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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 2 October 2019

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Forced Migration

1. **Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to help reduce the number of people who are forced to migrate. [912497]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Alok Sharma): The Department is investing in migrant source countries to give people better opportunities to build decent lives at home. Over the past four years, support for UK aid across all programmes has enabled 14 million children to gain a decent education, and nearly 52 million people now have access to clean water and better sanitation.

Thangam Debbonaire: Refugee settlement is one way to allow people to secure a safe and legal route to a safe country if they are classified as refugees by the United Nations. DFID funds and supports that, but there is no commitment to long-term resettlement programmes. Will the Secretary of State consider committing himself to a minimum of 10,000 refugees per year via resettlement and for a minimum of five years?

Alok Sharma: As the hon. Lady will know, in every year since 2016, the UK has resettled more refugees from outside Europe than any other EU member state, and I pay tribute to the local authorities that have already settled 16,000 refugees from Syria. The hon. Lady will also know that we intend to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees, as well as up to 3,000 vulnerable children and their carers, by 2020. Under our new compact, there are global resettlement scheme plans to resettle 5,000 of the most vulnerable every year post 2020.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Ind): I welcome my right hon. Friend to what I think is his first session of questions as Secretary of State for International Development, and I wish him—as we all do—very well in the role. May I ask him to update the House on the quality of our £75 million safety, support and solutions programme, which has been used particularly on the migration route in Africa, including north Africa? A particular feature of the programme was the ability to

return those who had escaped the clutches of traffickers to their home areas, where they could warn others that the outward route was dangerous and damaging. I should be grateful for an update.

Alok Sharma: I pay tribute to the fantastic work that my right hon. Friend did in this Department. He was an absolute champion for DFID.

Phase 2 of the safety, support and solutions programme is now running. We are delivering humanitarian protection to vulnerable migrants en route, as well as informing people about living conditions and—as my right hon. Friend mentioned—the other risks that they may face if they travel through the Sahel or the horn of Africa. One of our partners, the International Organisation for Migration, has reached more than 4,000 people with awareness-raising activities.

9. [912508] **Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): Global food insecurity is obviously a major factor in mass migration. Will the Secretary of State update us on what his Department is doing with aid agencies in respect of the merits of integrating nutrition into all areas of work?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Lady has raised an incredibly important point. We are working on nutrition with a range of multilateral agencies, and my ministerial colleagues and I continue to engage in discussions with them. At the United Nations General Assembly, it was announced that £61 million would be provided to develop crops that are better adapted to grow in higher temperatures and that can withstand drought. That is the sort of work that will make a long-term difference when it comes to food insecurity.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend update the House on the Rohingya situation and tell us what discussions he has had with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Government in Dhaka about the situation in Cox's Bazar?

Alok Sharma: My right hon. Friend did an enormous amount of work in this area as Minister for Asia, and I pay tribute to him. He will know that the major humanitarian crisis is caused by Myanmar's military. He will also know that we recently announced the provision of an extra £87 million for food, healthcare and shelter, not just for the refugees but for those who are hosting them. The Minister in the House of Lords, Baroness Sugg, is currently in Bangladesh looking into these issues.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): In north-east Nigeria, almost 2 million people have been internally displaced. In a disturbing development, the Nigerian Government have closed two major international non-governmental organisations, posing a risk to thousands of lives. May I urge the Secretary of State to do all that he can to press the Nigerian Government to enable those NGOs to operate, because they are about saving lives?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We are extremely concerned about this issue, and we have raised it with the Nigerian Government. We have

asked them to complete their investigations as swiftly as possible. He is absolutely right: those organisations provide support to millions of vulnerable people, and we must make sure that that work continues.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): A fortnight ago, I was privileged to be in Jordan to see some of the remarkable work of small organisations helping child refugees from the Syrian civil war recover from appalling injuries. What further support can DFID give to those small NGOs that make such a positive difference?

Alok Sharma: As my hon. Friend will know, we have pledged almost £3 billion since 2012 to provide support in Syria and neighbouring areas. We are working with a range of NGOs, and I would be happy to meet him to discuss the individual NGOs to which he referred.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stated that the greatest single impact of climate change could be on human migration. By 2050, it is forecast that up to 1 billion people could be on the move as a result of climate change. The Select Committee on International Development recommended that the UK use last week's UN climate summit to address that, so will the Secretary of State tell us specifically what discussions he has had on this subject and what concrete actions his Departments will take?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Gentleman raises an important matter. The Prime Minister made a number of key announcements at the UN General Assembly, including the doubling of our investment and commitment to the international climate finance fund. That is something that we will work on, but the hon. Gentleman is right that that is a key issue. The way to tackle poverty is also to tackle climate change.

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): The world is on course to have 200 million climate refugees by 2050, so will the Secretary of State tell us why his Government continue to be part of the problem by funding fossil fuel overseas, both with the Overseas Development Administration budget and with export finance? If he wants to be part of the solution, will he commit to work with Cabinet colleagues to increase the number of refugee settlements in the UK, as recommended by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees?

Alok Sharma: I say gently to the hon. Lady that we are regarded as world-leading when it comes to tackling climate change. If she had been at the UN General Assembly, she would have seen that. A whole range of announcements were made there. I am always happy to have a discussion with her, but she should acknowledge that the UK is actively leading in this area across the world. That is acknowledged by Governments across the world, too.

Venezuela: Humanitarian Support

2. **Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): What humanitarian support his Department is providing to Venezuelan people in (a) Venezuela and (b) neighbouring countries.

[912498]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Alok Sharma): The humanitarian crisis in Venezuela is absolutely dire, with millions fleeing the Maduro regime. Last week, I announced an additional £30 million of vital humanitarian aid to deliver life-saving medicines and clean water, as well as support for vital health services for refugees in neighbouring countries.

Sir Peter Bottomley: Everyone will be glad that we are doing what we can to help. Would it be a good idea if party leaders together nominated members of the Youth Parliament to go and see what has caused this social, economic, humanitarian and political crisis in a country that should be the richest on its continent?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Inflation is running at over 1 million per cent. in Venezuela and poverty has doubled. That is the economic model and regime that the Leader of the Opposition has been defending over a long period. People will know that Venezuela serves as a grim reminder of what might happen to the economy of our country and, indeed, the aid budget should the Opposition ever get their hands near government.

Mr Speaker: I welcome the invocation of the United Kingdom Youth Parliament, which, for the benefit of observers, customarily sits annually in the Chamber on a non-sitting Friday. A sitting is due to take place next month. It is a magnificent organisation that deserves the support of every one of us.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Until the Venezuelan Government were destabilised, HIV treatment was successful and deaths from AIDS were decreasing. Since destabilisation, HIV treatment is almost impossible for many people in Venezuela and the healthcare system has collapsed. What are the Government doing, particularly to ensure that antiretrovirals reach HIV-positive people in Venezuela?

Alok Sharma: The reason that the healthcare system and, indeed, public services have collapsed is the Maduro regime; that is something we have to acknowledge. As I have said, the support that we are providing includes healthcare support. There has been a big increase in disease outbreaks over recent periods, and that is why we are providing support for healthcare and vaccinations.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): How much are the UK Government giving to the UN central emergency response fund, and how much is that fund giving to the Venezuelan crisis?

Alok Sharma: We have given about £2 million of support to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and to national societies. In terms of additional funds that we have made available, we do not discuss the value of programmes inside Venezuela or name partners, for security reasons. I hope that my hon. Friend will understand that.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Given the extent of the problem, the millions of people fleeing Venezuela and the amount that the Minister has

alluded to, what steps are we taking to ensure that that aid is offered directly to the people affected and not diverted by the regime?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. We have a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to fraud, and we have robust controls against diversion. I can tell him that we have due diligence assessments in place to monitor the spending in Venezuela.

Climate Justice

3. **Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What recent meetings he had with his international counterparts on climate justice at the UN General Assembly. [912499]

4. **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What recent meetings he had with his international counterparts on climate justice at the UN General Assembly. [912501]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Zac Goldsmith): Climate change and biodiversity were top priorities for the Government at the recent UN General Assembly. The UK played a leading role, with the Prime Minister announcing a doubling of our international climate finance to £11.6 billion and a major focus on backing nature-based solutions to climate change.

Angela Crawley: The International Development Committee has specifically recommended that the UK Government should adopt the concept of climate justice to guide their climate spending, but this Government seem scared to even utter the words: not a single International Development Minister has ever said the words “climate justice” in this Chamber. Why are this Government so intent on ignoring this recommendation?

Zac Goldsmith: Given what we know about the science in relation to climate change and what we know about what is happening to biodiversity, habitat and species loss, it is absolutely right that this Government’s focus should be on tackling and preventing climate change, both through technology and by doing everything we can to protect and restore the natural world. If we do not do that, no amount of money from this or any other aid Department will properly compensate poorer countries for the devastation that will follow.

Deidre Brock: I am afraid that the Minister failed entirely to answer my hon. Friend’s question. Will he tell the House when he will follow Scotland’s lead and the recommendation of the International Development Committee and explicitly adopt the concept of climate justice to help to guide climate mitigation spending?

Zac Goldsmith: I thank the hon. Lady for her question, but I do not agree that I did not answer the previous one. We provide £5.8 billion for climate finance at the moment, and that will double to at least £11.6 billion. The whole basis of that programme is, in a sense, climate justice. It is about helping developing countries to prepare for climate change, to adapt to the inevitable changes and to fight the causes of climate change to minimise the impact.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): By 2030, the destruction of the world’s important habitats and the threat of climate change could force more than 100 million people into poverty. Does my hon. Friend agree that urgent action is needed to tackle deforestation throughout the world?

Zac Goldsmith: I commend my hon. Friend for all her work on this issue. She is absolutely right, and that is why, when the Prime Minister spoke at the UN, he emphasised the importance of investing in nature as a means of tackling climate change. She mentions forests, and they are an obvious example. About 1 billion people depend on forests for their survival, and protecting and restoring forests alleviates poverty, tackles climate change and helps to reverse the biodiversity loss that we have seen over recent years.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): First, may I welcome my hon. Friend to his well-deserved place at the Dispatch Box? The environmental world rejoices that he is there, and I know he will do an outstandingly good job. Does he agree that it is a perfectly legitimate use of aid funds to spend money on climate change reduction and climate change battling as well as on the mitigation of the worst effects of climate change? That helps in a global sense, and it also helps to mitigate the worst effects for the poorest people in the world.

Zac Goldsmith: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. He is exactly right to say that we will have no hope at all of tackling poverty globally if we do not take a bigger interest in preventing climate change and the annihilation of the natural world that we have seen in recent decades. The people on the frontline in relation to nature destruction are the world’s poorest people. They are the people who depend most directly on the natural world, so he is absolutely right.

10. [912510] **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his post. I am sure he will agree that the food and farming system has a major impact on climate change in developing countries, from deforestation to water use and mountains of food waste, but that is not really talked about in DFID terms except for some small livestock programmes. Can he assure me that it will be at the top of his agenda as a Minister in this Department?

Zac Goldsmith: As we heard from the Secretary of State in his first answer, we have committed serious sums of money to enabling smallholders around the world to adapt to climate change. We have also launched an initiative at the UN called the Just Rural Transition, which is about shifting the way subsidies are spent around the world on land use, away from unsustainable use towards sustainable use, just as we are doing in this country. The OECD tells us that the 50 top food-producing nations spend €700 billion a year subsidising land use, on the whole very badly. If we can shift even a fraction of that, it will have a much bigger impact than all the world’s aid departments put together.

Supporting Women in Developing Countries

5. **Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Ind): What steps his Department is taking to support women in developing countries in (a) business and (b) further education after they have finished school. [912504]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Alok Sharma): DFID's support for the SheTrades Commonwealth programme has trained over 2,700 women-owned businesses. We recently announced £30 million for the Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa programme, which will help to unlock \$3 billion of additional lending to women entrepreneurs.

Caroline Nokes: Some of the most inspirational, determined business leaders and entrepreneurs in Romsey and Southampton North are women. Do the Secretary of State and his Front-Bench team agree that female empowerment cannot begin and end in school, but has to continue into the workplace? Will he commit to giving more support to make sure that we have women business leaders in the developing world?

Alok Sharma: My right hon. Friend is right. Economic empowerment for women is vital, and I made mention of the affirmative finance programme, which is tackling issues such as access to finance, access to mentoring support and overcoming laws that discriminate against women. It is worth pointing out that women typically reinvest up to 90% of their income into education, health and nutrition, compared to 40% for men, so investing in female-led businesses can transform societies.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Specialist organisations such as Khwendo Kor that deliver services to women are being restricted by other NGOs in consortia by exclusivity clauses so that they can only bid with one organisation for funding, so expertise is being lost. Can the Secretary of State ensure that exclusivity clauses are removed?

Alok Sharma: I would be happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss that case and to try to understand a bit better what we could do.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Menstruation stops many women participating in the business world and mostly affects the poorest, no more so than in the Rohingya camps, as Oxfam has told me. WUKA produces underwear that deals with the problem, is reusable and environmentally sustainable. Will his Department meet WUKA, Ruby Raut and others in St Albans who have developed the product to help women beat the problems of menstruation?

Alok Sharma: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for all the work that she has done in Bangladesh in tackling humanitarian issues, and she raises an important point. We have a flagship programme called the Girls' Education Challenge, which does fund support for 23 menstrual hygiene projects across 13 countries, but of course I would be happy to meet with her and the company in her constituency.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Ukraine is a country that is perhaps redeveloping rather than developing. Can the Secretary of State tell us what projects he is supporting for women in business and education in the east of Ukraine, where there is a war with Russia, particularly through the International Committee of the Red Cross?

Alok Sharma: I am not aware of the details of programmes that the hon. Gentleman talks about, but I would be happy to meet him to discuss that case.

Topical Questions

T1. [912512] **Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con):** If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Alok Sharma): Governments around the world collectively spend around \$140 billion every year on aid. However, the United Nations estimates that an additional \$2.5 trillion is required annually in developing countries to meet the sustainable development goals. That investment gap needs to be met largely by the private sector. That is why I have established an international development infrastructure commission to advise the UK Government on how we can mobilise additional private sector funds, alongside public money, to deliver on the sustainable development goals.

Tim Loughton: I welcome the Secretary of State and the new Ministers to their posts. Representing a coastal constituency, I am only too well aware of the impact of pollution and plastic waste on marine life and our beaches. It was great to join many of my constituents at the recent great British beach clean. Given that much of the plastic problem affects developing countries—especially island nations—how are the Government using the aid budget to help to clear up our oceans?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend raises an incredibly vital point. He may be aware that the Prime Minister announced at the United Nations General Assembly last month that we are encouraging countries to join the UK-led global ocean alliance of countries in support of protecting at least 30% of the global oceans within marine protected areas by 2030.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): The Secretary of State has announced a new commission of business and finance leaders to mobilise private finance to invest in some of the world's poorest countries. What action is he taking to guarantee that all aid-backed private investments uphold labour rights and living wages for workers in the global south?

Alok Sharma: I think that is a sort of welcome for the infrastructure commission we have set up. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that labour rights are vital. When I was Minister for Employment, I worked with the International Labour Organisation on these issues, and if he has particular suggestions to make, I would be happy to discuss those with him.

Dan Carden: The Secretary of State is failing to take labour rights seriously. He is a career investment banker by trade, and he has—[Interruption.] I think it is relevant that he has gone from corporate wealth management to managing the UK's aid budget. Feronia, a Canadian palm oil company based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has received tens of millions of pounds of UK aid via the CDC Group; it has been plagued by scandal for years; and, in July, Joël Imbangola Luneu, a community activist involved in a land dispute with

Feronia, was allegedly murdered by a security guard employed by the company. Joël was father to eight children—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I just appeal to the hon. Gentleman to get to his question mark, because a lot of colleagues want to contribute and they must do so?

Dan Carden: Will the Department now launch its own investigation into this case and the litany of failures surrounding Feronia?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Gentleman is very welcome to write to me about the case. He wrote an article a few days back describing me as

“exploring ways to profit from human misery”.

May I just point out to him, with respect, that he could perhaps take some lessons from the Chairman of the Select Committee, who knows a lot more about development than he does?

T5. [912516] **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): Many of my constituents are concerned about plastic pollution, and I recently attended the launch of plastic-free Congleton. What are the UK Government doing to reduce, and indeed stop, plastic pollution in developing countries?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend is a true champion on humanitarian and environmental matters. I made reference in a previous answer to what we are doing about plastics, but I can also inform her that the UK Government have pledged £70 million to directly tackle this issue in developing countries, through the provision of technical assistance and testing practical approaches to increase plastic recycling rates.

T2. [912513] **Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): This month, we are celebrating 25 years of Fairtrade in the UK. At his first appearance at the Dispatch Box, will the Secretary of State reaffirm this Government's commitment to Fairtrade? Will he join me in celebrating, with the Fairtrade Foundation, such a milestone achievement?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Lady will know that we run a range of projects designed to ensure that we have fair trade, and of course I commend the work that goes on in this area.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Globally, vaccines save 2.5 million lives every year. What discussions were had at the recent UN summit about the UK's role in the global vaccination programme?

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Dr Andrew Murrison): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue. She will know that the UK is the No. 1 contributor to vaccines worldwide in the development space. She will also know that the UK will be hosting the Gavi replenishment next year and that for every pound spent on vaccines £21 is recouped; this remains one of our best buys in terms of international development, and we made that clear at the UN General Assembly last week.

T3. [912514] **John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): The Minister is aware of the devastating 2005 earthquake in Azad Kashmir, with massive loss of life and damage to housing and infrastructure—and of the gratifying international

response, with assistance. Although the recent earthquakes were not on the same scale, they are causing major hardship; so what assistance is the Department providing to the authorities there, both for emergency relief and for long-term reconstruction, to help the long-suffering people of Azad Kashmir?

Alok Sharma: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we are a major aid donor to Pakistan overall. We are in discussions with the National Disaster Management Authority in Pakistan, and we stand ready to respond and provide funding if it is indeed requested.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): The economy in Zimbabwe is expected to contract by 5.2% this year and millions are at risk of hunger, with warnings that the country is facing its worst ever famine. What are we doing to help?

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Andrew Stephenson): Humanitarian needs are rising in Zimbabwe, due to a combination of poor and erratic rains and the deteriorating economic situation. DFID has committed £49 million to a new Zimbabwe humanitarian resilience programme, but our ongoing re-engagement depends on fundamental political and economic reform in Zimbabwe.

T6. [912518] **Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Further to the question by my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar), will the Government press for the United Nations group on India and Pakistan to make a fact-finding visit to Kashmir to assess the humanitarian and human rights situation there?

Alok Sharma: We have a long-standing position on Kashmir, which has been reiterated and followed by successive Governments, but where there are matters related to humanitarian issues we of course always look at those.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) had a question on the Order Paper but it was not reached, so I will call him, on the strict understanding that he will be exemplary in his brevity.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Currently, approximately 97% of the UK's export financial support for energy in developing countries goes to fossil fuels and only 1% to renewable energy. That is a ridiculous and untenable position, given the Government's avowed aims. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that his work in supporting developing countries to tackle climate change is not undermined by his colleagues in the Department for International Trade?

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Zac Goldsmith): I am pleased that the CDC has made no new investments at all in coal-fired power stations since 2012, and that increasingly UK ODA supports renewable energy. I am assured that as a result of its adoption of the recommendations of the taskforce on climate-related financial disclosures, UK Export Finance is looking very carefully at the risks, which the hon. Gentleman has just highlighted, of its support for oil and gas.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [912482] **Julian Sturdy** (York Outer) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 2 October.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab): I have been asked to reply. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is in Manchester for the Conservative party conference. He is, as we speak making, the keynote speech, setting out that we will leave the EU on 31 October, so that we can get on with our dynamic domestic agenda.

Julian Sturdy: Askham Bog, a world-renowned nature reserve in my constituency, has been described as “irreplaceable” by, no less, Sir David Attenborough; yet it is threatened by proposals to build more than 500 houses on adjoining land. Will my right hon. Friend put in a good word with the Prime Minister to ask him to join me in lying down in front of the bulldozers to save that important piece of natural heritage?

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend. I always put in a good word with the Prime Minister on his behalf, and I share his passion for preserving our precious natural habitats. Local community views are of course incredibly important to the local planning process; that is what our revised national planning policy framework provides. He will understand that I cannot comment on individual planning applications.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Yesterday marked the start of Black History Month, so I will begin by paying tribute to a young woman already making history this month. Dina Asher-Smith became the first British woman in 36 years to win a sprint medal when she won silver at the 100 metres in Doha. Tonight she aims to go one better in the 200 metres—and I am sure the whole House will wish her well.

Dominic Raab *rose—*

Mr Speaker: I think that was a preface to a question.

Ms Abbott: If I may continue, uninterrupted!

Last week, my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) raised the very specific issue of how many of the hundreds of abusive and violent messages that she receives use the Prime Minister’s own words. The Prime Minister dismissed those concerns as simply “humbug”. Since that exchange, my hon. Friend has received four further death threats, some again quoting the Prime Minister’s words. Women across this House experience death threats and abuse. Will the Foreign Secretary take the opportunity to apologise on behalf of the Prime Minister for his initial dismissive response?

Dominic Raab: I thank the right hon. Lady for her question. My eagerness to rise to the Dispatch Box was because, in Black History Month, as she becomes the first black MP to take to the Dispatch Box for PMQs,

it is only fitting to say that she has blazed a trail and made it easier for others to follow in her footsteps. That is something in which I and every hon. Member in this House can take pride in paying tribute.

The right hon. Lady raises the increasing level of online and wider abuse that politicians from all parts of the House get, and we should come together to be clear that there must be zero tolerance of any abuse or any threats. May I also say that I have found the level of abuse that she herself has received online to be totally disgusting and totally unacceptable. At the same time, I am sure that, as a passionate champion of free speech, she will defend our right in this House to defend the issues of substance. The remarks that the Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend, made were aimed at the suggestion that he could not describe the surrender Act in such terms. It is absolutely clear, given the substance of the legislation, that it would achieve that and undermine the ability of the Government to go and get a deal in the EU, which on all sides we want to achieve.

Ms Abbott: So, we can take it that there is no apology from the Foreign Secretary. I raised the very specific point that my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury made about the abuse she gets that uses the Prime Minister’s language.

Deliberately disturbing billboards showing unborn foetuses have been put up in the London borough of Walthamstow. They are upsetting for women walking past, but particularly upsetting for my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), because these billboards are targeted at her in response to her work to decriminalise abortion in Northern Ireland. Abortion in Northern Ireland should be decriminalised on 21 October. What will the Foreign Secretary do to ensure that, from later on this month, women in Northern Ireland will have the same human rights to legal and safe abortion as women in England, Wales and Scotland?

Dominic Raab: The right hon. Lady has referred to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) and the abuse that she has received, which I and all Members of this House, I know, believe is totally unacceptable. There is a place for free speech, but we should never allow that to cross over into abuse, intimidation or harassment of hon. Members from all parts of the House going about their business. The most important thing that we can do on the specific issue that the right hon. Lady raises is get the institutions in Northern Ireland back up and running so that they can exercise their rights, their prerogatives, on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland.

Ms Abbott: I notice that the Foreign Secretary has not said anything about those horrific posters—they are not posters that anyone would want to see, particularly someone who is pregnant, as is my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow.

Last week, Labour reiterated its call to end the rape clause, which forces women to fill out a four-page form to prove their child was born of rape in order to get financial help. Will the Foreign Secretary today back Labour’s pledge to remove the abhorrent rape clause from universal credit?

Dominic Raab: I would say that we have looked at this issue and we continue to look at it. On the subject of using inflammatory language, it is incumbent on Members in all parts of the House to be very careful about it. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is looking at this matter and will continue to take questions and scrutinise it very carefully, so that we get the balance right. I gently say to the right hon. Lady that Labour wants to abolish universal credit and engage in an open spending spree on handouts. That is the wrong thing to do—trapping people in the welfare trap. On our side, we want to help those people from the poorest backgrounds get into work, and our record speaks for itself.

Ms Abbott: How much more dismissive can the Foreign Secretary be of people and families dependent on benefits? We are not talking about a spending spree; we are talking about a system that is fair and just, and which does not subject people to undue humiliation.

Last week, the 100-year-old travel company Thomas Cook went out of business. We know that 72% of its workers are women. We also know that, although Governments around the world stepped in to save Thomas Cook subsidiary companies in their own countries, the UK Business Secretary thought that this was not her job. Can the Foreign Secretary explain to those workers, some of whom are with us today, why their Government sat idly by?

Dominic Raab: First, we did not sit idly by. The Government's efforts, co-ordinated by the Transport Secretary, to ensure that the holidaymakers and travellers who were caught overseas could be returned to the UK, have been very effective and required a huge amount of cross-Government work, including in my own Department. On whether the Government should have stepped in to bail out Thomas Cook, it is very clear from looking at the financing that such a step would not have rendered the company more sustainable and would not have saved jobs in the long run. We are, of course, concerned to ensure that we have a sound economic base in the long term. We have created 3 million new jobs in this country since 2010, and will continue with that. What we are not going to do is routinely bail out companies that are unsustainable. That is not the right way to go about this.

Ms Abbott: Nobody is asking the Government routinely to bail out companies. We are asking the Government why they will not even meet the workers.

Whether it is women Members in this House, women claiming benefits, women's reproductive rights in Northern Ireland or the failure to support women workers at Thomas Cook, is not this a Government letting women down?

Dominic Raab: On this side of the House, we are proud to be on our second female Prime Minister. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Foreign Secretary has embarked on his answer. I want to hear it, and I think the House and everybody else will want to hear it as well.

Dominic Raab: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Members on the Labour Front Bench are pointing to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). Well, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for her accomplishments in tackling human trafficking, for her accomplishments and drive to tackle violence against women and for the domestic violence Bill that we will be introducing in the House today for further debate.

Ms Abbott: The Foreign Secretary has not mentioned the fact that there are over 600,000 more women and girls in poverty now than in 2010. I gently say to him that I was a Member of this House when Tory MPs defenestrated the first female Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, and I was a Member of this House when the Tory MPs worked their will against the second female Prime Minister. It seems to me that Tory Members of Parliament may on occasion make women their leaders, but they need to learn—*[Interruption.]* They need to learn how to treat them less cruelly.

Dominic Raab: The right hon. Lady mentions Margaret Thatcher. I gently say to her that if she wants to talk about treating women better, she might have a word with the shadow Chancellor, who talked about going back in time to “assassinate” Margaret Thatcher. That is not appropriate language from the Opposition.

The right hon. Lady talked about Labour's record. Let me remind her that female unemployment rose by over a quarter because of Labour's economic mismanagement, and now Labour wants more debt, more borrowing and higher taxes. On our side, we are proud: female unemployment at record lows, a higher percentage of women on FTSE 100 boards and a record low gender pay gap—lower than under the last Labour Government.

Ms Abbott *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I believe I am right in saying that the shadow Home Secretary has had her six questions. *[HON. MEMBERS: “More!”]* There will be more.

Q4. *[912486]* **Margot James** (Stourbridge) (Ind): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that legislation to establish a tough independent regulator of internet companies empowered to challenge the automatic right to anonymity online should be a priority for the Queen's Speech?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We want to make the UK the safest place in the world to go online for our children, but also for all members of our society. Our online harms White Paper set out our plans to make companies more responsible for their users' safety online, especially children, and also sets out measures to reinforce powers to issue fines against those who put them at risk.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is a disgrace that the Prime Minister is not here. Since he was elected in July, he has been to only one Prime Minister's questions. Quite simply, he is running scared from this Chamber.

Right now the Prime Minister is setting out his Brexit fantasy at the Tory party conference—a deal that he

knows is unacceptable and doomed to failure. When this deal fails, as Tory Members know it will, Downing Street sources have insisted that the Government will not seek an extension. They will not obey their legal obligations. Yet again, this Prime Minister is prepared to act unlawfully. Has the Prime Minister not learnt his lesson? He is not above the law. Can the Foreign Secretary confirm whether those sources are correct that the Prime Minister will not obey the law? Are this Government seriously planning to take on Parliament in the courts to force through a catastrophic no-deal Brexit, or will the Foreign Secretary now rule that out?

Dominic Raab: Of course this Government will always adhere to the law. The Prime Minister has written to Jean-Claude Juncker setting out our proposals. We want to take forward the negotiations. We want to avoid a no-deal scenario, and I would urge the SNP, rather than undermining the negotiations in Brussels, to try and support the Government in securing a deal that is good for this country. The right hon. Gentleman talks about respecting judgments. We will always respect legal judgments. I call on the SNP to respect the judgment of the people of Scotland when it comes to staying in the United Kingdom and the judgment of the people of the United Kingdom to give effect to the referendum on the EU.

Ian Blackford: “We will always respect legal judgments.” The fact is that this Prime Minister cannot be trusted, and his Foreign Secretary cannot even commit the Prime Minister to the letter of the law. This Government must be stopped. I am looking now to colleagues on the Opposition Benches, and I urge them: we must unite. We must stop this Prime Minister by removing him from office. The Scottish National party stands ready to bring this Government down. Other parties need to step up at this moment of national crisis—prepare a vote of no confidence, ensure a Brexit extension, prevent a no deal and call a general election. Doing nothing is not an option. We must act. So I ask the Foreign Secretary: will he give the Prime Minister a message from the Scottish National party? It is not a case of if but when: we will bring this dangerous Government down.

Dominic Raab: The right hon. Gentleman is at risk of sounding like he is all mouth and no trousers, because he had the chance to vote for a general election and he turned it down; he had the chance to avoid no deal; and the best chance now is to back this Government in securing a good deal—good for the United Kingdom and good for all quarters of the United Kingdom, including the people of Scotland.

Q7. [912489] **Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): On Saturday, I was out knocking on doors with my listening team, listening to the views of local people, as we do every week. The message to me, whether they were leave or remain voters, was crystal clear: get Brexit done by 31 October. Deputy Prime Minister, can you reassure my constituents that we will leave the European Union by the end of this month, come what may, no ifs, no buts?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend gets straight to the crux of the matter. We must leave by the end of October, come what may. We are committed to doing that. The

most effective way of doing it that will unite this House and bring the country back together is to get behind the Prime Minister's efforts to secure a good deal. I think it is incumbent on all Members on both sides of the House to support the United Kingdom rather than try to undermine the negotiating position in Brussels.

Q2. [912483] **Teresa Pearce** (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): Housing, I believe, is the first of the social services; without it, we cannot have education, productivity or health. The NHS has a diagnosis code for inadequate housing. The Department of Health wrote to me saying that poor housing costs the NHS £1.4 billion a year, but that figure is now four years old. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the Department of Health writes to me with the most up-to-date figures and places that information in the Library?

Dominic Raab: I will certainly pass on the hon. Lady's specific request to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. She is right to raise the quality of housing. When I was Housing Minister, we developed proposals for a social housing Green Paper. We want social housing tenants to feel they are treated with respect. I remember meeting an individual who said that he ran his own business, and when he went to work he was treated with respect but when he came back home he was treated disrespectfully by his housing association. That is not right.

I would gently say to the hon. Lady that we have delivered over 222,000 additional homes in the past year—the highest level in all but one of the past 31 years—and we have built more council housing than in the previous 13 years of the last Labour Government.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Ind): Sir John Major rang me about half an hour ago simply to give vent to his indignation, which I already fully shared, that a major policy announcement of historic significance—our last offer, apparently, to the EU of a withdrawal agreement—was being made not to this House of Commons, which is not even to have a statement, and not after discussion in the Cabinet, most of whose members know nothing about it, but in a speech to the Conservative party conference in which the Prime Minister—who, I remind you, was one of those who voted to stop us leaving the European Union at the end of March—began with an attack on Parliament. If a deal is obtained, I will be delighted and I will apologise to the Prime Minister. I will vote for any deal that is agreed among the 28 member states of the European Union. But can the Foreign Secretary reassure me—it seems to me obvious, otherwise—that this is not just a party political campaigning ploy to blame the European Union for the lack of an agreement and to arouse fury between people and Parliament so as to escape from the responsibility that seems to me to lie with the Spartans on the far right of the party, with whom he and the Prime Minister used to be close allies?

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend. On the specific point, the proposals we are setting out to Brussels—David Frost, the Prime Minister's special adviser, is in Brussels doing that—will be set out first in the House of Commons. They will be published—[*Interruption.*] No. The shadow Foreign Secretary is chuntering from a sedentary position, but the proposals

have not been set out in Manchester; they will be set out in written proposals to Jean-Claude Juncker and published in the House later on. I gently say to my right hon. and learned Friend: I know—[*Interruption.*] Later today—[*Interruption.*] The shadow Foreign Secretary is continuing to talk from a sedentary position. My right hon. and learned Friend and I have always had slightly nuanced but differing views on the EU, but I think the one thing we all want to do is to get a deal right now—that is why the attempts by Parliament to frustrate that have been deeply counterproductive—and to give effect to the promises that, on all sides of the House, we made to give effect to the referendum and to keep trust with the electorate of this country.

Q3. [912485] Eleanor Smith (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): The Government update of the national planning policy framework published in July 2018 changed the policy we have had for generations of not building on the green belt. The policy now allows future development to be considered. Local planning authorities are coming under great pressure from developers who do not want to spend money to improve brownfield sites. Unspoilt areas such as the Seven Cornfields on the edge of my constituency are now under threat from inappropriate development by house builders who put profit above all else. We should not be building on such sites, especially at a time of concern for the environment. I ask the Prime Minister to review the green belt policy to protect areas such as the Seven Cornfields from developers.

Dominic Raab: The hon. Lady's concerns are shared right across the House, so it is something that will be of interest and importance to everyone here today. The national planning policy framework is very clear: the green belt must be protected and brownfield sites must be brought forward. In order to provide a greater boost to the supply of new housing, we have introduced measures to boost the density of and the ability to raise homes in more urban or suburban areas while protecting the green belt. A huge amount of money has gone into infrastructure development right across the country to ensure that we can build the right homes in the right places and to answer the significant concerns of local communities, who ask where all the schools, housing and roads will come from. We are making sure that we give councils the support they need to build the right homes in the right places.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): The Government are backing a new hospital to serve Basingstoke with money to develop our business case. Does my right hon. Friend agree that a bid that could include new jobs, new state-of-the-art facilities and new homes is one that everyone in north Hampshire should get behind?

Dominic Raab: It sounds like a tantalising proposal. I am sure that the Health Secretary will look at it very carefully indeed. We have made it clear that we back the NHS with the biggest cash boost in history, an extra £34 billion a year by 2023-24. We can do that only with a strong economy, which is precisely what the Labour party will put at risk.

Q5. [912487] Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): On Monday, my constituent Richard should have been paid. It was the first time in his life that he

was not. Richard, like many others whom I met with his union, Unite, was a dedicated employee of Thomas Cook. Given that the warning signs were there for months, if not years, will the Government use the extra parliamentary time that we now have to bring forward emergency legislation to stop a further airline collapse? Will the Government pledge now to expedite Richard's redundancy pay and to recoup the millions taken by the directors in the past few months?

Dominic Raab: I feel for anyone in the Thomas Cook scenario—people stranded abroad or people who lost their jobs. I have set out why the Government do not systematically bail out or step in to prop up firms that are unsustainable. I am afraid that if the hon. Lady looks at the figures, she will see that that was not a sustainable route to follow. Of course, if she wants to write to me, we will look at any details she raises, but the bottom line is that the way we create a healthy economy and jobs is by making sure that we have the tax measures in place—by not raising taxes on businesses and by supporting the workers of this country. That is what we are doing.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Ind): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on being at the Dispatch Box as Deputy Prime Minister.

How is it that the Government are allowing special advisers at No. 10 Downing Street, speaking on behalf of the Government, to tell outright lies? My right hon. Friend should be familiar with the fact that on Saturday such a special adviser—whom I believe to be Mr Dominic Cummings—told *The Mail on Sunday* that a number of hon. Members were in receipt of foreign funding to draft what is known as the Benn Act, something which in itself is totally untrue. Moreover, he went on to say that that was going to be the subject of a Government investigation, which is also completely untrue because, mercifully, this country is not yet run as a police state by Mr Cummings.

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend. I was not quite sure what the question there was, but the position of the Government is that advisers advise and Ministers decide. It is right that the legislation that we have rightly dubbed the surrender Act gets the kind of scrutiny that a Government would get—whether it is from the Executive, parliamentary Select Committees in this House or, indeed, the declarations of interest that should come forward in the normal way.

Q6. [912488] Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Can the First Secretary of State set out clearly and unambiguously for this House in what circumstances the Prime Minister will write to the EU Council President, as set out in the terms of the Benn Act?

Dominic Raab: The Government have been very clear: we will respect the law—[*Interruption.*] We will respect the law, but we are not going to extend beyond 31 October. I would ask all hon. Members who signed up to that shoddy legislation to reflect on whether—with the fact of the multiple conditions, the £1 billion a month that it would cost the UK taxpayer and undermining the position of the UK Government to get a deal in

Brussels—they are actually courting the no-deal scenario they pretend they want to avoid.

Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con): May I join in the tributes paid earlier to the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for her historic achievement today?

Today marks the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that Gandhi's message of non-violence, religious tolerance and greater rights for women is as applicable today as it was in his lifetime?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I would go one further and tout the words of Martin Luther King, who said that we—I think on all sides of the House—should believe in a society where you are judged on the content of your character, not the colour of your skin, let alone your gender. That is why we on this side of the House are proud of our record of record levels of BAME communities in employment and children from BAME communities taking more rigorous GCSEs. We have the first Asian Chancellor, the first female Asian Home Secretary and I am proud to be in the most diverse Cabinet in history.

Q8. [912491] **Anna McMorris** (Cardiff North) (Lab): My constituent Anne has an auto-immune condition and needs 20 tablets a day to control pain. This medicine is her lifeline, and without it she could die, but she has been warned that a no-deal Brexit will mean a severe risk to its supply. Can the Secretary of State say why his Government are willing to risk her life and many others by refusing to rule out no deal, choosing a policy of ruin over delay?

Dominic Raab: Of course we share the concerns of anyone in the position of the hon. Lady's constituent. That is why the head of the NHS, Sir Simon Stevens, and the Health Secretary have said that they have put in place all the necessary arrangements to make sure that, in a no-deal scenario, medicines will continue to flow across the border, as is required. But if the hon. Lady really wants to avoid a no-deal scenario, she should get behind this Government getting a good deal in Brussels, and that is the best thing for all concerned.

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Ind): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his role today. I remember when my right hon. Friend resigned from the Cabinet because of his disagreements with Brexit policy—a route I subsequently became familiar with—but does his experience not remind him that there are honourable, different opinions across this House about how we leave the European Union and about how we interpret the will of the people, and the essential thing is that every Member here representing their constituency has a role to play in that? May I urge him, when working with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, to make sure that any decisions—any progress—are taken through this House?

Dominic Raab: I can give my right hon. Friend that reassurance. I do understand, and we have always managed to stay on civil, cordial, even amiable terms throughout all the challenges of Brexit, which we on both sides of the House should seek to do. Parliament of course has a

crucial role to play. I do not think anyone can legitimately say that Parliament, with the stalwart support of the Speaker, has not scrutinised Brexit at every stage. But we also have to remember on all sides, and particularly on this side, the promises we made to the voters to give effect to Brexit—to get Brexit done—and that is the way we can move on, unite the country and take Britain forward.

Q9. [912492] **Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): On 27 July in Manchester, the Prime Minister said he wanted to bring northern cities' bus services up to the same level as London's. Bus services are really important to my constituents. The problem is that, currently, Government funding for bus services is £75 a head in London but £5 a head in Sheffield. Although the Chancellor has announced a further £200 million for bus services, it would take half that money to bring Sheffield's funding level alone up to London's. Are the Government really going to fund the better bus services the Prime Minister promised for northern cities such as Sheffield, or have we again had a grand announcement from the Prime Minister that, on detailed examination, simply is not worth the paper it is written on?

Dominic Raab: I say to the hon. Gentleman, the Chairman of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, that we are absolutely committed to boosting bus services in his constituency and indeed infrastructure right across the country. That includes transport, that includes broadband, and that means making sure that we have a more balanced economy that can boost jobs, reduce deprivation and ensure we can fund the precious public services we need. On the specific point he raised, I will ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to write to him personally.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): Within the last 24 hours, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has launched a ballistic missile, possibly from a submarine; if so, that would be the first submarine-based missile it has launched in three years. It is its ninth launch, I believe, since June. Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to talk to other leaders in the region? Given that this comes a few days before the resumption of talks with the United States, what assessment has he made of the continuing threat of the DPRK to the region and the wider world?

Dominic Raab: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for his time at the Foreign Office; he was a very effective Minister, and he continues to make the case from the Back Benches. We are concerned about the situation in North Korea and we regularly raise it with our international partners. There has been a series of missile tests by Pyongyang, which are deeply troubling. We continue to make it clear that it must show restraint and adhere to its legal commitments. Of course, there is some bluff and bluster in the lead-up to the talks with the US. We would like to see a de-escalation of tensions and a route to denuclearising North Korea.

Q10. [912493] **Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): This week I heard from my constituents Phil and Rachel Turner, whose five-year-old daughter Eliza has cystic fibrosis. They are

planning to move to Scotland so she can receive the life-changing drug Orkambi on the NHS. Does the First Secretary of State agree that it is a tragedy that families should have to uproot their lives in that way? Can he confirm that funding will be found for children affected by this terrible disease so they can take up the treatment without delay? Furthermore, may I suggest that the Government should support Labour's plan to set up a publicly owned generic drugs manufacturer that would supply medicines to the NHS at affordable rates?

Dominic Raab: I feel for any family and any children in the situation that the hon. Lady highlights. We are frustrated, as is everyone, that agreement has not yet been reached that would provide access to Orkambi. We have a system, with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and NHS England, where it is for clinicians, not politicians, to determine the fair price for medicines. I say gently that I think the proposals put forward by the Labour party would put that at risk, because they would repel investment and innovation. That is not the right way to get medicines to the people who need them.

Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): May I ask the First Secretary of State to turn his attention to Hong Kong? Yesterday's events were truly awful. Obviously, the people suffering most are the victims of violence on both sides, but now a number of UK companies with interests in Hong Kong are being adversely affected. As we are one of the guarantors of the Sino-British joint declaration supporting one country, two systems, is there now an argument for him to discuss Hong Kong with China in the UN Security Council? Perhaps the next six-monthly report on the declaration would be an opportunity to do that.

Dominic Raab: We are concerned about what we are seeing on the streets of Hong Kong. We of course condemn any violence by protesters, but the vast majority are seeking to exercise their right to peaceful protest. Any response by the Hong Kong authorities needs to be proportionate, but what we need above all is a political process and a dialogue between the Administration and the people of Hong Kong that can lead to the kind of political reform that is envisaged in the Basic Law and reflected in the joint declaration my hon. Friend cites.

Q11. [912494] **Sir Mark Hendrick** (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): The last Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), created a hostile environment for migrants that made them feel alienated and unwelcome in this country, examples being the descendants of Windrush, and now EU migrants. The current Prime Minister is creating an even more hostile environment for anyone who does not agree with the UK leaving the EU on 31 October without a deal, by invoking the language of war, and through talk of surrender, betrayal and capitulation. Why do this Government feel the need to whip up such hatred, animosity and division, when so many people are already suffering from the Government's austerity?

Dominic Raab: We are absolutely determined to correct the wrongs experienced by the Windrush generation. We have apologised for the mistakes that were made

and, to date, over 7,200 individuals have been given documentation confirming their status. The hon. Gentleman talks about Brexit, which has been a divisive issue for all parties and people right across this country. The best way of resolving that and bringing the country together is to get a deal, get Brexit done, and move on. It is incumbent on those in all parts of the Labour party to think about the promises that they have made, and to get behind this Government as we strive for a good deal that works for the country.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming the £13.8 million of funding for East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust that has been earmarked for upgrading Eastbourne District General Hospital, which many of my constituents use? A few years ago, the hospital was earmarked for closure; under the Conservatives, it is earmarked for investment.

Dominic Raab: I am delighted about the new investment going into my hon. Friend's constituency. We have backed the NHS, which will have almost £34 billion a year by 2023-24. There is an extra £1.8 billion going into 20 hospital upgrades, and we are providing £250 million to boost artificial intelligence, so that we can have earlier cancer detection, new dementia treatments and more personalised care. All that would be put at risk by a Labour Government, who would tank the economy.

Q12. [912495] **Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): I recently met a victim of domestic violence who continues to live in isolation and terror, even now that the abusive relationship is over. This Parliament has a duty to her, and to every victim of domestic violence, to pass the Domestic Abuse Bill, which is finally having its Second Reading today. Will the Foreign Secretary promise her that this life-saving legislation will not fall due to Prorogation?

Dominic Raab: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman. Members on all sides of the House want to stand up to, and have absolutely zero tolerance for, any domestic abuse. The best way forward is for us to work together in a collaborative way, which, frankly, we have not seen in recent months and years because of Brexit. That opportunity will come today, when we debate the Domestic Abuse Bill on Second Reading.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Last year, I attempted to introduce legislation requiring banks to maintain or deliver a cashpoint, on a free-to-use, 24-hour basis, to every high street that supports 5,000 residents or more. I was inspired to do that when the tourist town of Battle lost its last cashpoint of that type. I am grateful that LINK has now seen the case for Battle's cashpoint, but I am conscious that other high streets across the UK are not so fortunate. Will the Deputy Prime Minister help to set up a meeting with me and Ministers to help to deliver a boost to all our high streets?

Dominic Raab: I will certainly pass on my hon. Friend's point directly to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and other Ministers, and will see what more can be done in the neighbourhood that he talks about. The reality is that some businesses and high streets are suffering, partly because of online

competition, and partly because of consumer trends. We need to make sure that we boost high streets and businesses, and in particular the small businesses in this country that have created over 80% of new jobs. All that will be put at risk, frankly, by the damaging and counter-productive policies that the shadow Chancellor has come up with this week.

Q13. [912496] Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): Many of my constituents in Sunderland who voted leave are contacting me, as they are petrified of a crash-out, no-deal Brexit coming on top of years of hardship caused by Tory austerity. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government will obey the law and request an extension to article 50, so that people in Sunderland can avoid the double whammy of a no-deal Brexit on top of Tory austerity?

Dominic Raab: I have to say to the hon. Lady that of course we will adhere to the law, but the Prime Minister has been clear that we must leave by the end of October in order to maintain public trust in our democracy and avoid the public feeling that parliamentarians and politicians do not listen to what they have said. If she wants to avoid a no-deal Brexit, get behind the Government in securing a deal that all sides can support.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Yesterday, I was honoured to speak at the official opening of CAE's new flight simulator and aviation training centre at Gatwick airport. Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming this significant aviation inward investment into global Britain?

Dominic Raab: It is absolutely crucial that we make this country the best place to invest for technology and innovation, and that is part of the vision of global Britain. So I pay tribute to the project in my hon. Friend's constituency. That is what we can deliver if we can get Brexit done and dusted and move on, and allow the people of this country to move on.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (IGC): The right hon. Gentleman and the Government talk about the will of the people and the need to restore trust in democracy when it comes to Brexit, while completely forgetting that over 16 million people voted for us to remain in the EU, 13 million people chose to abstain in the referendum, and 1.5 million youngsters were not eligible to vote and now want a say about their future. On that basis, surely the way to protect democracy is to put any Brexit deal to a confirmatory referendum because, if we do not have that people's vote, we will leave the EU without the consent of the majority of people of this country.

Dominic Raab: I know that the right hon. Lady and I have different views on Brexit, but we have always got on professionally and civilly in the past, and I understand the passion with which she holds her views. But I think a second referendum will be the last thing this country wants. It would solve nothing and put the Union at risk, because it would be a political gift to the SNP. If she wants to avoid no deal, she should back the Government, not undermine them, as they strive for a good deal in Brussels.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): With the shape of a potential deal becoming clearer, will the First Secretary of State repeat and confirm his absolute commitment to leaving on 31 October, which is in contrast to the Lib Dems—I do not think we have a single Lib Dem in the Chamber this afternoon—*[Interruption.]* Oh, we do—we have one. Forgive me, Mr Speaker, I got that wrong. We have one Lib Dem in the Chamber. That commitment is in contrast to the Lib Dems, who want to overturn the democratic result, and to the Labour party, which does not quite yet know what it wants.

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we need to get Brexit done. The country wants us to move on and to keep faith with the voters. As for the position of the Liberal Democrats, of all the different views in the House of Commons, I find this the most difficult to understand. How could we have 16 Liberal Democrat MEPs actually writing to Jean-Claude Juncker telling him not to negotiate or do a deal with the UK? That is deeply irresponsible and is courting the very outcome of a no-deal Brexit they say they wish to avoid.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Did the Prime Minister, as *The Times* reports today, receive a request from President Trump for help in trying to discredit the Mueller report and the role of British and American intelligence in uncovering the Russian interference in the 2016 presidential elections? Will he assure the House that no British Prime Minister would ever collude with any foreign leader to undermine or smear our security and intelligence services or damage their vital co-operation with their American colleagues?

Dominic Raab: I should first be clear that the Prime Minister is not going to comment on the discussions with President Trump that were held in private, but I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that of course neither the Prime Minister, then the Foreign Secretary, nor any other member of the Government would collude in the way he describes. That is of course entirely unacceptable, would never have happened and did not happen.

BILL PRESENTED**CLEAN AIR (No.3) BILL***Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Geraint Davies, supported by Kerry McCarthy, Wera Hobhouse, Neil Parish, Janet Daby, John Mc Nally, Chris Evans, Jonathan Edwards, Rosie Duffield, Mr Ben Bradshaw, Ruth Jones and Neil Coyle, presented a Bill to establish a right to breathe clean air; to make provision about reducing air pollution; to require the Secretary of State to set, measure, and report on air quality targets; to establish the National Clean Air Agency to enforce air quality targets; to make provision for the development of sustainable public, private and commercial transport by road, rail, air and sea; to restrict the use of polluting vehicles in urban areas; to prohibit the sale of new petrol- and diesel-powered vehicles from no later than 2030; to make it an offence to remove permanently devices that reduce vehicle emissions; to make requirements regarding indoor air quality; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 438).

Points of Order**Several hon. Members rose—**

Mr Speaker: I would have thought it the normal course of events to proceed with the ten-minute rule motion, but if colleagues particularly want to raise their points of order now, a simple nod of the head in acquiescence in such an arrangement and empathy with it will suffice. Not surprisingly, the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), who is invariably of an amiable disposition, seems content that we proceed in that way. We will come to the hon. Gentleman ere long, but first of all I believe there is a very important point of order from the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy).

12.50 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. If I may, I should like to seek your advice. For the last six days, an organisation calling itself the Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform UK has been waging a campaign of intimidation and harassment against me and, by extension, my constituents in Walthamstow—from turning up in our town centre with a 20-foot banner of my head next to an image of a dead baby of about the age of the baby I am currently carrying myself, proclaiming that I am working hard to achieve such an outcome; to buying from Clear Channel billboards advertising in my constituency, displaying near schools graphic and scientifically incorrect pictures of fetuses; to libelling me on national radio as someone who wishes to see abortion up to birth; to its Stop Stella campaign, which explicitly encourages people to target me as a hypocrite for being pregnant and advocating the right of all women to choose when to be.

Walthamstow residents have made clear their distress at this behaviour, and so have I. The organisation has made its point. It disagrees with me; I understand that and have asked it not to continue. Despite that, it has already stated that it will keep returning and targeting me until I stop campaigning. Already, I have received numerous threats and abusive messages that directly quote its material.

As you would expect, Mr Speaker, I have sought police assistance against this harassment. I am sad to report that, as yet, none has been given, including from the parliamentary authorities, although Sadiq Khan and Clare Coghill, the leader of my council, have been fantastic allies. I also have proposals for the Domestic Abuse Bill, which I hope Ministers will look on kindly, to recognise this form of abuse. As I have always said to bullies, “It’s not my time you’re going to waste.”

One of the troubling things about importing this kind of campaigning into our politics—the organisation has said that it will extend its protest to other MPs, and it is clearly influencing debate in this place, as some even in this Chamber have said that I wish to kill babies—is how it is funded. This organisation claims, in its constitution and accounts and in a statement it made to the BBC last October, to be a charity, yet the Charity Commission has refused to register it. Nor is it clear whether it has repaid the gift aid it has previously claimed under the auspices of this charity status. If not, given that it knew that it was not registered with the

[Stella Creasy]

Charity Commission, this group has facilitated tax evasion, which of course is a criminal offence. Nor is it clear whether it is complying with the rules for third-party campaigners in the run-up to an election, or whether it is accepting illegal foreign donations, given that it is part of a network of such organisations across the world.

Sadly, I understand that the organisation has also threatened to sue journalists who ask about these matters, so we cannot have clarity about who is funding this sustained campaign of intimidation from an organisation whose counterparts in other countries have picketed maternity hospitals with baby coffins and incited such hatred and radicalisation that it has resulted in violence, including a mass shooting at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado.

Given the calls for a general election, the Charity Commission, the Electoral Commission and, indeed, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs must prioritise investigating such organisations and tackling the potential consequences for our public debates. I am sure we would all want to know whether all taxes are paid, all donations declared and all donors legal.

I am not sure, however, where we as parliamentarians can start in holding such a company to account for its toxic culture and approach, and in the absence of police action. We cannot uphold free speech on any issue if we do not also hold to account those who seek to abuse it and the laws on campaigning. Perhaps, Mr Speaker, you will have some suggestions for me so that we can ensure that no MP and, indeed, no other woman has to go through what I have been going through in the past few days.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. At the outset, I know she will understand if I say that in respect of some of the other matters to do with tax treatment and funding that she mentioned, I cannot comment. It is perfectly reasonable for the hon. Lady to set out those matters, but they do not require a response from me and it would not in any way be authoritative.

However, as far as what I regard as her major point is concerned, I will be absolutely explicit in my response. I believe that campaigning of that kind, with the intensity involved and the explicit public threat, to its apparently endless continuation, is vile, unconscionable and despicable. There is a major difference—it is important that we should be clear about this—between putting a point of view with considerable force and insistence on the matter of abortion or any other matter of public dispute and putting it in extreme and provocative terms, and in doing so saying, “We will go on doing so until you stop exercising your right as a Member of Parliament to campaign for what you want. Give in to our intimidation, our threats and our bullying, or it will be the worse for you.” That to me, colleagues—I hope that I carry the support of the majority of the House in saying this—is rank, unacceptable and displays, if I may say so, and I will, an absence of any moral compass. Anybody who thinks seriously about these matters cannot seriously think that that is right. It would be wrong in any case, but for the hon. Lady to be subject to that treatment when she herself is pregnant, and those intimidating and harassing her, ultimately unsuccessfully, know that to be so, is double appalling.

With reference to what the hon. Lady said—and it is a challenge, which I take in good part—about thus far an absence of support from the House authorities, I am very disappointed to learn of that. I cannot comment on the particulars. What I do undertake to do is to meet the hon. Lady within 24 hours, if she wishes to meet me, and I will, as appropriate, be accompanied by people in this House who are best placed to advise. I am delighted that the Mayor of London and his team are supporting her, but she is entitled to proper and unstinting support from the House authorities. If she feels that that is not the case and there is more that we can do, or there are things that we have not done at all that we should be doing, I am determined that she should get that help.

The hon. Lady is respected across this House as an extremely dedicated, articulate and principled campaigner for her causes. Nothing on earth can be allowed to prevent her from continuing in that vein. Although it is not a matter of order within the Chamber, it is right that she should seek the support of Parliament's spokesperson, as she wants to reinforce her right to go about her business in a legitimate way. She has that right, and I stand absolutely with her in insisting on the continued exercise of that right.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Having discussed this matter just this morning with the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), may I say that the Government are similarly concerned about the nature of the campaign against her? Indeed, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury has already communicated her concerns to his Department, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already offered to meet the hon. Lady. We take these allegations very seriously, and we will see what can be done.

Mr Speaker: I hope that those replies will do for now, but let us get together, as I have suggested, and no doubt the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) will want to meet the Minister at the appropriate time.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): Further to the point of order from the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), Mr Speaker. As someone who sits on the opposite side of the abortion debate, may I express my solidarity with the hon. Lady? The abuse and the billboards do nothing to further the debate. Abortion is a very personal issue. We should use this place as a forum for debate, but should do so in a constructive, collaborative manner. Let me echo the point that those people do not speak for all of us who may have a different view.

Mr Speaker: I hope that colleagues will agree that that was a very welcome point of order from the hon. Lady, and I think that I speak on the House's behalf when I thank her for saying what she has said.

I think there was another point of order from the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), on a wholly unrelated subject.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you; it is unrelated.

Following his statement to the House last week, the Prime Minister, in response to a question that I asked about an instruction that had apparently been given by

his adviser, Dominic Cummings, that parts of Government data that are of significance and concern to many people should be brought together, told me that I had

“mentioned something about which I am afraid I was hitherto unaware”.—[*Official Report*, 25 September 2019; Vol. 664, c. 817-8.]

That was a very polite response, but it seems to many of us somewhat surprising in view of the publicity given to the issue and the fact that other Members have raised complaints with the Information Commissioner. I wonder whether you could give me guidance, Mr Speaker, on how the Prime Minister could perhaps be persuaded to return to the House to clarify the matter.

Mr Speaker: I do not treat what the hon. Gentleman has said with any levity when I say that conflicting accounts of a Government's position on a given subject are not a novel phenomenon. There have been many precedents, under successive Governments and in relation to a plethora of different Departments, sometimes including No. 10 Downing Street itself. I do not sniff or cavil at what the hon. Gentleman has said about the apparent inconsistency that perturbs him, and I am grateful to him for giving me notice that he would raise the matter. However, I do not think that this is a point of order. The hon. Gentleman is seeking procedural advice.

By the way, when I say that this is not a point of order, I say it for the purpose of the intelligibility of our proceedings to people observing them. The great majority of points of order are not points of order. They are ruses by which to raise matters that are of particular concern to Members at the time—in the most recent instance, the point of order from the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), quite the most compelling and pressing case to raise.

As far as the hon. Gentleman is concerned, I think that he should work on this basis. If he wishes to pursue what he sees as a potentially or actually inaccurate parliamentary answer, he should take the short journey from here to the Table Office and seek advice on how to pursue it. I hope that he will forgive me if I say that, in doing so, he should adopt my—I think—now established motto in these matters by way of advice: persist, persist, persist. I say this to the hon. Gentleman. Table further questions. Do not take no for an answer. Write letters. In a legitimate, as opposed to an illegitimate, way, make a nuisance of yourself, man.

If there are no further points of order, we come now to the ten-minute rule motion, for which the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr has been so patiently and good-naturedly waiting.

Public Expenditure and Taxation (Advisory Body)

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

1.3 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish an independent advisory body to make recommendations on the equitable distribution of public expenditure across the United Kingdom, the calculation of block grants to devolved administrations, the implications of the devolution of tax-raising powers for the United Kingdom fiscal framework, and the resolution of fiscal disputes arising between governments in the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes.

For decades, British Governments—red and blue alike—have tinkered around the edges of our broken economic system without challenging its structural flaws. Nine of the 10 poorest regions in northern Europe are located within the British state, as well as the richest by a country mile. These disgraceful geographical wealth inequalities are a record of shame. Successive British Governments, even after the 2008 financial crash, have been too timid to challenge the economic status quo, which prizes consumer debt addiction and the financialisation of the economy. In response to the crash, the former Chancellor George Osborne used to talk a lot about geographical and sectoral economic rebalancing, but in reality there has been little action to match the rhetoric.

Of the 12 NUTS—nomenclature of territorial units for statistics—nations and regions of the British state, only three, London, south-east England and east England, are not in deficit. Recent international data showed that the largest difference in economic prosperity in Europe was between inner London—the UK's richest region, with a regional GDP average of 614% of the EU average—and west Wales and the valleys, the UK's poorest, with a regional GDP of 68% of the EU average. London acts as a black hole, sucking in talent and investment from the rest of the UK and beyond. Perversely, this inequality further incentivises investment in London from the public and private sectors alike, so the cycle continues unabated.

That is why I am introducing a Bill to establish an independent advisory body to make recommendations on the equitable distribution of public expenditure across the British state: a new office for fair funding, with delivering geographic wealth convergence as its statutory aim. It would advise on the calculation of block grants to devolved Administrations, make recommendations on the implications of the devolution of tax-raising powers for the United Kingdom fiscal framework and act as an independent arbitrator in dealing with the resolution of fiscal disputes arising between the Governments in the UK.

There are constant misunderstandings and mis-statements about the relative funding and public spending levels in Wales compared with those in other parts of the UK. Forty years after the introduction of the infamous Barnett formula, it is still very poorly understood. On a number of occasions, the British Government have erroneously claimed that for every £100 of public spending

[Jonathan Edwards]

in England, £120 is spent in Wales. While that may be the case for devolved spending, it is certainly not the case for total expenditure, which is a very different measure. Identifiable public expenditure per capita in Wales in 2015-16 was 113% of the England level. Total expenditure per capita in Wales—identifiable plus non-identifiable—was 110%, well below the 120% claimed by the Secretary of State.

For the British state, it pays to keep the system as impenetrable as possible. Relative need, as used in consideration of funding for the devolved Administrations, makes no allowance for the concept of pump-priming, in which additional funding is allocated for long-term capital investment to realise the latent economic potential of poorer-performing geographical areas. The issue is well described in the first report of the UK2070 Commission, which claims that the Treasury Green Book is biased in favour of capital investment in the most successful regions. It is also important to mitigate the self-reinforcing tendencies of the Treasury Green Book and cost-benefit analysis whereby fast-growing places automatically move to the front of the queue for more public investment. One of the main reasons the British state currently has anaemic economic growth is low productivity. The best way to boost productivity would be to invest in poorer-performing areas, but what we are likely to get from the Brexit “Britannia Unchained” gang is even more money spent in London.

In July 2019, the Public Accounts Committee published a report outlining several problems with the way in which funding is currently allocated to the devolved Governments. It identified unnecessary complexity involving funding arrangements, recommending that the Treasury become more transparent in the way that it allocates funding. It concluded that the allocation of funding outside the Barnett formula without consequentials was unsatisfactory. For example, the dodgy deal with the DUP that resulted in £1 billion extra funding clearly undermined the little credibility that the Barnett formula still retained. A lack of clarity on whether the block grant reflects need was reported, and the Committee expressed concern at the impact of slower population growth on funding per head. The report also reiterated Plaid Cymru’s concerns about delays in the sharing of information by the Treasury with the devolved Administrations on the comparability factors included in the statement of funding policy.

The statement of funding policy, usually published alongside the comprehensive spending review, sets out the comparability factors that are used in the calculation of the Barnett formula. The last set of comparability factors in relation to spending programmes was published in 2015, and a departmental breakdown, with no material difference, was published as an addendum to the spending round last month. The comparability factors are decided unilaterally by the Treasury, and that needs to be changed as a matter of priority.

HS2 is a case in point. It currently swallows up a third of the UK Government’s support for rail: £2.1 billion out of a total of £6.4 billion in the year 2017-18. It is clear from published and leaked reports that HS2 will cost far more than the planned £56 billion—up to £100 billion. The Treasury categorised HS2 as a national

project with a comparability factor of 0% for Wales, while Scotland and Northern Ireland had a 100% score. As a result, full Barnett consequentials are payable to Scotland and Northern Ireland, but not to Wales. These are huge sums of money. If HS2 ends up costing £100 billion, full Barnett consequentials for Wales will amount to £5 billion.

Transport expert Professor Stuart Cole has also demonstrated that HS2 will have negative consequences for Wales, particularly in the south of my country, as journey times to cities in the midlands and north of England are reduced and new technology encourages companies to areas with HS2 stations. Professor Cole’s analysis was supported by a report from Greengauge 21, which drew on analysis by KPMG, which found that HS2 could reduce employment growth in Wales by 21,000 jobs between 2007 and 2040, as well as costing the economy of the south of my country £200 million per annum. My Bill aims to put a stop to the unfair way in which those comparability factors are set by setting up an independent advisory body.

With growing fiscal divergence and an evolving constitutional landscape, the need for such an independent body has never been greater. The Wales Act 2014 devolved certain tax and borrowing powers to Wales. It enables the Welsh Government to legislate in respect of stamp duty land tax and landfill tax, and for the partial devolution of income tax to Wales. A fiscal framework was negotiated between the British and Welsh Governments to establish rules for determining matters resulting from fiscal devolution. At the moment, the three Welsh rates are set at 10p, maintaining parity with England, but with the possibility of further devolution and greater fiscal divergence, the current mechanism for developing and negotiating the fiscal framework is unsustainable.

Significant concerns remain with regard to the dispute resolution mechanism in the framework. If no agreement is reached, the status quo remains. How can the devolved Administrations secure a fair hearing if the UK Government, with whom they are raising the dispute, are playing judge, jury and executioner? If we established an office for fair funding under my Bill, we would have a system of independent arbitration.

There is international precedent for an independent office for fair funding. In South Africa, the Financial and Fiscal Commission is an independent body that does not determine expenditure allocation formulae directly but advises the South African Government on those formulae. The South African Government have to consult the FFC regarding the division of revenue between different tiers of government. In Australia, allocations of federal funding to the six states and two territories are overseen by the Commonwealth Grants Commission, which is a statutory, independent, non-partisan body. The CGC was discussed in the 2009 report from the Lords Select Committee on the Barnett Formula, which recommended that a similar body be set up in the UK.

While an office of fair funding would not solve the fundamental imbalance at the heart of the British state, it could at least give Wales and other neglected areas the tools to begin improving our infrastructure and to diversify our economies. Brexit is not an excuse to reassert Westminster control over Wales. The Bill would help to create a level playing field between the nations of the British state.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Jonathan Edwards, Liz Saville Roberts, Guto Bebb, Anna McMorris, Jane Dodds, Caroline Lucas, Ben Lake and Hywel Williams present the Bill.

Jonathan Edwards accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on 3 October 2019 and to be printed (Bill 437).

Domestic Abuse Bill

[Relevant Documents: First Report of the Joint Committee on the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill, Draft Domestic Abuse Bill, HC 2075, and the Government Response, CP 137; ninth Report of the Home Affairs Committee, Domestic Abuse, HC 1015, and the Government Response, HC 2172; and written evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, on the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill, reported to the House on 3 April, 10 April and 21 May 2019, HC 570.]

Second Reading

Mr Speaker: I will call the Secretary of State for Justice in a moment to move the motion, but before I do so, and in recognition of the fact that there are no time limits on Front-Bench speeches, I will tell the House that more than 40 right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch the eye of the Chair. I know that colleagues will want sensitively to take account of that in framing their contributions.

1.14 pm

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am mindful of the information with which you have kindly furnished the House, Mr Speaker. You will know that historically I have been generous in accepting interventions. I will tailor my generosity today, because I want to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to take part in this landmark debate. I look around the Chamber, and in all parts I see colleagues who have made a huge contribution to getting where we are today. We still have a long way to go, but I am pleased, encouraged and proud to see parliamentarians of all colours who have put their shoulder to the wheel to tackle the challenge that we face. It is a challenge that has been too big for too long, and the Government have consistently made clear our continued determination to tackle the scourge of domestic abuse. Legislation, including the Bill, whatever its landmark status, is only one aspect of the work that needs to be done and that we are undertaking across Government to diminish the prevalence and impact of domestic abuse, and to make it clear to the public that we have zero tolerance of abusers.

This is not just a matter for the Ministry of Justice—it is for the Home Office, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department of Health and Social Care. I am glad to be supported by Ministers from all those Departments and, indeed, all of Government, as we need to put our metaphorical shoulder to the wheel. The Bill puts the needs of victims front and centre, by providing additional protections, strengthening the agencies' response, and amplifying the voice of victims. We are determined to ensure that victims feel safe and supported, both in seeking help and in rebuilding their lives.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): As the daughter of a social worker who spent her entire career working alongside children and families, supporting victims of domestic abuse, may I ask the Secretary of State to join me in thanking the hard-working social workers and, indeed, police officers who are often the first line of response, as well as charities across the country who support victims of domestic abuse?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is right to remind us at the get-go of the importance of a co-ordinated approach. All of us, including Members of Parliament, need to be domestic abuse-aware. We need to understand that it presents in myriad ways and myriad circumstances.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Domestic abuse is a leading cause of homelessness, and some of the most harrowing cases I have dealt with as a constituency MP have involved the difficulty faced by survivors of abuse in accessing safe, secure housing. Will the Secretary of State undertake to ensure in the Bill that survivors of domestic abuse automatically have priority need status for housing and, most importantly, that local authorities are fully and sustainably funded to deliver that obligation?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that issue, and the Bill provides an opportunity to delve into it. It is important that we outline those principles on Second Reading. In Committee, we will have an opportunity to debate the detail. I am particularly interested in the points that she made. I want to make the Bill as good as possible, and I need the help not just of colleagues in government but of all hon. Members to do that.

Several hon. Members rose—

Robert Buckland: May I make a little progress? As I have said, I will be as generous as I can.

Can I take the House back 25 years to a case in the Crown court at Carmarthen that involved a young couple? The man was charged with assault against his wife. A young barrister had been given that case. That was me, and I remember seeing photographs of the victim's injuries. I was 24, and not very worldly-wise. I looked at the photographs of that woman's eyes, which were bloodshot and bruised. The police had got there in time to take photographs of the injuries—something of a rarity in those days—and I immediately thought that she had been a victim of a direct assault by punching, but I was wrong about that. She had been strangled—strangulation causes those types of injury.

The victim came to court. Frankly, I could not see what the defence was for the case, but my instructions were to plough on none the less. I saw a frightened and terrified woman having to come to this grand and rather old-fashioned court. Luckily, the judge was humane, sensible and sensitive, but there was a problem: the woman did not want to follow through and give evidence. The judge called her into court and called her to the stand because he was concerned about what was happening. He asked her to explain why she did not want to give evidence. She said that she still loved her partner, that she wanted to be with him and that she did not want to put him through the stress of a Crown court trial. With that, the case was over. He was acquitted, they went on their way, and I was left thinking, "Is that really the end?" Was it in fact just the beginning of the domestic abuse that we all recognise?

That story has haunted me all my professional life. The evidence shows that victims of domestic abuse will often have been a victim on dozens of occasions before

they call the police or the authorities. Victims are suffering in silence, often for years, and we are unable to reach them.

Several hon. Members rose—

Robert Buckland: I will give way in a moment. I have not yet finished this part of my speech.

I believe that the days of the courts approaching abuse as "just a domestic" have, happily, gone, but my goodness me, we still have a heck of a way to go. I want to give the House one statistic before I give way. In the year ending March 2018, some 2 million adults between the ages of 16 and 59 experienced domestic abuse. That is 2 million people, like the woman I was talking about, whose everyday lives are blighted by abuse and who live with the effects, be they physical or emotional. So we have a high degree of duty to them to pass this legislation.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Another aspect highlighted by the Secretary of State's incredibly moving story is just how long the survivors of domestic abuse have been waiting for this kind of legislation. They have been waiting for 25 years, and indeed for much longer, but for the past three years the Government have been promising to outlaw cross-examination by perpetrators of domestic violence. People have waited for so long, so will he now give a commitment that this Bill will be seen through before the House is prorogued once more? If it was not, that would be the final straw for many very vulnerable people.

Robert Buckland: I pay warm tribute to the hon. Gentleman, who has been an assiduous campaigner on this issue. Domestic abuse is predominantly experienced by women, but we also know that there are many relationships in our society in which men suffer in silence. We are speaking for everybody, whatever their gender, orientation or classification. This is for everybody. On the question of the carry-over, that motion is on the Order Paper and I know that hon. Members will want to support it. This Bill will be carried over. That is an important sign of our deep commitment to this issue.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (IGC): I only wish that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's very moving story was an exception, but sadly, as he and I and many others who have practised at the criminal Bar or as solicitors will know, it is still all too common a story today. I have two quick questions that I hope he can answer. First, will this Act ensure that our police change their attitude? He is right to talk about the courts and the judiciary, but what about our police, who I fear still think of these instances as "domestics"? Secondly, will he meet me to discuss what is happening in our courts? There is now far too long a delay between complaint and trial—there is often a delay of between two and three years, and that is not fair on the victims.

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady. On her second point, I will meet her. On her first point, the important thing is what we do to embed the legislation, and that has to be by way of further training and seeing the operational effect of the strategy we set out and the direction that the primary legislation takes.

Several hon. Members rose—

Robert Buckland: I give way to the Chair of the Select Committee on Justice.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for giving way. I, too, have seen examples like the one that he quoted, and I particularly welcome the provisions in clause 75 relating to the prohibition of cross-examination by the abusive party. As the Bill goes forward, will he and his colleagues particularly bear in mind the legitimate improvements proposed by the Law Society and others in this field? They include a proposal for the proper remuneration of, and a proper system for instructing, the representatives instructed to carry out the cross-examination, in the interests of justice. Will he also consider whether examination in chief could be included in certain circumstances—for example, when the alleged abusive party seeks to call the child of the relationship in support of their case? That, too, can cause real distress.

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to talk about his experience, the issues that we can tease out in Committee and how far we need to go.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Robert Buckland: I will give way again in a moment, but I would like to make some progress.

Abuse has not only a direct impact but an impact on the wider family and, most appallingly and sadly, on children and young people, who suffer the short and long-term emotional and behavioural effects of abuse. We know that children who witness domestic abuse in the home are far more likely to experience abuse by a partner as an adult. It is therefore our role as a Government and a Parliament to do all we can to protect our children from having to suffer as a consequence of abuse, and to ensure that national and local agencies recognise and respond to their needs.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): My right hon. and learned Friend is making a powerful speech and giving some amazing examples. I am sure that most of us have come across stories, perhaps sometimes in our own families, where victims do not believe that the perpetrator is at fault and instead believe that they themselves are at fault. He has mentioned physical, emotional and economic abuse. That is the crux of the problem, and the definition has been widened out. I absolutely welcome the Bill. How does he expect it to provide protection for victims and help to expose the vile perpetrators and bring them to justice?

Robert Buckland: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for her continuing commitment to reform and improvement in this area. The widening of the definition from “financial” to “economic” abuse captures the manipulation that can happen, not only in relation to money but in relation to other benefits and through coercive control. I am proud to have played my part as a junior Minister in ensuring that coercive control went on to the statute book as a criminal offence some years ago. We must continue to reinforce the message that abuse is not just about violence, important though that is, and that its collective impacts can change the lives of far too many victims.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I commend the Secretary of State and, in particular, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), for the work they have been doing on this issue. On a number of occasions we have stated that we want to embed legislation that provides the best protection, and the Secretary of State will know that this Bill contains particular definitions that are unique to Northern Ireland. However, one thing we are devoid of in Northern Ireland is legislative protection from stalking. I hope that he will give thoughtful consideration during the passage of the Bill to incorporating measures to include that, whether there be a domestic connection to the stalking or not. We need that legislation for the individual victims and their families. Will he also give thoughtful consideration to the inclusion of Northern Ireland Members of this House on the Bill Committee?

Robert Buckland: On the hon. Gentleman’s last point, the business managers will have heard him loud and clear. I am keen to ensure that the Bill maintains its focus on domestic abuse. I do not pretend that we can somehow hermetically seal the issue off from other aspects of criminal behaviour and abuse, such as stalking, but I think that the best place for stalking legislation would be in a discrete piece of work. I draw his attention to the work that we did in England and Wales. I was part of the all-party parliamentary group on stalking and harassment, which campaigned and worked at pace to get stalking criminalised in England and Wales. I will give him encouragement, but I really want to ensure that this Bill is focused.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I have just returned from the Council of Europe, where members across parties, especially in the Socialist Group, expressed horror that it has taken seven years and counting for the UK to ratify the Istanbul convention. One of the critical points in ratifying the convention is the treatment of women in Northern Ireland and the fact that they do not have the protections that the Secretary of State has just suggested should not be in the Bill. The Government gave a pledge and told the Council of Europe that the Bill was about ratifying the Istanbul convention, and there is a motion of recommendation about the convention in the UK right now at the Council of Europe. Can he give an assurance that he will not leave the women of Northern Ireland out of the Istanbul convention, let alone the migrant women in this country who also need us to put the legislation together?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady makes an important point about the Istanbul convention, and of course we passed domestic legislation about that. I want to make sure that every aspect of the convention is underpinned in domestic law throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom. I am simply saying, as a legislator and someone who wants to make sure that we get the Bill in the best possible position, that we need to make sure we get the issues in the right vehicle. If it is the will of the House that the Bill is the right vehicle, that will of course be respected, but I think I am entitled to make that point about what I regard as the real focus of the Bill. I speak as someone who has actively and enthusiastically supported the criminalisation of stalking—as has she—for many years.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) *rose*—

Robert Buckland: I give way to the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee.

Yvette Cooper: I urge the Secretary of State to reconsider this point. We have a Bill before us and the opportunity to address the issue of stalking. There is considerable overlap: many cases that may begin as domestic abuse become terrible cases of stalking when the relationship splits up. There are serial perpetrators of violence and abuse who in some cases are involved in domestic abuse and in others in stalking.

Robert Buckland: Of course, and the right hon. Lady makes an important point. She will know that my decision to extend the unduly lenient sentence scheme to cover stalking offences reinforces my personal commitment and my deep understanding of the link between stalking and obsessional behaviour and the commission of sexual offences, offences of violence or homicide. I absolutely get that, but it is right that we tease out those issues in Committee and look at them again on Report. If it is the will of the House, we will of course do it.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (LD) *rose*—

Robert Buckland: I will give way to the Chair of the Health Committee.

Dr Wollaston: The Secretary of State may know that I took the Stalking Protection Act 2019 through the House and it received Royal Assent in March. Can he update the House on when it will come into force?

Robert Buckland: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her work on this important issue and on getting that legislation through Parliament. I will make sure that that information is furnished to her in the course of the debate. Of course, we are brilliantly served by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), and she will respond to the debate.

We have talked about the moral case for pursuing this issue, but there is also an economic case—a case of financial responsibility. Research has established that the cost of domestic abuse was approximately £66 billion for victims in England and Wales in the year ending March 2017. The biggest component of that cost is the physical and emotional harm incurred by them, but the cost to our economy and our health service is also considerable. Domestic abuse makes up one third of all violent crime reported to the police. The case for removal is clear, but the challenge is not easy. The dynamics are complex and mean that much domestic abuse is hidden. Victims face significant barriers in seeking help and difficulties in escaping from an abusive relationship. That is why we need a cross-Government, multi-pronged approach to tackling it. The Bill is not only part of that approach but demonstrates the breadth of our ambition in showing strong leadership and taking decisive action to help to end the suffering and harm.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): May I say how much I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to taking a zero-tolerance approach to domestic violence and to

sticking up for the victims? Following his welcome speech at the Conservative party conference this week in which he pledged to end automatic early release of certain prisoners, can he confirm that people who commit violence as part of domestic abuse will be included, and they will no longer be eligible for release halfway through their prison sentence?

Robert Buckland: Yes, I can. People convicted of offences with a domestic element will often be convicted of the most serious violent and indeed sexual offences. Under my proposals, automatic release will therefore apply at two thirds, rather than one half of the sentence. I have furnished the House with a written ministerial statement on that.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): Sexual exploitation is one of the most heinous forms of abuse that can be perpetrated in domestic situations. That is when the victim is coerced and forced to perform sex acts in return for money, accommodation, employment, services or goods. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is vital that the Bill explicitly recognises sexual exploitation as a form of domestic abuse?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Gentleman is right, and the definition does that. I look forward to more detailed debate to see how fully we can reflect the important point that he makes.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The Secretary of State will recognise that there is an interesting situation as between England and Wales. This legislation will apply to England and Wales, but Wales has its own legislature and legislated in this area in 2015. Will he make a commitment to me that Wales will be properly represented on all the scrutiny and advisory boards affected by the Bill, including the answerability of the commissioner for domestic abuse?

Robert Buckland: The right hon. Lady was of course part of the Joint Committee and has an impressive track record on this issue. I have very much appreciated the work that we have done together on these issues. I can give her that assurance. It is clear that all parts of the joint jurisdiction need to be adequately represented.

The Joint Committee was chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), who did a wonderful and important job. I want to put on record my thanks to her and all the other members for what they have done. The Government have taken on board many of the Committee's helpful recommendations, and the Bill is better as a result of its work. I am conscious that we have yet to respond to a small number of recommendations, but we will provide an update during consideration of the Bill in Committee.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): My right hon. and learned Friend has been characteristically generous in giving way. I welcome the establishment of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner. There is no doubt that the Bill is important and vital, and will sail through the House, but I am concerned that people will abuse our well-meaning intentions, and I do not want to see people being able to get different answers in different parts of the country. Does he agree that the commissioner will make that less possible?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend is right to hail the appointment of the first Domestic Abuse Commissioner. We thought we should not wait for the Bill to go through both Houses, because we thought that the job was too urgent and too important. We have appointed a designate commissioner, but it is very much our hope that the House will support the appointment by passing the necessary legislation.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): I am sure all hon. Members welcome the Government's commitment to end economic abuse and to enable partners who are victimised to leave the relationship. I note that the Secretary of State did not include the Department for Work and Pensions in his list of Departments to work with. Does he share the concern of the Work and Pensions Committee at all the evidence we have received from charities that shows people are simply not able to leave violent relationships because of the benefits system? Will he commit to addressing that?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady rightly upbraids me, and I apologise. It is important and good that we now have domestic abuse advisers in every jobcentre, who can really help signpost and give support to people who are in abusive relationships. It is right to say that about 60% of claims are made by the primary carer, which will often be a woman, but in a number of cases individuals are trapped in a position of dependence. I hope that the Bill will be an opportunity for us to do more work on that.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I hope the Secretary of State has seen the work that has been done in Drake Hall women's prison, which has shown that about two thirds of women prisoners—those who have been screened—have had a major traumatic brain injury or a history of it. Two thirds of those injuries happened prior to their first offending behaviour and were as a result of domestic violence. So would it not make sense, first, if we screened every woman prisoner before she arrived in prison to make sure that she had the right support, and, secondly, if we made sure that every woman who had potentially suffered from domestic violence was given the neuro-rehabilitation that she needs to make sure that she gets over the physical trauma?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point—one with which I am familiar—about the cycle of abuse and then criminality. Women whom I have met in Eastwood Park recently were in a similar position, particularly women from south Wales. I could talk about individual meetings I have had with women prisoners, but the simple truth is that I get the point about acquired brain injury and we want to do more about it. Again, drawing that out in the debate will be really helpful for the Government.

Several hon. Members rose—

Robert Buckland: May I just move on to deal with the provisions in the Bill? I will be as generous as possible in taking interventions.

As we know, the Bill introduces the first all-purpose statutory definition of domestic abuse. Why? It is because we need to do even more to raise awareness of this

crime and tackle it more effectively. There needs to be a common understanding, because the outdated perception about violent crime, ranging from common assault through to more serious offences, does not understand the true nature of domestic abuse. It ignores the insidious, controlling or coercive behaviour, and the psychological abuse that, bit by bit, changes what may start as a loving and equal relationship into one that is completely unequal and controlling, where, without the victim realising it, they are turned into somebody who is being abused.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): I commend the right hon. and learned Gentleman on his passionate commitment and speech. The Bill contains many important provisions. It is important to recognise that in Scotland we have a gold standard, and that this Bill is primarily about England and Wales, but one area on which we have not been able to legislate in Scotland has been concerning migrant women having no recourse to public funds. Does he recognise that there is a failing in the Bill and that much more needs to be done to protect migrant women who have no recourse to public funds?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that matter. Of course that issue is subject to a current review. I do not just want to park it there, as an excuse to do nothing, as we are looking at it carefully and it may well be that we can take action other than via primary legislation.

While I remember, let me answer the point made by the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston): the proposal is to bring the law she mentioned into force early next year. We are talking about a matter of a few months. I know she will hold me to "early" meaning truly early, as opposed to civil service-speak. I get that, with respect to the wonderful civil servants who serve this Government well and who are dedicated and working hard to eradicate domestic abuse.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for making such a passionate speech. Does he agree that a mother of two children fleeing domestic abuse should not be living in a one-bedroom hostel for more than a year? Women who have experienced domestic violence need priority housing, and reasons such as I have mentioned force some women to remain with their abusers.

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady is right about that. I am very hopeful that this Bill will allow us to tease out these issues and address the issue of secure accommodation for victims in abusive relationships. I will take a moment to pay tribute to the network of organisations such as Swindon Women's Aid, in my constituency, which provides a gold standard service. She would agree that this is about not just the accommodation, but the wraparound support that women need—the advice, counselling and trauma counselling—to try to rebuild their lives. She is right to talk about the effect on the children of the relationship, too.

Several hon. Members rose—

Robert Buckland: May I move on to deal with some other provisions in the Bill? I want to talk about the concept of financial abuse, which we have dealt with in interventions. I want the new definition to be used by

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service providers, justice agencies and schools, and promoted to the public at large, so that finally we have a shared understanding of the nature of this abuse. Only then can we really identify, challenge and respond to it. We have already heralded the appointment of Nicole Jacobs as our designate Domestic Abuse Commissioner. This Bill will put that post on a statutory footing. We will ensure that she has the necessary powers to drive this change, so that public bodies such as local authorities, NHS bodies and justice agencies will be under a duty to co-operate with the commissioner. They and Ministers will be required to make a timely response to each and every recommendation made.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I, too, served on the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee. One of our recommendations was that the post of Domestic Abuse Commissioner should not be part-time—it needs to be full-time. All the evidence we heard was that there was plenty of work to do. Will the Minister reassure us that it will now be a full-time post?

Robert Buckland: Yes, the hon. Lady makes a very proper point. We wanted to get this moving now and get it in place so that the work could begin. I want to see and fully expect the post to become full-time, certainly after it is embedded in law, so I can give her that assurance.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): Let me say how powerful it is in this place to have such strong consensus on this important Bill, which focuses on England and Wales. Research shows that domestic abuse can last up to 25% longer in rural areas, as there are more complex obstacles to people exiting these situations and the police resources are spread over a vaster geographical area. Will the Minister therefore confirm that the Domestic Abuse Commissioner will have a renewed focus on rural areas, in order to ensure parity?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who makes a new and important point in this debate, which I readily take on board. The police and crime commissioner for North Yorkshire has been doing an important piece of work on the understanding of rural domestic abuse, the delay involved in that and all the points that my hon. Friend makes.

Victims of domestic abuse—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Robert Buckland: May I just press on for a moment? Victims of domestic abuse just want it to stop. They do not want to live in constant fear in their own home or to be forced to flee to a place of safety. That is why civil protection orders play such an important role in providing protection to victims and their children, but at the moment we have a rather confusing landscape, with non-molestation orders, restraining orders and domestic violence protection orders. Each of those is available in different circumstances. They do different things and they have different consequences where the order is breached. Victims are not well served by that plethora. In recognition of that, the Bill provides for a new go-to domestic abuse protection notice and the domestic abuse

protection order. I hate acronyms but I will call it a DAPO on this occasion. The notice will give victims immediate protection following a crisis incident. It will be issued by the police—

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab) *rose*—

Robert Buckland: I will give way in a moment.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): My hon. Friend has been waiting for 15 minutes.

Robert Buckland: Mr Speaker, I think I have been very generous. I respect all hon. Members, and I will give way to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) now.

Tulip Siddiq: I had better make a good point now! The Minister has been making a powerful speech, and I welcome this Bill, but I have to reiterate the point about migrant women. Leaders of the non-governmental organisation Liberty argue that migrant women face an “impossible” situation

“where they are forced to choose between the risk of detention/deportation or staying in a situation of violence.”

So I ask the Minister, once again: where is the support? The Bill is welcome for the most part, but it clearly is a missed opportunity to create an intergovernmental strategy to support migrant women who are at risk of abuse. Does he agree that all of us should work together to develop a framework of support in Committee? Will he commit to that?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's persistence, because it has resulted in an important point. I assure her that the review is not just an internal review; it involves the sort of agencies that she and I would want to be involved. Not only the review but this Bill and the debates we can have in Committee can help us to get to a situation where we are providing the appropriate support for all victims, including migrant women. I thank her for her intervention.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Robert Buckland: May I make some progress? With the greatest respect to my colleagues, I shall finish the point about what the new DAPO will mean. It will be issued by the police. It may, for example, require the perpetrator to leave the home of the victim for up to 48 hours, and the issue of that notice will then trigger a police application to a magistrates court for a longer-term DAPO to protect the victim.

Of course, it will not always be the case that a single incident necessitates the issuing of a notice. That being the case, the Bill also allows for a victim, the police or any other person, with the permission of the court, to apply for one of these orders, and it would also be open to a judge or magistrate to decide for themselves to make a DAPO as a corollary to existing proceedings in the criminal, civil or family court. So, this is a fully flexible instrument. It can be tailored by the court to meet the needs of the individual victim, and it would be for the courts then to determine its length, or indeed to decide that it should be open-ended until such time as a further order was made. Really importantly, the court

will be able to attach not just restrictions but positive requirements. For example, an order could prohibit the perpetrator from contacting the victim, require that perpetrator to attend a behavioural change programme and compel them to wear an electronic tag to monitor compliance with an exclusion zone around the victim's home. Crucially, breach of that order will be a criminal offence, with a maximum penalty of five years in prison.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I take the opportunity to welcome the tone that is being struck this afternoon. That is incredibly important.

On the point that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is making about DAPOs, we already have a system whereby if a person is convicted of a domestic abuse crime, there is a possibility that there will be a light sentence; they could end up with a suspended sentence. That is what happened in the case of a constituent of mine—the perpetrator got a suspended sentence. Processes were put in place to ensure that the perpetrator did not repeatedly harass or contact the victim, but nevertheless that continued, and there was no action, despite those breaches of conditions, to re-arrest the perpetrator. So what confidence can victims have that the new process will be any better than the present one?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady has given a powerful illustration of the importance of this order, because it can be run alongside a criminal conviction. So even if there is a suspended sentence, as in the case that she cited, an order can be passed—a DAPO—that will have its own criminal consequences. It gives that extra strength, that extra purchase, not just to the authorities but to the victim, to know that there is a mechanism by which the perpetrator can be held to account if they breach the terms. With respect, I think this is an important additional element, but I bear what the hon. Lady says very much in mind.

I want to ensure that we get these new orders right, so we need to make the whole process as simple as possible for victims, and also for the police and others when navigating it. I want these new orders to be effective in changing abusive behaviour and protecting victims. We shall pilot these provisions, therefore, in a small number of areas before rolling them out nationally, so that issues of the sort that the hon. Lady and others have raised can be ironed out and dealt with, to make the provisions as effective as possible. The worst thing to do in these circumstances—we have all been here before as legislators—is to talk nobly and grandly about our intentions, pass the legislation and then find that nothing has changed. When we do so, all we have done is to raise victims' expectations, only to cruelly let them down. We are all responsible for that, so let us get this right.

If we are to strengthen the protection afforded to victims, we need to employ more measures to keep them safe. So, in addition to the DAPOs, the Bill seeks to build on two other preventive tools: the domestic violence disclosure scheme, which we all know as Clare's law; and the polygraph testing of high-harm perpetrators.

Clare's law has been in operation for over five years and I can see many Members—myself included—who campaigned very hard as Back Benchers to get that moving and to make a difference. It has been a success. Just to remind the House, the scheme has two elements: the right to ask and the right to know.

The right to ask allows an individual—or a relevant third party, such as a family member—to ask the police to check whether a partner, or ex-partner, has had a violent or abusive past. If police records show that an individual might be at risk of domestic abuse from their partner or ex-partner, the police can consider the disclosure of relevant information.

Under the right to know, the police may proactively decide to disclose information to keep a potential victim safe. In the year to March 2018, there were over 5,500 disclosures under that scheme—a welcome and encouraging statistic. However, I am clear, and the police accept this, that Clare's law does not always operate as well as it should, which is why the Bill puts the guidance underpinning the scheme on a statutory footing, and places a duty on police forces to have regard to that guidance. We believe that will help to raise awareness of the scheme, increase the number of disclosures and ensure greater consistency across England and Wales.

I acknowledge that, in contrast to the rest of the Bill, there has been a degree of scepticism about polygraph testing, including from the Joint Committee, but I can assure the House that it is not a panacea—it is not a gimmick; it is a genuine attempt better to protect victims. I will tell the House why. It has been used successfully in the management of sexual offenders for the past six years. In that context, it has been shown conclusively that polygraph examinations provide useful information—useful intelligence—including what is disclosed by the offender, to help those responsible for supervision better to manage the risk of reoffending.

Given that evidence, I suggest that we at least test whether there are similar benefits to be secured in the management of high-risk domestic abuse offenders. To that end, the Bill allows the National Probation Service to conduct a three-year pilot among that cohort and, if successful, to roll the scheme out.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Robert Buckland: I give way to the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans), whose seat I unsuccessfully contested 25 years ago next February.

Chris Evans: I do not want to remind the Minister, but in that by-election he actually lost his deposit, so I am amazed that the Conservative party allowed him to stand again. We have known each other a long time; we served together on the Justice Committee, of which he was an extremely talented member, and I am not surprised he has reached Cabinet level. However, he knows that when we served on that Committee we had major doubts about the technology of polygraph testing, and other Government Committees have noted problems with IT. IT is a problem of Government. Is he confident that the technology will provide for this type of Bill?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful. I do not know whether that was a compliment, but I will take it as such. I am very glad to see the hon. Gentleman in his place, representing that wonderful part of Gwent, where perhaps one day the electorate will take a different view—who knows? I hope not for a long time—[*Interruption.*] I was speaking on a personal basis.

The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about polygraph testing. I assure him, first, that this is a pilot; and, secondly, that this is not an attempt to use it

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as evidence. Clearly, there needs to be a high bar for the admissibility of evidence in criminal or family or civil proceedings. This measure is all about getting the sort of information—intelligence—that can help the police and other agencies to assess risk. Material of that sort can be invaluable and really make the difference for many victims.

Where prevention and protection has failed, some victims will seek remedies before the courts. I recognise that we must do better. In criminal proceedings against an alleged perpetrator, we want victims to be able to give their very best evidence to help convict the guilty. Giving evidence, as I said, can be a daunting, traumatic experience—and often a barrier—so there is already provision for what are termed “special measures”. It has been in legislation for 20 years. Those measures are designed to take some of the stress out of that process. If the quality of a victim’s evidence can be improved by allowing them to give evidence from behind a screen or via video link, or by playing a pre-recorded interview, we should do everything we can to allow that. The Bill, importantly, ensures that the victims of domestic abuse—the complainants in the trial—are automatically eligible for such special measures.

Few things are likely to re-traumatise victims more than being subject to direct cross-examination by their abuser in legal proceedings. Such an experience will inevitably cause immense stress, and would of itself be a continuation of the abuse.

Mr Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I am so grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. I congratulate him on making a powerful speech.

The issue of coercive control is highly complex, and such control can trap victims in debilitating and isolating fear. Sadly, friends of mine who have been victims of coercive control talk of almost being taken psychologically hostage by an abusive former partner. Does the Secretary of State agree that the hope is that the Bill would not only change the law for the better—although we still need to scrutinise it, however widespread the support is—but would change behaviour as well, and encourage women who are victims of coercive control to know that it is not right?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend has coined a very powerful phrase—psychological hostage—which is the right characterisation of the relationship he describes. I welcome his support and observations, and I am truly grateful to him.

Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con) *rose*—

Robert Buckland: I will give way to my right hon. and learned Friend, the former Attorney General.

Jeremy Wright: I am very grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend and I congratulate him on the way in which he is making the case for this very important Bill.

My right hon. and learned Friend has talked about the confidence that we need to give domestic abuse victims in the experience they are likely to have within the criminal justice system. He is right to highlight special measures, and I know he will also talk about preventing defendants from cross-examining complainants.

In relation to special measures, may I ask him to consider something that he and I know has worked well elsewhere—not just pre-recorded examination in chief but pre-recorded cross-examination? The benefit, as we know, is not just the complainant’s ability to get their part in the case out of the way altogether—dealing with the point about delay that the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) made—but that it very often causes the defendant to recognise the position that he, and it often is he, is in and to plead guilty early.

Robert Buckland: My right hon. and learned Friend speaks with immense experience. He is absolutely right about what we call the section 28 roll-out, which proved in the pilot to be a really successful scheme whereby victims of sexual abuse—child victims—are both examined in chief and cross-examined on video. It is an immensely sensible use of resources. It saves time for the victims. It is all done much more quickly and, as he said, it often leads to a much more sensible resolution in terms of the admission of guilt.

I am very interested in taking that concept further. That does require discussions about resource, and requires me to consult fully with the Lord Chief Justice and the judiciary, as I am constitutionally obliged to do, on its impact. I will obviously have further discussions on that matter and I will discuss it with my right hon. and learned Friend and other hon. and right hon. Members who have both a knowledge of and a commitment to this important issue.

Finally, Mr Deputy Speaker—[*Interruption.*] Well, I will go on if Members want. I could talk all day about this topic—[*Interruption.*] Oh, forgive me, Mr Speaker, I demoted you.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) mentioned the Istanbul convention and made a very proper point about the need to fill the gaps, which is why it is important not only to emphasise what the Bill is already doing but to remind ourselves what the convention requires us to do. We have to criminalise psychological violence and to take extraterritorial jurisdiction over that and certain other violent and sexual offences. This Bill, of course, gives effect to that.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): I thank the Minister for giving way and welcome his speech. He talks about extraterritorial powers. My constituent Samia Shahid was lured to her rape and murder in Pakistan, but we were unable to pursue that as an investigation. Will this measure include provision to cover that?

Robert Buckland: I am incredibly grateful to the hon. Lady for mentioning honour crime, which, of course, takes many forms. I have dealt with it myself in the context of other types of offending. The extra territorial jurisdiction will, of course, extend to offences of sexual violence, and if this Bill does not do that, then, frankly, we need to ensure that it is as watertight as possible. Again, we can look in detail at those provisions in Committee.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. The Istanbul convention is not just about extraterritorial powers but about the provision that we make for survivors in this country. If we are signatories, it means that we give extra care to people who return having experienced abuse abroad. Will he make sure that we sign the Istanbul convention so that we can provide adequate support for victims in this country?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady is right to remind us of the wider implications of the Istanbul convention. Much of that provision will have to be done as a matter of operation, but, again, this Bill gives us an opportunity to set the framework correctly.

Emma Little Pngelly (Belfast South) (DUP): I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. I welcome both his comments and the fact that some of the Bill's provisions extend to Northern Ireland. The situation in Northern Ireland is stark. Figures released in 2017 and promoted by Women's Aid in Northern Ireland, which does fantastic work, showed that by head of the population deaths among women was the joint highest in the entire European Union. In 2018, a domestic abuse call was made once every 17 minutes. Our law is very much falling behind what is happening in England and Wales.

Will the Secretary of State engage with me and my colleagues on what other provisions could be extended to Northern Ireland to offer that much-needed protection for women—and for men and others—who are impacted by this? I ask that because of the importance of this issue and because of the absence of a Northern Ireland Assembly.

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady makes a very powerful case for making sure that we use this Bill as an opportunity to extend as much protection as possible to domestic abuse victims throughout the length and breadth of our country. Scots law and my friends in Scotland have been dealing with this at length. Where it is appropriate to legislate, this House has the opportunity to act.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): I thank my right hon. and learned Friend very much for giving way. It was a huge pleasure and privilege to serve as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), with all the work that she did over many, many months, which is why I am delighted to see the Bill progress today.

No one who listened to Sally Challen be interviewed on the radio the other day can fail to appreciate how important this Bill is. We are talking about resource and about costs that will come with the Bill, but does my right hon. and learned Friend recognise that, currently, the cost of domestic abuse is £66 million a year—as of 2017—so if resource has to be put into the system it must be done?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to remind us of the economic as well as the moral cost of domestic abuse, and the Sally Challen case is one that will live with all of us as an example. The hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and I have spoken about it at length. I look forward to her contribution because, although we are political opponents, we are also friends. Working together on issues such as this, we can show that, as friends, we can make that change.

The Government are absolutely determined not just to stamp out this crime but to provide better support for victims and their families. We have shown in our response to the pre-legislative scrutiny of the proposals that we are open to means of strengthening this Bill. Indeed, we expect to bring forward some proposals of our own. Before the summer, we made it clear that, subject to the outcome of the then open consultation, we would bring amendments to the Bill to place new

duties on first-tier local authorities with regard to the support services to victims and their children in secure accommodation. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is currently considering more than 400 responses to that consultation, but it remains our intention to bring forward appropriate provision to enshrine those duties in law and to provide the necessary funding to do so.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (LD): I am very grateful to the Lord Chancellor for giving way. We have in Lambeth among the highest rates of domestic violence in the country, so I very much welcome the introduction of this duty on local authorities. Does he recognise that it is vital that coupled with that duty is a Government commitment to help to provide the sustainable funding for specialist services that is needed? Secondly, does he recognise that the provision of those services should not be done through competitive tendering, which is squeezing out many of the specialist service providers?

Robert Buckland: I am very interested in the hon. Gentleman's contribution, because he makes an important point about the way tendering is administered. I certainly want to make sure that the probation reforms unlock the genius of the small organisations that can really make a difference, but there is a read-across to the way in which we provide victim services. I am taking a keen interest in the commissioning of those services. Police and crime commissioners clearly have a role, but I want fully to understand and work out the miasma that faces small organisations making those bids, so I take his point very much on board.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

Robert Buckland: The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) has been very persistent, so I shall give way to her.

Rachael Maskell: Services such as Survive in York, which provides trauma support to victims of domestic violence, are seriously under-resourced. It is crucial that the Bill gets trauma support services right, particularly mental health and psychological support services. How will the Lord Chancellor ensure that these services are properly funded as well as provided?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady draws together all the issues in her local community. The various agencies, including police and crime commissioners, have a part to play. I want to ensure that the Domestic Abuse Commissioner helps to provide a focus on where the gaps are and where things are going wrong, but my hope is that this overarching legislation can provide a framework within which we can get the greater consistency that the hon. Lady and I rightly want.

No one should have to face violence or abuse from their partner or any other family member. Millions are experiencing it, and we owe it to each and every one of those affected to do all we can to protect and to support them, to put an end to domestic abuse, and to bring offenders to justice. It might be 25 years since the case I mentioned at the start of my speech, but the fact that it lives with me—a mere observer—means that the experience is magnified 100-fold for those who have experienced

[Robert Buckland]

the physical and emotional consequences of domestic abuse. We owe it to all those millions of people who suffer in silence to do something about it, and to do it now.

2.11 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Let me take this opportunity to thank the Lord Chancellor and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), for the productive way in which we have managed to work together on this Bill to date. May I also say that, as a proud Welsh woman, I am delighted that most of the Front-Bench speeches today will be delivered by a Member with a Welsh accent?

Like many colleagues across the House, organisations throughout the sector and—most importantly—victims and survivors of domestic abuse, I am delighted that I stand here today for the Second Reading of this long-awaited and desperately needed Bill. None of us can deny the utter chaos that has prevailed in this place in recent weeks. The Prime Minister's political game playing very nearly cost us this Bill. Less than a week before Parliament was suspended, the Prime Minister said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) that he would ensure that the Domestic Abuse Bill received “proper consideration” and was “rolled over”. Despite that, and while domestic violence-related homicides in the UK hit a five-year high last year, the Prime Minister went back on his word and blatantly allowed the Bill to drop, alongside a dozen other important pieces of legislation. But thankfully Lady Hale ruled last week that the Prorogation of Parliament was unlawful, and we rightly found ourselves back here with the Domestic Abuse Bill firmly back on the agenda. It was very much a case that Hale saved the day and the Bill.

We cannot afford any more hold-ups. Time is not a luxury that victims of domestic abuse have. Every delay in getting this legislation through is critical. I was encouraged by last month's announcement that Nicole Jacobs had been appointed as the first Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, but I do have grave concerns—also mentioned by hon. Friends—that the role is only part-time. I sincerely hope that the introduction of new legislation through this Bill will change that. If the commissioner is going to successfully deliver a whole-society response and radically improve the UK's approach to domestic violence, a part-time position is just not viable.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. A constituent of mine came to me having left her abusive partner after many years. She did not go to a refuge, but instead went to stay with friends and family. She could not afford a lawyer, so she did not contest her divorce. She now finds herself homeless without any priority for housing and will potentially lose the house that her ex-partner is selling. Will this Bill help to provide the holistic approach that can support victims such as my constituent?

Carolyn Harris: I will talk about housing later in my speech, as it is an issue that is very important to the Labour party.

This is our golden opportunity as parliamentarians to transform the domestic abuse agenda in this country. We have a duty to survivors, victims and their dependants—and to generations to come—to get this right.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for the amazing work that she has been doing in this field; she is one of our champions for victims of domestic abuse.

One of the things that has always been missing is the relationships education so that young people understand that abusive relationships often do not start with the first slap or the first thump. They can start with criticism, undermining and isolation—with perpetrators moving people away from their support network, and causing them to lack belief in themselves and believe that they have created the violence that is inflicted on them. Do we not need to tackle that problem, as well as addressing the issue when it gets to the point at which people report the crime?

Carolyn Harris: I could not agree more. This is something that we all see every day when we talk to people who have experienced or witnessed domestic violence. In many cases, it is learned behaviour and we really need to look at that.

As it stands, although there are some welcome and vital changes in the Bill, it is too narrow. There are many areas that are crying out for wider scope. I hope that this can and will be addressed and incorporated through amendments in Committee.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Carolyn Harris: I just want to make a little progress.

We have volumes of data relating to victims of domestic abuse, but at present this only accounts for those aged 74 and under, even though we know that domestic abuse has no age limit. Older people must have their rights protected too, and the Bill needs to recognise that. Statistics consistently demonstrate that the vast majority of domestic abuse victims are women and the vast majority of perpetrators are men, but we know that there are no barriers. Anyone—regardless of sex, sexual orientation, age or race—can be a victim or a perpetrator, so we must ensure that service and funding provision is appropriately proportioned.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): My hon. Friend will be aware of the vital work that the Domestic Abuse Safety Unit in Shotton has been doing for many years. I have been there and have heard harrowing stories. To echo her point, so many people say that they have put up with this sort of behaviour for five, 10 or 20 years when asked, “How long had this gone on before you reached this stage?” We need to ensure that these centres are getting the finance they need to carry on with this vital work.

Carolyn Harris: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point; I wholeheartedly agree with his sentiments.

The Bill needs to include a legal duty to fund a national network of accommodation-based domestic abuse services as a matter of priority, to meet the needs of all survivors and, very importantly, their children.

The protection and provision of support for children who experience domestic abuse—either as witnesses or as victims themselves—also need to be consistently included in every aspect of the Bill.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): Women's Aid organisations, such as Lighthouse Women's Aid in my constituency, are doing good work but have to survive hand to mouth, relying on money from lottery funding. Does my hon. Friend agree that this makes it extremely difficult for them to employ and retain the staff they need, with the experience and training to give proper counselling to women?

Carolyn Harris: I do agree. I also join my hon. Friend in congratulating those organisations. I have yet to meet an organisation that deals with this issue that has not done excellent work, and all struggle for every penny they are able to get from wherever. They truly deserve our praise.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an important and powerful speech. Does she believe that the Bill will do enough to support the role of schools in the lives of families? I know the amount of work that goes on in many schools in my constituency to support parents and children when there is domestic abuse at home. One primary school has told me that it suspects about five children in one class are subject to domestic violence.

Carolyn Harris: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and later I will talk about a scheme that helps in that situation.

The protection and provision of support for children who experience domestic abuse—I am repeating myself. I have already read that bit, so we will scrap that, thank you very much. *[Laughter.]* That is the Welsh in me; never ashamed to say when we are wrong.

As well as ensuring access to support services, the Bill needs to legislate for those children and ensure protected places in all NHS waiting lists, as well as priority access to school places when they are forced to move to a new area to escape domestic abuse. There is already good practice in our communities that has been established to cater for the needs of children experiencing domestic abuse.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Does the hon. Lady agree that we need to protect those survivors of domestic abuse not just when they are children but throughout their lives? We need some means of following them and taking a holistic approach, because domestic abuse affects their mental and general health as they grow.

Carolyn Harris: It certainly does and I think we all recognise, as I said previously, that experience and learned behaviour can cause perpetrators of the future.

Wera Hobhouse *rose*—

Carolyn Harris: I am going to make progress.

Operation Encompass, which is an excellent example of what we are doing in communities, was set up to enable police forces and schools to confidentially and quickly share information about vulnerable children who need support and safeguarding.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for the passionate case that she is outlining. One of my local forces, Gwent police, have played a considerable role in pioneering Operation Encompass. Will she join me in congratulating and thanking not only Gwent police but forces across the country for the important work that they have done in rolling out that initiative?

Carolyn Harris: I am delighted to congratulate Gwent police. On Monday, my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) and I visited the Liberty stadium in my constituency, where South Wales police launched their Operation Encompass. I pay particular tribute to Russell Dwyer, the head of St Thomas Primary School, who was a pioneer in ensuring that it came to Swansea.

Naz Shah: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Carolyn Harris: I am going to make progress.

We need to secure better outcomes for child victims of domestic abuse. The only way that we will do that is by ensuring that such initiatives are available throughout the country. The Bill also needs to legislate to improve the experiences of survivors and their children in the family courts. Contact arrangements must be based on the child's best interests, and parental contact should not be automatic, especially where there is evidence that the child could be at risk.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): A constituent of mine is desperately trying to prepare her child after a court order stated, against the child's wishes and the recommendations of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, that he must spend half his school holidays with his father. In order to support her son, she has put in place resilience counselling through the school, but the father has refused his son this help to support their contact. Does my hon. Friend share my concern that parental rights are being used against children in a way that has a negative impact on their wellbeing?

Carolyn Harris: I thank my hon. Friend. We have worked closely on many cases where children have been put at risk by being allowed access to potentially, if not very, dangerous parents. That is something that I feel passionately about. I believe we need a complete overhaul to ensure that the courts are prioritising the victims, not the perpetrators.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Carolyn Harris: I am going to make progress.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend very much for giving way. She mentioned the family courts. A prominent campaigner against the injustice that domestic abuse victims face in the family courts is Rachel Williams, who recently organised the Stand up to Domestic Abuse conference in Newport, which my hon. Friend and I both attended. Will she join me in paying tribute to campaigners and survivors such as Rachel whose courage in speaking out make a real difference to legislation such as this?

Carolyn Harris: Never not give way to a Whip—I have learnt that much since I have been here, and it always helps when it is a Whip with a Welsh accent. As I had a chair at the conference and my hon. Friend did not, I will certainly agree with her and say that Rachel is an absolute inspiration and someone we should all look up to.

Wera Hobhouse: Will the hon. Lady give way to someone with a non-Welsh accent?

Carolyn Harris *indicated assent.*

Wera Hobhouse: Does she agree that, in order to protect children, we need to include them in the statutory definition of domestic abuse victims and that it is disappointing that the Bill currently does not do that?

Carolyn Harris: I agree that we need to look at the definition and the impact on children. That is something that we can look at closely in Committee, and we would welcome amendments guided in that direction.

It is not just the courts that we need to look at; we also need to look at housing, which is another thing that currently allows perpetrators to control their victims. In cases of joint tenancy, only one tenant needs to end the lease, effectively allowing abusers to leave their victims homeless. The Bill needs to adopt changes to that law that would require both parties to end the tenancy and, in cases where perpetrators are convicted of domestic violence, automatically transfer the tenancy to the name of the victim. For victims who leave their accommodation by choice due to violence, the Bill needs to legislate to ensure that they automatically become a priority need for housing, irrespective of whether they have moved to emergency refuge accommodation.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an important point, which I welcome. I have had a couple of cases in surgery of people in that very situation, whether in a housing association or whatever, who cannot get out and who are struggling because of the threat they face every day from having to stay in the same place. I very much endorse what my hon. Friend is saying and would like to hear more.

Carolyn Harris: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point about housing. We have grave concerns about the housing of victims, which is another issue that we will pursue in Committee.

Reforms are also needed in the benefits system to ensure that survivors do not suffer further financially when escaping domestic abuse. The introduction of separate universal credit payments by default and the abolition of the five-week payment delay for all survivors will prevent abusers from using the welfare system as a means of continued economic abuse.

Naz Shah: I thank my hon. Friend. Does she agree that the victim should be central to making decisions about housing? In Bradford, Staying Put will go in and change the locks at no financial cost to the victim and support them in obtaining injunctions and non-molestation orders, so that the victim feels empowered and the process is centred around them.

Carolyn Harris: Without question, the victim is central and we need to look closely at that.

We also need to see changes in relation to migrant women and the economic abuse that they experience due to having no recourse to public funds—a situation that often leaves them in violent and dangerous relationships, as they simply cannot afford to leave. The Bill must change the legislation to ensure that all migrant victims are eligible to apply for indefinite leave to remain irrespective of the visa that they are residing here on. The law must allow them to apply immediately for access to public funds under the destitute domestic violence concession and permit up to six months for their application for indefinite leave to remain to be submitted under the domestic violence rule.

Stella Creasy: My hon. Friend is making an incredibly important point. Is it not also worth putting on record that, if we wish to ratify the Istanbul convention, we have to make sure that this legislation covers the rights of migrant women, as well as the rights of women in Northern Ireland, and has a gendered definition of domestic violence? Without those, we will not be able to say that we have ratified and, after seven years, I know that the Council of Europe will want to know why we have not.

Carolyn Harris: That was a very powerful point from a well-known champion on such issues who has now taken the opportunity to put those sentiments on record.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I am pleased to hear my hon. Friend talk about migrant women. I represent a very diverse constituency and domestic abuse is a very significant problem among that community. Will she join me in paying tribute to Welsh Women's Aid in my constituency, who provide so much help both to migrant women and women in south Wales?

Carolyn Harris: I have no problem in congratulating Welsh Women's Aid. I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. Support must be available to all victims and survivors of domestic abuse, with no restriction due to immigration status. Safe reporting systems need to be introduced to allow victims to report abuse to police and other authorities without fear of immigration enforcement.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way; she is making a powerful speech. I would like to go back to the reference that was made to women in Northern Ireland. She and her colleagues will be well aware that we have not had a functioning Assembly in Northern Ireland for over two and a half years, since January 2017, so we have no Health Minister and no Justice Minister. Would the Labour party give a clear commitment to join the Government, if we have no Assembly up and running again in the near future, to extend this much-needed legislation to Northern Ireland to protect women—and, indeed, some men—from domestic abuse in Northern Ireland? That would be a very valuable commitment from both sides of the House today.

Carolyn Harris: The hon. Lady will know of my commitment to legislation in Northern Ireland—I spoke this week on children's funerals and gambling—and I would very much like to see the Assembly reconvened. Women everywhere—victims everywhere—need to be guaranteed every protection that we can offer them.

I have very real concerns about migrant victims when we eventually leave the EU. Under the EU settlement scheme, European citizens and their families will need to apply to secure their status in the UK. Survivors of domestic abuse are at particular risk of being left out of this by abusive partners in a bid to control and isolate them. The Government must ensure that legislation is in place to support these victims, allowing them to apply even after the deadline has passed in order to prevent a situation where survivors are forced to choose between staying with their abuser or being illegally resident in the UK. The Home Affairs Committee has already highlighted this scheme as running the risk of becoming another Windrush. We must ensure that the Bill gets it right in order to prevent that.

The Bill is vital legislation that will help some of the most vulnerable in our communities and undoubtedly save lives. Home should be a place of comfort, love and stability but, for an estimated 2 million adults, and very many children, it is anything but: it is a place of fear that brings with it pain and devastation. This is our opportunity to rectify that. The Government must ensure that they not only make the changes to the law but back it up with the necessary resources and funding.

Getting to this point today has been a rough ride, and there were times when many of us thought we would never see it happen, but we all recognise that this is our optimal opportunity to change the future for domestic violence survivors and their families. We must all commit to making the changes, funding the services and reducing the tragic consequences we are currently witnessing. We desperately need this legislation to be comprehensive, robust and fully funded so that we can start punishing the perpetrators and prioritising the victims. This Bill will go down in history as landmark legislation. Let us make it a Bill that we can all be proud of.

2.34 pm

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. I am pleased that my first speech on my return to the Back Benches should be on this topic—a topic on which I have worked both in opposition and in government. It is an issue on which I am pleased to say that the Government of which I was a member, both as Home Secretary and Prime Minister, took forward action, building on work that had been taken by previous Governments—and crucially, of course, a topic that is of such importance and significance to our society. Domestic abuse blights lives; it can destroy lives, and not just the life of the immediate victim but of the children and other family members as well.

I believe that this is a landmark piece of legislation. I am very pleased that we have seen, I think, more than 40 Members of this House wishing to speak in this debate. That shows the degree of seriousness with which the issue is taken by Members across this House. That view is shared across all parties in this House. It is good to hear of the co-operation and collaboration that there has been, and I am sure will continue to be, to make sure that we get this legislation right. But of course passing the legislation is only one step. This is about changing the attitude that people take to domestic abuse. The challenge for Members of this House, the challenge for the Government and the challenge for us

all is to make sure that the whole of society takes this issue as seriously as those who wish to contribute to this debate today are taking it.

As I say, I think this is a landmark piece of legislation. This Bill has been described by Government—and, indeed, by charities and others involved in working with the victims of domestic abuse—as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make sure that we make a step change in the approach we take to supporting victims and to dealing with domestic abuse. I would like to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for the work that she and all the members of her Committee did in pre-legislative scrutiny. They did that assiduously, with great care and with great commitment. That was a very important part of the process of making sure that we get this legislation right. I would also like to thank the charities and organisations that contributed to that and have continued to push us all on this issue to make sure that we are doing more for the victims and survivors of domestic abuse.

I thank my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), who have championed this issue and continue to do so, and have worked so hard to ensure that this legislation comes forward and will be carried forward. It is imperative that this Bill is not lost and that we are able to see it go on to the statute book, because it will affect people's lives—it will improve people's lives.

The Lord Chancellor himself referred to the figure of 2 million adults experiencing domestic abuse in the last year for which there are figures. Two thirds of those, of course, were women. Domestic abuse accounts for a third of violent crime and, as we heard earlier, it is estimated to cost our society £66 billion a year. This is not something that simply takes place behind closed doors and that others can ignore; it is something that affects us all. It affects our economy, it affects our society, and it affects our young people as they are growing up. We have heard various comments about experiences that people have had. Reference was made from the Opposition Benches to the issue of young people and their understanding of relationships. I remember as Home Secretary initiating a campaign of advertisements about what a good relationship was. The saddest thing was reading some of the comments that young people, particularly young women, made when they had seen those adverts in cinemas and elsewhere: comments like, “I didn't know it was wrong for him to hit me.” This is the sadness in our society of so many people who do not know what a good relationship is, who suffer from their bad relationship, and who suffer in silence—too many, as we have heard, suffer in silence for many years before any action is taken.

Mrs Moon: I thank the right hon. Lady—I am awfully sorry, but I am still tempted to refer to her as the Prime Minister.

When I worked in child protection, I worked with a young mother in a second marriage. She said to me: “We all expect to be hit by our husbands, don't we? It's just this one is so violent.” That was absolutely shocking, but not half as shocking as when we were later in court, where we were taking wardship proceedings to protect the children. The husband informed the court that I was

[Mrs Moon]

lying—there was nothing wrong with their family or their relationship, and I was just prejudiced. The judge asked him: “Are you saying that you have never struck your wife?” After a pause, he said: “Obviously I’ve given her the odd backhander to keep her in line, but no, I’ve never been violent.” That is what we have to combat and deal with, and that is part of what this debate and the Bill must tackle.

Mrs May: I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady. That is why I trust that we will pass this legislation. We will pass it in good shape, and it will make a difference, but it is only one step. It is about getting that recognition out there of what is right and what is wrong. It is very simple: it is not right to hit somebody in a relationship. But it is more than that, which I will come on to in a minute—conscious as I am of the number of Members who wish to speak, I will touch on a small number of issues very briefly.

The first issue is one that many people looking at this legislation might feel was insignificant, but it is hugely significant—the inclusion in statute of a definition of domestic abuse. Not that long ago, a number of Government Departments were working to different definitions of domestic violence and abuse. I recall that, as Home Secretary, I tried to ensure that we could at least try to get an agreement among Departments as to what a definition might be. Having it in statute is hugely important, as is having a definition that goes beyond what most people would answer if you asked them what domestic abuse or domestic violence was, which is physical violence, and recognises all the other types of abuse that take place.

It is chilling to sit and hear a woman who has been controlled by her other half for a period of time—often for years—say how it happened slowly, and that it was difficult to recognise when it started. Little by little, however, that control was exercised until that individual’s rights as an individual human being were taken away from them. That is what we are talking about when we talk about domestic abuse, so getting that definition right are incredibly important. As the Lord Chancellor said, I hope that others will use the definition in the Bill. It is referred to as the underpinning of this Bill, but I hope that others will use that definition and recognise it.

The second issue I will touch on was referred to earlier, and that is the courts. I am sure that every Member is aware of cases—indeed, the Lord Chancellor started his speech with a reference to his case 25 years ago—in which a victim of domestic abuse has not felt able to pursue, to give evidence and to go through the steps necessary to see the perpetrator brought to justice. Fear of what will happen in court often drives people, and there is also the fact that the perpetrator might well use and manipulate them to ensure that they do not give evidence in court.

I remember when I was Home Secretary talking about one case in the west midlands. An independent domestic violence advocate was describing how a woman almost did not turn up at court, even though they had done a lot of work for her to turn up. The IDVA had gone to the home to see what the problem was, and it was very simple: the perpetrator had locked the woman

in a cupboard, so that she physically could not get to court to give evidence. We have to recognise the problems that victims face.

Another issue, which has been referred to by the president of the family division of the High Court, is the question of cross-examination by perpetrators. That can be an extension—in some cases, deliberately so—of the abuse that the victim has suffered. Having the prohibition of that on the face of the Bill is incredibly important.

I want to touch on the issue of children. For far too long in this country, we thought that if a child was in the room next door when someone was being hit or coerced, that child would not be affected. Nothing could be further from the truth. I think the figure for children who have been in a home where there has been domestic abuse is that they are 50% more likely to endure such abuse in a relationship later in their lives. That is why I said earlier that domestic abuse does not just blight or destroy the life of the victim, but does so for those around the victim too.

This is important. I recognise the pros and cons when looking at the issue, but I do not want us to miss this opportunity to ensure that we properly look after the needs of children in a home where domestic violence is being experienced. I ask the Government to look very seriously at recommendations to do with children, to ensure that we do not pass a Bill into statute only for people to ask, six months down the line, “Why didn’t you?” It is imperative to look at that.

I will touch briefly on two other issues, one of which is the question of perpetrators. This is a hugely difficult topic to talk about. I am sure that we would all prefer not to have the necessity of talking about domestic abuse legislation, because we want to eradicate domestic abuse—we are very far from doing that—but, if we are to get to that point, we have to deal with perpetrators. We talk a lot about supporting victims, and that is absolutely right, but finding a way to ensure that people do not become perpetrators in the first place or, where they are perpetrators, that they cannot continue to perpetrate domestic abuse, is hugely important too. It is difficult. From talking to organisations that work with perpetrators, I know that finding the interventions that will have the best impact is hard.

Robert Buckland: My right hon. Friend is making an important point about perpetrator programmes. I think she would agree that we have to be careful to ensure that programmes are tested and are the right ones, because we do not want to make the problem worse.

Mrs May: My right hon. and learned Friend has made a very valid and important point. That is why I say this is a difficult topic. Sometimes it seems hard to talk about working with the perpetrators, but it is important that we identify the programmes that work, and that will not be one size fits all. I think the Joint Committee made that point when they looked at this issue, which was very welcome. It has to be done carefully, but we should not shy away from it, because if we wish to see an end to domestic abuse, we have to deal with perpetrators. That goes alongside issues such as education on what a good relationship is, so that we see those sorts of behaviours being stopped at the first sign, rather than being allowed to continue.

Some might say that the last point I want to make is slightly tangential to the Bill, but I want to talk about the police. A huge amount of work has been done with the police to train them to deal with domestic violence. Many developments are very helpful. For example, body-worn video cameras can ensure that film is taken when the police turn up to a reported incident, so that someone cannot say later, “Well, no, it was okay, nothing happened.” Such evidence is hugely important. The ability through the use of technology for a police officer attending an incident to know in advance whether there have been reports of domestic violence or abuse there in the past is another important element. Also—I am sure that others have had this experience—domestic abuse victims talk about the fact that if they get a police officer who has been well trained, it works well, but when someone reports an incident, it is the police officer who is on duty who comes, and they will hand on to the response unit that comes out, and such officers often do not have the same experience. We need to look at that very carefully.

We also need to do something else—this point was made to me by one of the people involved in one of the charities dealing with victims of domestic abuse. Police forces need to look at how they deal with domestic violence and domestic abuse within the force when police officers themselves are subject to such domestic abuse. If they turn a blind eye, that gives a message to their officers about how they should treat people outside the force who are reporting abuse. That aspect has not really been focused on previously, but we should focus on it. We should be encouraging police forces to ensure that they have, within their forces, the means to support such officers properly. There will be police officers who themselves are the victims of domestic abuse, and we need to ensure that forces have the ability to support those police officers.

As I say, this is a hugely important Bill. It will, I know, be subject to very close scrutiny during the Committee stage. There is so much that is good in this Bill. There are obviously issues that the Government are being asked to look at again to make sure that we get this into the best shape that it can be. However, as I said earlier, I say to everybody across this Chamber that passing this legislation is but one move. It is up to all of us to make sure that we are doing everything we can to make clear to our society and to the public the horrific nature of domestic abuse, the impact it has on people's lives and the need for us as a society to say, “Stop it.”

2.51 pm

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): I am grateful for the chance to follow the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). May I take this opportunity to take a different approach from the one we very often take on the Opposition side of the House, which is to pay tribute to her both for her approach as the former Prime Minister of this country and for her commitment and genuine passion? As the former Prime Minister, she committed her life's work in this Parliament to making sure that the agenda of women and girls was recognised. I am sure that the successful passage of this Bill will be a legacy that she can be proud of, and that it will rightly go down in history as the landmark legislation of the second female Prime Minister of this country. I pay tribute to the right hon. Lady for the work that she has done.

To return to the point of order made by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), may I also acknowledge her dedication and commitment to women's rights? I think no Member across this House should have to receive the treatment she has received. I am sure—I know—that the right hon. Gentleman the Speaker of this House will do everything in his power, as a champion of Back Benchers, to ensure that all the House of Commons authorities provide her with the necessary support that she requires, because no one in this House should come under fire for ultimately doing what is right and proper and what should be done, which is protecting the rights of women.

I welcome this Bill, and I agree in essence with its main principles, because domestic abuse can ruin lives and it needs to be tackled strongly. I recognise that the primary basis of the Bill will apply only to England and Wales. However, there are some limited provisions in the Bill that will have an impact on Scotland, and it is on those grounds that I want to speak today.

As the Lord Chancellor said, 2 million people in the UK are affected. Most of them are women, but not all. This is only an estimated number. It is based on the recorded statistics we have of the number of women who have bravely come forward and undergone the process of speaking out loud and saying, “I will not accept this treatment any longer”. However, it is only an estimated number because too many more women will suffer in silence and receive this ongoing treatment day to day.

I of course have nothing but the utmost respect for the law and justice and for our ability as Members of this House to produce legislation that can make a difference, but everyone in the House knows that legislation alone will not tackle this problem. I congratulate the UK Government on going some way towards taking the approach of really driving home the point that domestic violence cannot be tolerated and cannot be accepted. It is something that we want to change so that future generations will not grow up to experience this kind of world.

On this particular occasion, I think Scotland has taken a leading stance and a really strong stance against domestic abuse. In Scotland, domestic abuse accounts for almost a quarter of all violent crimes. Again, this is only an estimated figure; we have no real idea of the true figure or of the true cost that it has on people's lives. About one in four women has experienced or reported domestic abuse at some time in their lives. It is usually perpetrated by a spouse, partner or ex-partner. Domestic abuse often includes physical violence, mental or emotional damage, or undue control or power over another person.

The SNP in government has taken a lead and taken the issue of domestic abuse seriously. I am very proud that we have been able to do that in the Scottish Government. The multiple forms of abuse are tackled by the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, which for the first time introduced a “course of conduct” offence. This enables not just physical abuse but psychological domestic abuse and controlling behaviours to be prosecuted at once. As many from a legal background will know, that in itself is really hard to pin down. How do we even begin to quantify undue influence or coercive control? How do we recognise that, and how do we prevent it in a criminal statute? The fact is that the Scottish legislation

[Angela Crawley]

is designed to address the emotional abuse that Scottish Women's Aid has said is, for most victims, the most traumatic and the hardest aspect of abuse to recover from. It is a really significant and important part of this legislation, and I hope that the Government will take that into consideration when they come forward with the Public Bill Committee.

In a similar vein, the Domestic Abuse Bill broadens the scope of domestic abuse legislation in England and Wales. This is the legislation we are here to speak about today, and it would be a great shame if the Bill were to be lost. Should this Parliament dissolve or prorogue again and we do not succeed in passing this legislation, it would ultimately be against all our better intentions. We want to see the Bill successfully brought through this Parliament during this term, regardless of when this term may cease.

Christine Jardine: On that very point, as the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) has said, this is landmark legislation. All of us may have reservations about certain aspects of it and things we may want to see amended in Committee, but it is incumbent on us to support it today and get it through so that, as the hon. Lady says, it is not lost.

Angela Crawley: Absolutely. Perhaps I should use this opportunity to say that should a future Government of any coalition have to carry forward this legislation, I hope their agenda will also be to deliver on this Bill should it not succeed in this parliamentary term. It would be a great loss and a great shame were we not to see it passed in this parliamentary term, and were the right hon. Member for Maidenhead not to have it as part of her legacy, because she rightly deserves such an opportunity.

In particular, it is welcome to see the measures to protect survivors in court, including the prohibition of the examination of domestic abuse victims by their perpetrators. It seems almost unimaginable that such a procedure is even possible. The inclusion of non-physical abuse in the statutory definition of domestic abuse, the inclusion of children aged 16 and 17, and the appointment of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner are truly welcome. While these measures go some way towards tackling a broad and multifaceted problem, I believe there are several areas in the Bill that could be improved in Committee.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making a very good case. There is another dimension, because we very often get women whose immigration status, for want of a better term, is not secure. Does she not agree that the commissioner should really have her powers strengthened to look at that?

Angela Crawley: I wholeheartedly agree, and I will come on to that later in my speech.

In 2017, my colleague Eilidh Whiteford's Bill to ratify the Istanbul convention was very much about pressing the Government to do exactly what this Bill sets out to do. I know that she, although no longer in the House, would love to see this Bill passed and to see the Istanbul convention ratified as part of her legacy. Although the

Government stated their intention to bring the convention's provisions into law, two years later we are still waiting. The Bill is an opportunity for the Government to meet those intentions, but in my opinion it fails fully to meet the requirements of the Istanbul convention. I hope more work can be done in Committee to ensure that the Bill gets us to the point where we can ratify the convention.

Women with insecure immigration status find it virtually impossible to seek protection when experiencing domestic abuse. As the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) indicated, for many such women their visa status is tied to their partner or their partner has control of the necessary documents and evidence, so they are unable to escape. That goes against the crystal clear language of the Istanbul convention, which states that protection must be afforded to survivors regardless of their immigration status. I am worried that, should the Bill fail adequately to promote equality, including for those with insecure immigration status, it would risk violating our existing human rights obligations under the European convention on human rights, the Human Rights Act 1998 and the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women—CEDAW, as we all know it. In essence, we must ensure that we get this legislation right.

I am conscious that many people want to speak, so I am doing my best to wind up as fast as I can. In taking forward the Bill, we must consider the needs of people whose insecure immigration status means they have no access to public funds or housing support. Such people are routinely denied refuge spaces, safe accommodation and welfare, and therefore are stuck between becoming destitute and homeless and returning to their abuser. Every MP in the House will have a constituent, or will have supported a woman, who has had to seek refuge in temporary accommodation. That may have been their first interaction with a Government office, be it the Department for Work and Pensions or the Home Office. They need our support, so we must do better.

Frankly, the Government's approach to welfare only compounds problems for survivors of domestic violence. Universal credit provisions, include mandatory waiting periods and payments to heads of households, create an environment that allows economic abuse and control. The SNP has repeatedly argued for universal credit payments to be processed and paid in advance rather than in arrears, and be made to more than one householder, in the form of split payments. If the Government do not make those adjustments, victims of abuse will continue to be unable to access the resources they need to leave harmful relationships.

As the SNP spokesperson for women and equalities, it is an honour to work with colleagues across the House, including the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) and many others, as a member of the Women and Equalities Committee. The Bill relates specifically to England and Wales, but some of its provisions will have an impact on the lives of women in Scotland. The picture painted by the Minister only highlights that we have so much further to go. Let us not get another 25 years down the line and be having the same conversation.

I am proud of my honourable friend Christina McKelvie, who, as Equalities Minister in the Scottish Government, is delivering this policy in Scotland. We can do better.

We must do better. Too many women and their families are relying on this Government to protect them, whether through policing or justice measures or through this legislation in and of itself. I hope this Prime Minister and this Government get this right so we can deliver for women across the UK.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady, as the House will be, for being commendably succinct. Momentarily, a 10-minute limit will begin on Back-Bench speeches, and the right hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley) will be the next speaker. However, just before I call her to contribute, I think that the House will be interested to know what I have just been advised by the Minister on the Treasury Bench: namely, that the designate Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nicole Jacobs, is observing our proceedings today. Welcome to the House. We very much appreciate your interest in the legislation from which we hope will flow your very important responsibilities.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

3.4 pm

Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): It is an honour to follow the spokesperson for the SNP, the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley). I welcome the Bill and the cross-party support for it.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor, who looks like he may be about to go and get himself a cup of tea—I cannot blame him for that—orated at length, although his speech was comprehensive, detailed and very passionate. I recall our joint work in Committee on the Serious Crime Bill; together, we introduced the coercive control measure that so many people have referred to. I remember being asked at the time, “Why are we doing something so difficult? How are we going to train the police? How are we going to do this?” If the answer is, “It’s too hard,” we will never do anything. I am very proud that we introduced that measure, and I was very pleased to work with my right hon. and learned Friend on that. I wish him well with this Bill.

I also pay tribute to some of the people who helped us get to the Bill being brought forward. They include my right hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd) and for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), and my hon. Friends the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) and for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), who both served in the same Under-Secretary role in the Home Office in which I had the privilege to serve.

However, I pay tribute above all to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). I stand here making my first Back-Bench speech for seven years, having been on the Treasury Bench in that time, to find that I am following my right hon. Friend. I feel quite a lot of pressure to live up to the speech she just delivered, which showed her commitment, her attention to detail and her absolute determination to deliver on this incredibly important issue. Without her, we would not be in this place today.

My right hon. Friend spoke about the challenges with tackling domestic violence. I recall, when I was in the Home Office, looking at what we could do to change things and at how we could change society on

this matter. A number of contributors have mentioned attitudes. I am pleased that the old line, “Oh, it’s just a domestic; ignore it” is gone, but it was there for far too long. The other thing on which we have seen a difference is training for police officers. It is not everywhere—my right hon. Friend mentioned that there are police officers who have not had training—but when I was in the Home Office I saw police officers being trained to believe the victim and to take belief in the victim as the first port of call. They are trained to walk in not with cynicism but believing what the victim says. If somebody has gone to the police to report domestic violence, they are not making it up; it has taken enormous strength of character for them to get to the point of reporting it, and they need to hear the police officer say, “I believe you.”

I was struck by that as a new MP, when a constituent come to a surgery appointment and told me how every police officer she had dealt with had refused to believe her. They had said, “Oh, it’s six of one and half a dozen of the other,” and that she must have contributed in some way.

Mark Tami: Does the right hon. Lady agree that the other thing police do so often is to look at each incident as an individual incident, rather than looking for a pattern of behaviour?

Karen Bradley: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is so important that we look not just at a pattern of behaviour but across the whole family. The troubled families programme was very good at looking at the family as a whole, seeing where domestic violence was happening and identifying its effect on children—on each member of the family.

Public awareness of the crime is another challenge we have always faced. We have talked about 2 million cases a year, but of course the number of reported cases is so much lower. Reporting is on the up, and that is very good news. We need these crimes to be reported; unless they are reported, nobody can tackle them. It is incredibly important that we improve public awareness and get an understanding of what a healthy relationship looks like versus an unhealthy relationship.

Mr Jim Cunningham: The right hon. Lady mentions something that a lot of people will be interested in: often, because the authorities do not necessarily believe them, the victim is sent back into the situation they are trying to get out of and subjected to further abuse. The other point I would make is that we should also be tackling psychological abuse.

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman is right on all counts, and he takes me to my next point. One of the challenges is having the tools to tackle this crime. The problem with having only criminal measures is that the burden of proof is so high. Civil measures, which we introduced for various things, including honour crimes and domestic violence, and which of course are introduced by the Bill in the form of the new domestic abuse protection order, are very important because the burden of proof is so much lower. In the exact circumstance that the hon. Gentleman talks about, use of a civil measure means that the police can intervene earlier and prevent the crime.

Hannah Bardell: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Karen Bradley: I will not, if the hon. Lady will forgive me, only because I have run out of interventions. Now that I am on the Back Benches, I have to get used to not being able to take all interventions.

The other challenge is the multi-agency approach, which, again, has been talked about. We cannot arrest our way out of this problem. We have to deal with it through prevention and education. There is a role for so many agencies and organisations in ensuring that domestic violence is tackled. I recall, when I was Minister, visiting the domestic violence team at the A&E in Royal Stoke University Hospital. A nurse there, Mandy Burton, received a national nursing award for her work in bringing to the A&E department a focus on domestic violence, and on identifying it. That was revolutionary at the time—this was 2015. We need all agencies to work together to make sure that they identify domestic violence.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): I hesitate to take up my right hon. Friend's time, but would she accept that the medical profession has a key role to play? One of the places where physical violence will first be picked up is accident and emergency; one of the first places where non-physical, psychological, violence will first be picked up is in general practice. Is there not a case for improving education, so that there is a high index of suspicion of domestic violence in both general practice and hospitals?

Karen Bradley: My right hon. Friend speaks with personal experience and great authority on this matter. He is absolutely right. So many agencies will have interaction with victims of domestic abuse. They need to understand the signs and indications, and need the ability and strength to intervene, because that may be an early point at which we can get in, before domestic abuse that may appear to some to be low-level—there is no such thing as low-level abuse—turns into something horrendous. We know the number of homicides a year; we need to make sure that we intervene as soon as possible, in order to prevent the very worst tragedies.

That brings me on to the Bill. It is right to describe it as landmark legislation. Putting into statute a definition of domestic abuse is incredibly important. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead talked about needing to have one definition that was recognised across all agencies and across the law. That is how we will help to identify this abuse, and get services and support in the right places at the right time. I referred to the civil powers; having more of them is very important. The civil powers mean that the victim can stay in her home with her children, while the perpetrator is removed. If abuse does not meet the criminal test, it may still meet the civil test, and of course breach of that civil law becomes a crime, which gives the police the power to act.

I am very pleased about the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner. When I was in the Home Office, we introduced the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, who often said things that were uncomfortable for Government, but was absolutely right to say them. It is right that we should have one person working for all victims of domestic abuse.

I am pleased to see the extension of the offence of coercive control to Northern Ireland; from my previous role, I know how important that is. That reminds me of the sentence that I have probably said far more often than any other in this Chamber in the past few years: it is time for the parties in Stormont to come back together and form a Government, and do the right thing by the people who elected them. In the absence of such a Government, it is right that we take steps in the Bill to make sure that coercive control is properly recognised and dealt with in Northern Ireland.

The Bill will make a difference only if we see outcomes from it. The outcomes in my county of Staffordshire over the past few years—since I was first involved in this field—have been really quite incredible. Our police and crime commissioner, Matthew Ellis, has really made the issue his focus during his stewardship of the police. He introduced a multi-agency approach, and the New Era service, which gives victims holistic support. Last year, it supported 25,000 people in Staffordshire. That is a great credit to him, and I pay tribute to him for the work he has done.

Victims need the power to speak openly, and the police need the tools to bring persecutions, so that perpetrators are punished. When I was a Minister in the Home Office, I recall clearly making a speech for a colleague, as we all do. I talked about my work in the Home Office. One of the people there, who had been enjoying a lovely dinner, stopped eating, and at the end of the speech she asked me for a private word. It was very emotional. She said, "Twenty-five years ago, I was a victim of coercive control, though I didn't know it at the time. I'm out of that relationship now, but everything you described was my life." She said, "I remember the police saying to me, 'We know he's abusing you and treating you in a way he shouldn't, but there's nothing we can do. The best we can hope for is that when he comes home drunk tonight, he kicks the door down; then we can arrest him for criminal damage.'"

We need victims to know that the police have weapons, tools and ways to help them, because they put their trust in the police—we all do, quite rightly. We need to make sure that the police have the weapons that they need, so that they can deliver. That is how we will help victims to bring things out into the open, and put an end to domestic abuse.

3.16 pm

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): So what is domestic violence or abuse, and where do we get our ideas about it from? Often we see the same images and stereotypes on TV: housing estates, working-class families, drunk men coming home from the pub, women surrounded by children, and a sequence of shouting, followed by immediate physical violence or assault. But soap opera scenes tend to focus on only one or two aspects of a much bigger and more complex picture.

Domestic violence has many faces, and the faces of those who survive it are varied, too. There are 650 MPs in this place—650 human beings. Statistically, it is highly likely that some of us here will have directly experienced an abusive relationship, and we are just as likely as anyone else to have grown up in a violent household.

Abuse is not just about noticeable physical signs. Sometimes there are no bruises. Abuse is very often all about control and power; it is about abusers making

themselves feel big, or biggest, but that is not how they present themselves. It is not how they win your heart. It is not how they persuade you to meet them for a coffee, then go to a gig, and then spend an evening snuggled up in front of a movie at their place. When they ask you out, they do not present their rage, and do not tell you that while they like the idea of strong, independent, successful women, they do not like the reality. They do not threaten, criticise, control, yell, or exert their physical strength in an increasingly frightening way—not yet. Not at the start. Not when they think you are sweet, funny and gorgeous. Not when they want to impress you. Not when they turn up to only your third date with chocolate, and then jewellery. Not when they meet your friends, your parents, or the leader of your political party. They do not do any of that then.

It is only later, when the door to your home is locked, that you really start to learn what power and control look and feel like. That is when you learn that “I’ll always look after you,” “I’ll never let you go,” and “You’re mine for life” can sound menacing, and are used as a warning over and over again. It is when the ring is on your finger that the mask can start to slip, and the promises sound increasingly like threats. It is then that you spend 12 or more hours at work longing to see the person you love, only to find that on the walk or tube journey home they refuse to speak a single, solitary word to you. Eventually, at home, they will find a way to let you know which particular sin you have apparently committed: your dress was too short, the top you wore in the Chamber was too low-cut, or you did not respond to a message immediately.

It starts slowly: a few emotional knocks, alternated with romantic gushes and promises of everlasting love, which leave you reeling, confused, spinning around in an ever-changing but always hyper-alert state, not knowing what mood or message awaits you. You tell yourself to be less sensitive, less emotional, to stop over-analysing every little thing. Ignore the moods—he never stops saying he adores you, right? All seems good again.

A whole week goes by: a week of summer evening walks home and maybe a drink on the way. A long weekend is booked and organised as a surprise while you are at work. The journey there is full of promise and promises—time away alone together in a place away from stress—but then it starts. In a strange city, his face changes in a way you are starting to know and dread, in a way that says you need to stay calm, silent and very careful. He goes for a walk. You sit in your hotel room and wait. You read a city guide and plan which sights you want to visit, mentally packing a day full of fun. But he seems to have another agenda. He doesn’t want you to leave the room. He has paid a lot of money and you need to pay him your full attention. You are expected to do as you are told, and you know for certain what that means—so you do exactly as you are told.

In the months that follow, those patterns continue: reward, punishment, promises of happily ever after alternated with abject rage, menace, silent treatment and coercive control; financial abuse and control; a point-blank refusal to disclose his salary or earnings, an assumption and insistence on it being okay to live in your home without contributing a single penny, as bills continue to pile up; a refusal to work, as your salary is great and public knowledge; false promises to start

paying some specific bills, which you discover months later remain unpaid; and the slow but sure disappearance of any kindness, respect or loving behaviour.

You get to the stage where you are afraid to go home. After 15 hours at work, you spend another hour on the phone to your mum or a close friend, trembling, a shadow of your usual self. You answer the phone, and the sheer nastiness and rage tell you not to go home at all. So you leave work with your best friend, exhausted and shaking, and buy a toothbrush on the way, knowing that the verbal abuse followed by silent refusal to speak at all will be 100 times worse tomorrow.

Every day is emotionally exhausting. You are working in a job you love but putting on a brave face and pretending all is good, fine—wonderful, in fact. Then the pretence and the public face start to drop completely: being yelled at in the car with the windows down, no attempt to hide behaviour during constituency engagements—humiliation and embarrassment now added to permanent trepidation and constant hurt and pain. It is impossible to comprehend that this is the person who tells his family how much he loves you and longs to make you his wife.

But the mask has slipped for good, and questions are starting. Excuses are given to worried friends, concerned family and colleagues who have started to notice. One night, after more crying and being constantly verbally abused because you suggest he pay a bit towards your new sofa, you realise you’ve reached the end and you simply cannot endure this for another day or week, and certainly not for the rest of your life. Having listened intently for two whole weeks to the sound of his morning shower, timing the routine until you know it off by heart, you summon up the courage to take his front-door keys from his bag.

You have tried everything else on earth and know for certain, 100%, what awaits you that night if you do not act today. Heart banging, you hide them carefully and creep back into bed, praying he won’t discover what you have done. You know for certain what will happen if he does. You know an apology will not follow. You know for sure it will be because of what you have done and that it is all your fault. He leaves for the gym, telling you how much he adores you. He tells you to remember that you will always be his. He kisses you lovingly, as though there has not been months of verbal abuse, threats and incidents he knows you will never disclose. He tells you he will bring something nice home for dinner.

Sure enough, the next few days and weeks are a total hell—texts and calls and yelling: “You’ve locked me out like a dog”, “No one treats me that way”, “This is the last thing you will ever do”. You cry, you grieve for your destroyed dreams, you try to heal, you ignore the emails from wedding companies, but it is like withdrawal, and it takes six months.

But one day you notice that you’re smiling, that it’s okay to laugh, and that it’s been a week or two since the daily sobbing stopped. You realise you are allowed to be happy. You dare to relax and you dare to start to feel free. You realise it is not your fault and that he is now left alone with his rage and narcissism. You dare to start dating someone, and you realise that you have survived, but the brightest and most precious thing of all is realising that you are loved and believed by friends, family and colleagues who believe in you and support you.

[*Rosie Duffield*]

So if anyone is watching and needs a friend, please reach out, if it is safe to do so, and please talk to any of us, because we will be there and we will hold your hand. [*Applause.*]

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for that speech, which was simultaneously as horrifying and as moving a contribution in the Chamber as I have heard in my 22 years of membership of the House. Thank you.

3.25 pm

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I echo your words, Mr Speaker. The hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) is an extraordinarily brave woman. It takes the most enormous courage to stand up in this place and say what she has said. If any of us needed a reminder of why we are here today—why it is so important that we unite across the Chamber to take this action today—she has provided it. She will have given so much hope to so many people across the country. Knowing that it can happen to someone so beautiful, brave, strong and successful—successful enough to get to sit on these Benches—will give them the confidence, self-belief and self-worth to take action and break free from the torture she had to endure. I would like to thank her, as I am sure would everyone in the Chamber and listening at home, for being so brave as to do what she has done today. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

In the few minutes remaining, I want to raise one or two things that I would like the Minister to think about. This is an extremely good Bill. As we have heard, many Members across the House, not least my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, have spent a huge amount of time on pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill and as a result it is already in really good shape.

As has been mentioned, at the heart of the Bill is culture change. The Bill starts in the right place because it talks about how we need to change our attitude towards relationships so that everybody knows what a good relationship is. That must start with every child in every school being given extremely good education about what makes a good relationship.

Lyn Brown: Does the hon. Lady agree that, as well as educating every child, we need to support children who have specific difficulties as a result of witnessing violence in their homes, and that child and adolescent mental health services need beefing up and proper funding in order to do so?

Sarah Newton: I completely agree with the hon. Lady that, in addition to education, every child must be supported. We know, as has been said today, that when children grow up in a home where there is controlling or coercive behaviour, economic control or any sort of abuse, including physical abuse, they will be affected by it. Boys and girls will think, “That’s what love looks like.” Is it any wonder that so many of those affected go on to become perpetrators or victims themselves? Of course, we need to help those perpetrators understand that this behaviour is totally unacceptable, and to help those victims understand that they can be survivors and

that their lives need not follow this cycle. We need to make sure that every adult who comes into contact with children understands what domestic abuse is. That means statutory training for all people in the public sector who will come into contact with children, so that they can support them to get what they need to break that cycle.

There is a group of people who are often neglected in this debate, namely older people and people with disabilities. The briefing given to us by Age UK highlights work that is replicated—I have seen it at first hand—in my constituency. I recently attended a meeting with the excellent women’s centre, which does absolutely fantastic work in my constituency, as does an organisation called SEEDS—Survivors Empowering and Educating Domestic Abuse Services. So many older women are the subject of domestic abuse, but they are the least likely to speak out about it or to have access to services. The same goes for disabled people.

Although I very much agree with the definition in the Bill, I ask the Minister to consider gathering an evidence base of the prevalence of undisclosed domestic abuse of people with disabilities, particularly learning disabilities, as well as of those with physical disabilities and older people, to make sure that we have got the definition absolutely right. I know from the homicide reviews conducted in Cornwall that there are many more examples than any of us would like to think of family members financially, economically and physically abusing and even killing an older member of their family. Clearly, much more needs to be done to recognise those families who are at risk and really struggling, so that we can prevent those avoidable deaths.

It is not just family members; it can be people who deliberately befriend vulnerable people, including those with disabilities or older people. They can work their way into people’s affections with the sole purpose of abusing them. Often it is economic abuse. The definition really matters. I would like the Minister to consider the prevalence of undisclosed abuse. If it is the case, as I feel it is, that there are people beyond the family who become close and trusted friends of vulnerable people and commit this abuse, those perpetrators’ activities should come within the purview of the Bill.

In conclusion, people are right to say that victims and survivors have waited a long time for us to have this debate. They have been campaigning vigorously to get to this point. It is now down to all of us to take really important action through this Bill, so that we can prevent the avoidable deaths and the terrible suffering that go with domestic abuse, and make sure that we consign this appalling behaviour to the history books.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady, and I think the whole House will be, both for what she said and for the extraordinarily sympathetic and empathetic manner in which she said it. I knew she would do that, which is why I called her.

We will have one speech lasting six minutes by the Mother of the House, Harriet Harman.

3.33 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton). I absolutely agree with everything she said. I, too, pay tribute to my hon. Friend

the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), because what she said will save lives. We are incredibly proud of her, and she should be incredibly proud of herself.

There is so much hope and expectation surrounding this Bill. Every woman who has suffered from domestic violence and every child who has lived in a house subjected to the terror of domestic violence will be watching what we are doing today and wishing us forward. All those who work in the charitable sector and in refuges will be watching what we are doing and supporting it, as will all those who work in the police services. Up and down the country there are police officers who want to do more about domestic violence and are dismayed at how little they are able to do. The Bill will strengthen their elbow in their own police forces, and the same applies to the Crown Prosecution Service and the court services. The Bill will be a focus, not just as a piece of legislation but in the context of a determination to provide more support, including proper financial support—proper funding for services—and to see the whole issue in the round.

I pay tribute to every Member who is present to support the Bill, and to all the organisations that have given their support. I pay particular tribute to the Minister for Women, the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), who has doggedly pressed forward with the Bill. Let me also point out, however, that we would not have a Bill to provide this focus had not the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) made it a priority. It is our Bill but it is also her Bill that we are discussing today.

Men used routinely to get away with murder and be charged only with manslaughter, because a man could say that, although he had killed the woman, it was not his fault but hers, as she had provoked him. That was the provocation defence, which led to a charge being reduced from murder to manslaughter. A man would say, “It was only because I loved her: I killed her because I loved her, and she was having an affair”, or “She drove me to it, because she nagged me and wore me down, so she provoked me into killing her.” I am afraid that it used to be called, at the Bar, the “nagging and shagging” defence, while in Scotland it was called the infidelity defence.

It was as recently as 2009 that the provocation defence, used in that way, was put a stop to. Now, however, another version of “She drove me to kill her—I killed her, yes, but it was her fault” has reared its ugly head. Men are now, literally, getting away with murder by using the “rough sex” defence. Although the man has to admit that he caused injuries which led to the woman’s death, he claims that it was not his fault, as it was a “sex game gone wrong”. She, of course, is not there to say otherwise. In the witness box, he gives lurid, unchallengeable accounts of her addiction to violent sex, and explains that the bruises that cover her body were what she wanted. The grieving relatives have to listen to his version of her sexual proclivities, and see them splashed all over social media and the newspapers. He has killed her, and then he defines her. She is dead, so only he gets to tell the story. I will just say a few words about the case of the constituent of the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier)—the case of the young woman Natalie Connolly. I know that the hon. Gentleman will be talking about it in due course, but this is why we want to change the law to prevent men from being able to argue that “the injuries that she died by, she consented to.”

Hannah Bardell: On the subject of responsibilities, does the right hon. and learned Lady recognise that the way in which the details of such cases are reported in the media, and the way in which the narrative has grown around these issues, has a huge impact on public perception and on the behaviour of men, and violent men?

Ms Harman: Absolutely. I completely agree. Men are using the narrative of women’s sexual enjoyment of being injured to escape murder charges and face only manslaughter charges. Instead of being imprisoned for life, they are out in just a few years. The woman’s grieving family, though, are never free from their loss or the stain on her reputation. What an irony it is that the narrative of women’s sexual empowerment is being used by men who inflict fatal injuries. It is what I describe as the “Fifty Shades of Grey” defence.

The killing of Natalie Connolly is the worst case that I have come across, but it is far from the only case. In that case, not only were the relatives absolutely distraught, but the jurors were dismayed that the man had not faced a murder charge. They approached the relatives on the steps of the court and said, “What on earth happened?” They even approached me, which was unprecedented: jurors had never come to me before. We can change the law in the Bill. There is case law on this. In 1993, in *R v. Brown*, the House of Lords, which preceded the Supreme Court, ruled that if injuries are serious a defendant cannot claim as a defence that the victim consented. We need that in statute, so that it is right there under the noses of the Crown Prosecution Service and the judges.

For years, men got away with murder, claiming, “She asked for it.” Now we have to shut down this modern version of the defence. I want to say to the relatives of Natalie Connolly that we can see that she was a wonderful young woman. We can see that she was a precious daughter, a devoted mother, a twin sister, a beloved granddaughter. We recognise who she was, and that is what we want them to remember. We will get justice for her in a change in the law.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the Mother of the House. A five-minute limit now applies. I call the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, Maria Miller.

3.40 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman). I thank her for the evidence that she gave the Joint Committee, as it helped our deliberations. I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), who had enormous strength to come to the Chamber to share such a personal story. I am sure that she will take strength from the fact that those who have heard her will feel more empowered to act to put themselves into a safe position. She and I have campaigned a great deal for a number of years to get more women into the House, and I count myself lucky to have worked alongside her, given the strength and courage that she has shown today.

[Mrs Maria Miller]

I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), because without her I am not sure that we would be here today. She had the vision to pull the Bill together and, along with Ministers on the Front Bench, to create an opportunity for a step change in the national response to this issue. I was privileged to chair the Joint Committee on the draft Bill, and I thank Members both here and in the other place who gave so much of their time, those who gave evidence and related their personal experiences and, above all, the staff of the House, who gave us the most extraordinary professional service.

This is an incredibly important Bill, but I would like to make a couple of points. First, the Government need to make clear what the Bill deals with. They have tabled some amendments and promised others, but I am not sure that the Bill is in its final format regarding what the Government want to do. The Minister might want to make sure that Members of both Houses are thoroughly briefed on the final Bill, including all amendments, before Report. This is an important Bill, but the Government introduced amendments midway through our deliberations with regard to the statutory duty on local authorities to provide refuge places. The consultation still needs to report, so perhaps the Minister will confirm that she will ensure that the House is fully briefed before Report.

Secondly, I make a plea not to Ministers but to colleagues. Members need to resist the temptation to use the Bill to remedy all the issues, concerns, and campaigns in recent years to do with domestic abuse. Some of them have been quite open about their wish to include abortion reform in the Bill, and while there is clearly a strong case for reform, with which I would agree, this is not the place to do it. I do not believe that we have the time in this Parliament to give that issue the attention that it demands. My plea is for a separate Bill, sponsored by a Back-Bench MP in the usual way, to deal with that, and to deal with it swiftly.

Hannah Bardell: I take the point that the right hon. Lady makes about time, but we should look at making the Bill as broad and detailed as possible. We should also look at the issue of data sharing. I have a constituent whose data was shared by the Department for Work and Pensions. She was being protected by the police from her violent partner. Her data was shared, and she had to be moved again. Those kinds of issues need to be addressed in the legislation.

Mrs Miller: I have a huge amount of respect for the hon. Lady, but we run the risk of derailing a Bill that is long overdue. I urge people to have some sense of restraint on what we might do to amend it.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mrs Miller: I am afraid I cannot take any more interventions.

I want briefly to turn to the Government's response to our Joint Committee report and to make one point—I should like to have made a lot of others—on the inclusion of an age in the definition. My right hon. Friend the

Member for Maidenhead is absolutely right to say that the definition is key, but Committee members were particularly concerned about the issue of the age limit. We decided not to recommend a change in the definition of domestic abuse from 16 years and above, but that was not an easy decision for us, particularly given the personal testimony we heard from young people who felt that the police and other people in positions of authority did not take seriously violent behaviour that occurred in relationships under the age of 16. This is not right, and it has to be tackled. It may not need legislation in the Bill, but it needs the Government to urgently review the police's response in these areas.

I would like to go on to certain other issues that I believe have to be looked at carefully in Committee. The first concerns migrant women, because the Bill makes no provision for that particularly vulnerable group. The Government have reiterated the importance of treating those individuals as victims first and foremost, regardless of their immigration status, but we need to look at how safeguards are put in place to ensure that the right support is there for those individuals, including by extending the three-month time limit to six months for the destitution domestic violence concession.

I want to talk about the importance of an independent commissioner. We like commissioners, but we do not make them very independent; we need to make sure that we do. The Government must also give details of how they will fund their statutory duty on local authorities for the provision of services.

Sarah Newton: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mrs Miller: I cannot give way; I have only 20 seconds left.

The Committee was also concerned about the absence of a definition of domestic abuse victims who are children. I am reassured by some of the Government's comments in their reply to us, but that needs further thought, as does a confirmation that the Istanbul convention will be ratified as a result of this Bill being put into force.

3.47 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I too want to begin by paying a huge tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for her bravery in speaking out, because that is a message not just to those across the country who experience coercive control or abuse but to everybody else, including those of us across the Chamber who think she is wonderful but who did not know all she was going through and who want to support her and other people who experience abuse, control or violence across the country.

It is also really important, at a time when this Parliament and the country can feel hugely divided and angry, that we have seen so many people from both sides of the House come together on an area that is so important and in which radical reforms are needed. I pay tribute to all on the Opposition side of the House, and also to the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for the work that she and her Committee have done on this legislation. This comes at a time when the number of people dying from domestic violence is increasing, and we should not ignore the fact that in some areas the

problem is getting worse; it is not an area in which improvements are happening and we just need to go further.

I welcome the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner. I raised that issue with the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) in 2013, so it is good to see this happening now, but I do think that the role has to be more independent. We have seen from the experience with the anti-slavery commissioner and the immigration inspectorate that there is a need for greater independence. Many of these issues were also raised by the Home Affairs Committee in our report last October, and I welcome some of the measures for stronger powers, including prevention powers, and the inclusion of economic abuse in the statutory definition.

I want to raise four areas where I think more action is needed. First, the creation of a commissioner is not an alternative to having a proper action plan from the Home Office and the Government. The number of domestic abuse cases reported to the police has gone up by 40% in the last two years. However, over the past four years the number of cases referred to the Crown Prosecution Service has gone down by 20%. The number of prosecutions for domestic abuse has gone down by 20%. A huge systems failure is going on, and we cannot just tell ourselves it is about changing attitudes, crucial though that is. Action is needed to make the system work and to address the fact that so many cases now involve online abuse, stalking and control, making them more complex.

Our police and social services are often also badly overstretched. I have seen cases in my constituency in which obvious things were not done for victims of domestic abuse: the police were too overstretched and did not gather crucial evidence from A&E departments, for example, or individual police officers—although well intentioned—did not know about the coercive control legislation introduced in 2015. It is not enough just to change the law; we need a proper action plan to deal with the reduction in prosecutions.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhese (Slough) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is so right about why we are here today to discuss the Bill. I, too, pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), who spoke so eloquently and emotively. Does my right hon. Friend agree that one reason why we cannot get to grips with this issue is that the resources and support for the support network—the wonderful women's charities and domestic abuse charities—have dwindled and been taken away? If we do not support them, they cannot support the women who need their support.

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right. Refuge, for example, has faced funding cuts of some 80% of its services over recent years—that was the evidence given to the Joint Committee. We also heard that 60% of referrals to refuges were unsuccessful because of a lack of bed spaces. I hope that in Committee we can look more closely at the recommendation from the Home Affairs Committee to have a statutory duty on local authorities to provide refuge places with sustainable funding supported by Government.

I want to raise the point about what happens to serial perpetrators, including serial stalkers. We recommended in our report that the Government should introduce a

national register of serial stalkers and domestic violence perpetrators. We know from the ONS evidence that around a third of victims of domestic abuse suffer from more than one type of abuse, with partner abuse and stalking being the most common combination. The Suzy Lamplugh Trust told us that 55% of callers to the national stalking helpline were being stalked by an ex-partner. We need more co-ordination between police and social services to address that.

In a case in my constituency, a man has just been sentenced to 11 years for violent assault. He tied a noose around his partner's neck and lifted her off the ground. It was part of a series of sustained attacks. At the time, he was on bail for other attacks, including punching his previous partner in the face, trying to suffocate her and wrapping a phone cord around her neck. He also threatened to tie a rope round her child's neck and drag him behind his van. Laura Richards of Paladin, the anti-stalking charity, warned that this particular man had abused at least four women before, including some years ago grabbing a 17-year-old by the hair and kneeling her in the face, and the following year grabbing another woman by the throat and headbutting her in the mouth. Yet this man was able to go on and commit the abuse for which he has now been sentenced. There are so many other cases that involve serial abuse, yet the onus is still on potential victims of domestic abuse or stalking to raise their concerns with the police, rather than agencies having a responsibility to manage the risk, identify those who are committing serial violence and make sure that action is taken before it is too late.

Let me briefly raise the other concerns we had. As well as seeing the commissioner be more independent, I hope the Government will also take further account of the gendered nature of abuse. Of course men and women can both be victims of domestic abuse, but the Minister will know that women are more likely to be the victims of abuse and of the most serious abuse. That is part of a wider context of violence against women and girls. We owe it to those who experience terrible coercive control, and to their children, who can bear the greatest scars, to ensure we use this Bill to make the maximum possible change in people's lives.

3.55 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Ind): It is always a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). She and I do not always agree on things, but I absolutely concur with her final comments to the Minister about this being a gendered crime. Of course it happens to men as well as women, but we have to look at the reality of the statistics.

I welcome the opportunity this afternoon to get this Bill out of the blocks and use this unexpected week wisely. I must also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for her moving contribution. I wish, in a limited period of time, to concentrate on one element alone. Some may look at me with some surprise when I do this, and fear I find myself in the role of gamekeeper turned poacher, rather than the other way round. I am sure the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), does not need reminding of the meeting that she and I attended in May, alongside the Minister for countering extremism and my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward

[*Caroline Nokes*]

Argar), then an Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Justice. I was pleased to see him on the Treasury Bench for the opening of this debate. He made the point during that meeting that when considering domestic abuse it is imperative that we consider people as victims first, rather than alongside any other considerations that the Government might have. That meeting was attended by Southall Black Sisters, Imkaan and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), who has not yet spoken in this debate but who has such a wealth of experience and expertise on these issues.

I was pleased to hear my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor talk about the need for a cross-Government approach. The meeting that I chaired and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle, attended was a cross-Government one, but, as I said to those agencies represented, it was not sufficiently cross-Government. There was no representation from the Department for Work and Pensions or the Department of Health and Social Care. If we are going to address domestic abuse in all its forms, we must have all bodies around the table.

Chris Bryant: I just wonder whether we should be looking at one other Department, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, because in my constituency and in the south Wales valleys the worst spikes, when there are so many instances of domestic violence that the police are simply not able to cope, occur when there is a big rugby or football match. I simply do not understand why all the sporting bodies cannot come together to run a major publicity campaign to try to tackle this.

Caroline Nokes: I welcome the comments that the hon. Gentleman makes and those that my right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), a former Culture Secretary, made when she said that she was trying to do what he suggests. Of course the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government must also be involved. We have heard much about health, relationships and sexual education in schools, so the Department for Education also of course has a role to play.

I urge the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend Member for Louth and Horncastle to do what she can to make sure that we are doing more for migrant women, bearing in mind that the destitute domestic violence concession is currently available only to those who come here on a family visa. We must consider those who are here as partners of refugees, those who are here en route to settlement but who have not yet got their protected status, and those who are here on tier 4 visas. We have heard much about older victims, but younger people, those who might be here as students, can also suffer from domestic abuse.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a valid point about the breadth of this issue and the need for Departments to co-operate. One of the most disturbing cases ever brought to my surgery—we all know how disturbing surgery cases can be—was that of a disabled man whom I had known in a different context as a

cheerful, light-hearted person but who had been abused for years by his wife, who was of course much stronger and more powerful than him. Disabled people and other vulnerable people need to be taken into account here, which is one reason why we need to work across Government.

Caroline Nokes: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right; we must work across Government and we must consider all vulnerabilities.

We have heard this afternoon about the varied forms that domestic abuse takes. It might be physical, financial, emotional. We have heard about coercive control. However, there is also the controlling behaviour that relates to immigration status. A victim is a victim first, and the law and agencies must recognise that.

The role of the Minister is not simply to speak—it is to listen; it is to understand. Earlier, I mentioned the cross-Government meeting held back in May. As I said, it was not cross-Government enough, but I certainly listened very carefully that afternoon to the voices of Southall Black Sisters, the End Violence Against Women coalition, and Imkaan, and their message was that we had to extend the domestic violence concession and must not allow immigration status to be weaponised—as we know that, by perpetrators, it very much is weaponised. That can be physical, in the sense of a passport being withdrawn, but it can also take the form of the simple threat that a victim is in this country only because of the status of the perpetrator, and that if they were to approach an agency they would do so at their peril, and might then be excluded from this country.

The hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who is no longer in her place—I venture into this space with some trepidation—spoke of the EU settled status scheme and EU citizens. I urge hon. Members to make contact with Home Office officials and talk to them about the amazing amount of work that has gone into the resolution centre in Liverpool. When I was a Minister, I visited the centre and spoke to a wide range of brilliant caseworkers there. I hesitate to name her, but the awesome Gabi, who was passionate about helping those in the most vulnerable situations, spoke about recognising that there will be people who apply to that scheme who no longer have their passport, and who have no paperwork evidencing their stay in the United Kingdom, because their controlling partner has seized that from them and prevented them from having access to it.

We heard this afternoon about Government data sharing. Again I hesitate to go there, but there are occasions when data sharing can actually be a force for good. I would highlight the EU settled status scheme, which can combine evidence from the Department for Work and Pensions and HMRC in order to draw a picture of someone's life in the UK that enables those who are vulnerable, who have been victims, to pull together sufficient information. There is a call centre. I sat in on some of the calls, which were handled in the most compassionate and understanding way so that victims were not put through a gruelling process but were helped to obtain their status. When I left office, there were in the region of 1,500 people working on the scheme. I hope to goodness that there remain 1,500 people working on it today, because it is absolutely imperative that we get that right for all EU citizens who are in this country.

I know that the Minister takes this matter very seriously and I am delighted that she has seized the opportunity provided by a day that we were not expecting to be in Parliament to give the Bill a Second Reading and allow us to make progress. I urge her to continue listening to the words of current and former Ministers. I know that the current Chancellor of the Exchequer was very passionate about ensuring that the review on migrant women enabled the Bill to cover more ground and enabled us to consider the domestic violence concession and do more.

I hope that the Minister heeds that, and that when the Bill moves into Committee we can all play an active part to ensure that we make it every bit as good as it can be, embracing as many individuals in this country who have been subjected to domestic abuse as possible, to give them the help that they need.

4.3 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) and others—especially my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), who is no longer in her place; I hope she is getting a nice cup of tea after making that incredibly moving and inspiring speech.

I declare my political approach: I am, as I have called myself many times, a professional feminist, and have been for 32 years; and I have been involved in domestic violence work for 32 years. That is the value that underpins my involvement, for all those decades, in anti-domestic violence work. That is not an accident; it is because the nature of domestic violence is incredibly gendered. We can acknowledge two things at once: we can acknowledge the gendered nature and at the same time acknowledge that there are male victims, and victims in same-sex relationships. I also work with the Men's Advice Line, which supports male victims, and with Respect, the national organisation for work with perpetrators. As a perpetrator group worker at DVIP—the Domestic Violence Intervention Project—I am very proud of what I learned there and hope to bring that to my speech today.

I first got involved in this work 32 years ago, as I said, in a refuge for young Asian women in Manchester. One of the things that used to break my heart was that the young women themselves would say, "What is there to try to fix him?" When I went on to work at the Women's Aid national office in Bristol in 1991—that is what brought me to Bristol—women used to say, "What is there that might change him?" To be fair, so did the perpetrators themselves—men who use abuse. Many of them, not all, wanted to change. Professionals I worked with—police officers, social workers and refuge workers—would say, "Why isn't there anything that we can at least try?"

I became wary of the idea that something would always be better than nothing, and so, indeed, it proved to be, as I went on to develop the country's first accreditation standard and a system of inspection for perpetrator programmes. The Minister is very kind, as she graced me with her first meeting as a Minister to talk about exactly this issue. She will probably recognise some of what I am going to say today. I am grateful to her for her continued interest in this matter.

We found in our work, in the late '80s and early '90s, that separation alone does not increase safety for survivors and, sadly, this is often the time of highest risk for

homicide, serious injury, stalking, murder of children and further harassment. Women wanted the programmes because they wanted their partners to be held to account. They found that, otherwise, their partners were going to mainstream therapy, marriage guidance, drug and alcohol services, or anger management. All of those services have something to offer, but none of them has the specific focus, skills, knowledge and understanding that is necessary to do good quality work with domestic violence perpetrators, and to do it safely, because, as I have said, something can be worse than nothing—a bad programme can do more harm than good.

I declare an interest. As I have already mentioned, I helped to develop the first accreditation system, along with my colleagues Neil Blacklock and Jo Todd. I feel incredibly proud that we decided to aim high. We decided that we should aim for, not one size fits all, but a programme that, whatever its shape, conformed to a very high set of standards. We make no apology for that. As Neil reminded me on the phone only this morning, for most things which are potential causes of risk such as schools, healthcare facilities, old people's homes, and places for vulnerable people, there are regulations and a strong system of monitoring enforcement. No system is perfect—we know that—and there are people who will not benefit from perpetrator programmes, which by definition are managers of risk and places where dangerous people are at work, and who will continue to be violent. It is vital, therefore, that we have a good system on a statutory footing, so I urge the Minister to consider my plea that the accreditation system, which I am so proud to have helped to develop, is put on a statutory footing by some means during the passage of this Bill. I say that because colleagues in the women's sector who work with women victims of domestic violence—I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) will confirm this—are rightly sceptical. They challenge us to do the best that we possibly can. Being held to account by the women's sector is, in my view, essential for any decent perpetrator programme.

I knew that, when I turned up to co-facilitate a group of violent men, I could not do that without a proper linked safety service for women and ex-partners, as well as partners, and without there being proper evaluation and monitoring. While I was at Respect, I helped to commission research that evaluated the effectiveness of good programmes. I am pleased to say that, contrary to what some people say, there is good evidence on good programmes doing good and effective work. There is also evidence that bad programmes do bad work. I urge all hon. and right hon. Members, and particularly the Minister, to grasp this opportunity in both hands and to develop a really good, sound, meaningful strategy for perpetrator programmes so that we do not have the gaps that currently exist, and to ensure that the domestic abuse protection notices can have the meaning and purpose that I and—I am sure—the Minister want them to have. I thank all hon. Members for their attention and hope that, if they want to know more, they will join the all-party group on perpetrators of domestic abuse.

4.8 pm

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), chair of the all-party group on perpetrators of domestic abuse. I am sure that her work is extraordinary and really important.

[Mark Garnier]

I also follow the speech a little earlier of the Mother of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), who talked about my constituent Natalie Connolly. Natalie Connolly, as she so rightly said, would be 28 years old now. She has a young daughter and she comes from a family of loving parents, loving grandparents, a loving sister and, of course, a loving daughter.

Natalie Connolly fell into a relationship with John Broadhurst in 2016. She was, I guess, impressed with him. He was a millionaire and she came from a relatively normal background. One Saturday afternoon, they went off to a rather extensive party. That evening, they were driven home by his driver. They went back to their house, which they were renting while their main one was being renovated, and indulged in intimate activities of an aggressive nature, which were allegedly consensual—I believe were consensual.

When John Broadhurst went to bed that night, he stepped over the bleeding, unconscious body of Natalie Connolly on the steps of their house and went upstairs, leaving her there. He came down the next morning, stepped across her now lifeless body, went and had breakfast, washed the car and called the emergency services, telling the police and paramedics that she was “dead as a doughnut”—which seems extraordinary.

Broadhurst was obviously charged with murder—the Crown Prosecution Service was going to maintain a murder case. The trial happened at the end of last year and was quite high profile at the time. The injuries that Natalie suffered were unbelievably extensive, extraordinarily intimate and, frankly, utterly, utterly brutal. She had lost a lot of blood from her injuries. But the problem was—this is where the law comes in—she bled into a carpet, so it was impossible to measure the extent of her blood loss. As a result, whether she died as a direct result of the injuries, or as a result of overuse of alcohol and possibly narcotics, could not be absolutely confirmed. The charges were therefore dropped from murder to manslaughter by neglect, owing to the fact that Broadhurst had left her behind to bleed to death overnight.

The problem was that to get this change of charge, someone had to sit down and talk to the family. I have met the family—an immensely kind and loving group of people. I sat down with them and we had a conversation about their daughter, who had been besmirched by this vile man. Their last memories of her will be of the court case—people discussing what he alleged about her and her hideous, unbelievable injuries. As I sat with this family, I looked at a group of people whose memories of Natalie should be of buying her first Snow White costume or Barbie doll when she was a child—all the stuff we want to do as parents who love our families. Being asked to understand the risk-balances of complicated legal issues put this family in an intolerable position, as they had to work out the right way forward to get a prosecution.

One of the unbelievably brilliant things about this House is that we are actually not divided when it comes to this sort of thing. The Mother of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham, reached out to me before Christmas and said, “Are you aware of this case?”, so the two of us worked together. I am not a lawyer, so I do not particularly understand

these legal issues, but she does; this illustrates how good we can be as a House. We visited the Attorney General to see whether there could be a retrial, but he said, “Actually, no. In this particular case, the sentence was right because of the reduction of the charge.” So together—actually, me being led by her and learning from her—we want to table a couple of amendments.

Caroline Nokes: My hon. Friend is making an incredibly important point, and I think it is imperative that he is allowed the time in which to achieve that.

Mark Garnier: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend.

There are two points. The first is that “she was asking for it” cannot possibly be a defence when somebody dies. Apart from anything else, the individual does not have the ability to defend themselves, and their reputation is being destroyed in front of the people they loved, the people who care for them and their friends. That is absolutely wrong. The “Fifty Shades of Grey” defence cannot be allowed.

The second point is that victims’ families are not qualified to make the decision about changing the charge so that there can be a better chance of a conviction. We need people who are brilliantly clever at this—brilliant barristers who are brave enough to fight these cases on behalf of the victims. But what we can do is ensure that the decision is made by somebody who really understands the process, so that the Director of Public Prosecutions is the one who is consulted if a change is going to be made in a case pertaining to this type of injury and homicide in a domestic abuse setting. In that way, these families will get the support they need.

Natalie Connolly would have been 28 now, with a young daughter growing up in a warm family, but she is no longer with us. If there is any way in which we can remember her, we have to do something to make sure that this can never happen to anybody ever again.

4.14 pm

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): There have been many days recently when I have not been particularly proud to be a Member of this House, but today I am intensely proud, particularly following that wonderful speech, which I will find it difficult to follow, and the contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) and from the Mother of the House and the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee. Each and every one of them has made us feel something.

There have been too many times in this place when we have had to be hardened and stoical or put on a brave face. Today I am not going to put on a brave face. Today we have a huge opportunity to make a difference for victims of domestic abuse in our constituencies. We all know them and care for them, and I do not think there is a woman alive in this country who has not experienced some of that behaviour or who knows somebody well who has. Now we have a chance to do something about it. This is a good day.

I will be resisting, though, those who say that we should show some restraint and not try to widen the Bill. This could be a rare opportunity. We might not get another such Bill for some time. We need to look to Departments other than the Ministry of Justice and the

Home Office, such as the Department for Education, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Department of Health and Social Care, to find out what we can do more broadly to support victims of domestic abuse.

I have seen the journey in my constituency that this field and the women's organisations that support victims have been on. In 1976 in Darlington, we first had what was then called a refuge for battered wives. Thank God we have come a long way since then. It is now a safe haven for survivors. I want to take the opportunity to celebrate those who worked together to provide that vital service. They were the Rev. John Wright, Harry Cass, Val Portass, Louie Hutchinson, Isobel Hartley, Dot Long and Lillian Elliott. They are heroes, because if they had not done what they did then, my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) and for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) would not have had the opportunity to make the impact that they have. Those people were pioneers and they deserve that recognition and to be celebrated.

I am very worried that the Bill is limited to abuse experienced by people over the age of 16. I would accept that as appropriate if Ministers could show us where abuse under the age of 16 is sufficiently dealt with in other legislation. If it is dealt with adequately in other Acts of Parliament, fine. I just do not believe that it is at the moment.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I very much agree that children are often massive victims themselves, which can often have lifelong consequences for them. Does the hon. Lady agree with the Children's Commissioner that the lower age limit of 16 should be removed from the Bill?

Jenny Chapman: I do not know whether I agree with that or not, but this issue needs to be examined in great detail as the Bill progresses. This is the first opportunity that we have had to raise it in this place in this way. It needs further thought and consideration, and I am certain that it will get it.

Mrs Miller: I understand the point that the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) made, but does the hon. Lady agree that this issue is the best argument for every child in this country having relationship education and that we should absolutely dismiss anybody who says otherwise?

Jenny Chapman: I completely agree, but relationship education is not enough, because I am afraid that the horse has already bolted. The University of Central Lancashire has done some research that will reinforce what I think everybody, particularly if they have teenage children, will know in their gut. Half of young people in relationships between teenagers are reporting emotional abuse and a fifth are reporting physical abuse. A third of girls have reported sexual violence. A quarter of boys have reported some form of sexual violence. Over 50% have reported abuse via new technology. Controlling behaviour through surveillance and being pressurised into sexting is the most common form of abuse reported by girls. If there are two teenagers and one of them is insisting that they check the other's phone and use apps to monitor their location, that is a red flag if ever there was one.

The fact is that we are not adequately supporting young people and intervening. Given my background, I understand very well about not wanting to criminalise young people—I completely get that—but I am not seeing a framework, criminal or otherwise, for intervening and adequately tackling these kinds of problematic behaviours. This must not be dismissed as somehow less important because it is about two people who are under the age of 16; in fact, it is more important. There is an opportunity to intervene that we are missing repeatedly.

The problem with this Bill is that we are focusing on how the system should work. In the Bill Committee, we will receive assurance after assurance from Ministers saying, "Your worry will be taken care of because of this or that measure." I have been through this far too many times to take those kinds of assurances at face value. We must be forensic and persistent, and we must continue to debate this in the way we have this afternoon.

I have high hopes for this Bill—I really do. I think it could be Parliament at its very, very best. But we must be persistent, we must be clear about what we want, and we need to work with those heroes outside this place who really do know what they are talking about, and who we will have to go back to when we have completed this process and say, "We've done our best by you."

4.21 pm

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. We have heard two of the most powerful speeches I have heard in my time in Parliament. First and foremost by a country mile was that by the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield). It was one of the bravest and most powerful speeches I have ever heard not just in this place but anywhere. Her contribution to this debate will be remembered for an awfully long time, and this debate will be remembered for her contribution to it. Following hot on her heels was my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier), who also made an incredibly powerful speech regarding his late constituent. If those examples do not force us into some kind of action, nothing will. It is a pleasure to follow their speeches.

I want to make points that I do not think anyone else will make, which is often my role in these debates. In all this consensus I want to try to stop the idea that we have had throughout this debate that domestic violence is a gender-based crime. It is not, and we would be doing a huge disservice if we were to run away with that idea and make this legislation work only on that basis. Men are perpetrators of domestic violence; men are victims of domestic violence. Women are perpetrators of domestic violence; women are victims of domestic violence. I will go through the figures in a second to show why it is not gender-based. We in this House have a duty to treat everybody equally before the law. I hope that it does not matter whether the perpetrator is a man or woman—they should face the full rigour of the law regardless—and whether the victim is a man or woman, they should have exactly the same safeguards from this House. I hope that that is what this legislation will do and I do not want to hear any ideas that it should not be like that.

For the record, the latest official figures that are available show that someone is one and a half times more likely to be a female victim of domestic violence in a lesbian relationship than in a heterosexual relationship. We should not be leaving behind those victims of domestic

[Philip Davies]

violence by running away with the idea that it is gender-based. In fact, 5.1% of men reported being victims of non-sexual partner abuse with a male partner, which is exactly the same level as women have with a male partner. Men are just as likely to abuse a male partner as they are a female partner. So this is not gender-based violence—it is unacceptable violence by all sorts of people and we should treat them all equally before the law.

Mrs Miller: My hon. Friend needs to accept the fact that women are more affected by domestic violence than any other group. Does he not agree with the Joint Committee recommendation that, rather than putting it on the face of the Bill—perhaps for some of the reasons he is talking about—we should take the approach that the Government have accepted and have statutory guidance to ensure that those who commission services are clear about the need to reflect the needs of women in the services that they provide?

Philip Davies: I want all victims to get the services that they need, but we have just been hearing on our Women and Equalities Committee about instances of male victims of domestic violence. We heard very moving accounts of that recently. We all want to ensure that they get the services that they require too. This is not about either/or. I want to see everyone who is a victim of domestic violence get the treatment and support that they need. I do not care whether that is a man or a woman, and nor should anyone in this House. We should want to provide those facilities and services for everyone—whether someone is in a majority or a minority category is irrelevant.

Having got that on the record, there is much in the Bill that I support and some things that I would like to be added to it. In the time available, I want to mention the two things that I would like to see added. In recent years, one of the things that I have been increasingly troubled by is the level of parental alienation, where one parent tries to turn the children against the other parent, using the child as a weapon in their dispute. That is a growing phenomenon, which I see in my surgeries and is well documented.

Clearly, in some cases, in particular when domestic violence is taking place, it is right for the parent to be removed from the whole family. I am a hard-liner on crime, as most people know, and I would have the courts treat perpetrators of domestic violence much more severely than they are at the moment. However, where there is no good reason for a parent to remove the other parent's contact with the child, that parental alienation should in itself be seen as a form of domestic abuse. One thing that has come out in this debate, rightly, is that often the people who are the biggest victims of domestic abuse are the children. When a child is deliberately turned against the other parent for no good reason, that should be included in the definition of domestic abuse—[*Interruption.*] I am surprised that the SNP think that is a particular problem, but that is a matter for them to explain. They ought to meet some parents who suffer from parental alienation and then they might realise what a massive issue it is for them; often it leads to suicide. The SNP ought to think about those people.

When people make a false allegation of domestic abuse—which is also a very serious thing—the Government should consider that to be a form of domestic abuse as well in this legislation. That is one of the most terrible things that someone can be wrongly accused of.

4.28 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): After the terrible scenes in the House last week, it is reassuring that this House can also be a force for good. However, there remain things on which we passionately disagree, and I refer to what the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) has just said. But I have a limited amount of time, so I will concentrate on what I want to say about the Bill.

I can testify personally to the importance that the Bill holds for survivors of domestic abuse, both in my constituency and further afield. It is a progressive reform that should be celebrated, but the Bill could go even further to protect survivors, and I am disappointed—I have mentioned this before—that children who have witnessed abuse have not been included in the statutory definition of domestic abuse victims.

People know that I am passionate about the issue of adverse childhood experiences and preventing them. Witnessing domestic abuse in childhood is a traumatic experience and we must recognise that. Adverse childhood experiences greatly increase a child's likelihood of ending up in the criminal justice system, or of being part of an abusive relationship themselves. This is not about when they are directly abused, but about when they are witnesses. That in itself is such a traumatic event. For that reason alone we must make sure that children are included in the statutory definition. I urge the Minister to look at that again.

The Bill fails to safeguard survivors against homelessness. Under the current system, survivors of domestic abuse are not automatically placed on priority needs lists for social housing. Instead, they are required to undergo a vulnerability test—they have to go through traumatic evidence of their abuse to prove that they are vulnerable. We have already heard testimony about how retraumatising certain things are when people have to relive their experiences. We must not retraumatise survivors. This approach means that all too often survivors end up homeless because they do not want to go through the retraumatising event. Recent studies suggest that 12% of homeless families cite domestic abuse as the reason for their homelessness, while only 2% of priority housing lists are made up of domestic abuse survivors, so we can do better: we can have a system that assumes that survivors of domestic abuse are all vulnerable, as all our evidence on the subject suggests, and ensures that they are prioritised in housing allocations, therefore keeping survivors off the streets. We can do better.

Another part of the legislation I worry about—it has been mentioned—is the use of polygraph tests. I understand it is only a pilot, but its use even only to determine an offender's licence after release is troubling. Polygraphs are not reliable and the inclusion of polygraphs in this legislation goes against the grain of the Bill, confusing modern reforms with outdated methods.

I disagree that the cost of domestic abuse prevention orders should be shouldered by the police force taking those orders to court. That undermines the whole idea of domestic abuse prevention orders. It puts policemen

in the position of having to use resources that simply are not there, or convincing a victim to go to the courts on their own because they do not have to pay. We can do better. We can use proven methods to determine if rehabilitation has worked and we can create funding methods that do not place burdens directly on to local police.

Finally—I have already said this today—I must mention the Istanbul convention, which is still unratified by this Government. Ratifying the Istanbul convention would go a long way towards addressing the concerns about the Bill. It would also prove that this Government are not afraid to match global standards on care for survivors. Ratification would mean that support systems were not just promised but guaranteed for survivors. It is time that this Government step up not only with warm words, but with meaningful actions.

The Bill will allow many more survivors to seek justice, but alone it is not enough. We must try to support survivors beyond the courts to rebuild their lives.

4.32 pm

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the many fantastic and powerful speeches that we have had today. When I have spoken before in this place about domestic abuse, I have talked about the fact that it can happen to anybody. Over the last year, a number of people have come forward with very similar stories, including that they have subsequently found out that the person involved was a repeat offender, and they were perhaps the second, third, fourth or fifth individual that that person had got to, abused and then discarded.

There are some really important measures in the Bill; I will not go through them all for reasons of time. We have been working for a long time with organisations such as Women's Aid on cross-examination in the family courts. Although this does not particularly need legislation, I would also like more awareness in the family courts of cluster B personality disorders, such as narcissistic personality disorder, so that people hearing the evidence are not taken in by a perpetrator's superficial charm.

We have talked about economic abuse. I commend the work of organisations such as Lloyds bank, which is offering extra support to people it discovers are experiencing financial, economic and domestic abuse. It is so important that we educate others, including GPs. We heard from the former Secretary of State for International Trade, my right hon. Friend for—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Wendy Morton): North Somerset.

Paul Scully: My hon. Friend could have intervened and given me an extra minute, by the way.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) talked about the advice GPs have given about perpetrators. In the case of Luke and Ryan Hart, the GP explained that he thought their father, who went on to shoot their mother and sister in broad daylight, was a fine, upstanding member of society. Clearly, he was totally taken in by that gentleman's narcissistic personality disorder.

The Bill's measures on secure tenancies raise a few more questions. Crisis raised with me and other Members the fact that people who flee abusive relationships and

request emergency housing have to keep telling their story at every level. It would be fantastic to have a single advocate with whom those people could go through that process, easing the burden on them. There is nothing worse for people than having to rehash their story time and again. Not everybody is as bold and brave as the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and can use their story for such powerful advocacy. Extraordinarily, the perpetrator often stays in the property; the person fleeing has to give up everything rather than being supported to stay in their house.

I welcome the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, which means we can start to talk about awareness. We are working on an awareness campaign that talks about entry-level red flags to stop people getting into abusive relationships in the first place. That is being led by the *Daily Express*, along with my former staff member, Robyn Thackara, who has become a formidable campaigner on emotional abuse issues and in particular highlights narcissistic personality disorder. They are doing a wonderful job to explain those basic things to stop people getting involved.

There is no domestic violence without emotional abuse in the first place, whether that is gaslighting or projection. Often, women—although, as we have discussed, this is not necessarily solely about women—are less like a frog in boiling water, which will leap out when it first senses danger and pain, than a frog in cold water that is heated up slowly. Women are often drawn into an abusive relationship over a period of time, until it is too late—until they have been brainwashed and, in effect, kidnapped in plain sight.

It is important to understand that, when we highlight narcissistic personality disorders and cluster B disorders, we are talking about people who cannot easily change. We therefore need to put the emphasis back on ensuring that people do not get involved in the first place and that all the organisations around them, and all of us, are aware. We need to talk about these things in the same way we talk about things such as “stranger danger” so we can look out for each other and people do not get in this position in the first place.

4.37 pm

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): May I start by saying how much I and many others present appreciate the consensual nature of the debate? As well as praising the leadership of my own party's Front Benchers, who have been fantastic on this issue, I thank the Government Front Benchers for the remarkable leadership they have shown. In particular, I thank the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), who has met me many times to discuss this and other issues. She was the first Member from the 2015 intake to go into government, so I see her as an ambassador for all of us in that intake, and she has done very well. The Minister for Health, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), was previously in the Ministry of Justice. Although he has now been moved to another Department, he is back here supporting the Bill. Those things do not get noticed by people observing us from outside, but they really matter to those of us who are here.

I was made very aware of the problem of cross-examination by perpetrators of domestic violence when a woman came to see me at a surgery soon after I

[Peter Kyle]

became a Member of Parliament. She had suffered so much abuse—she had been raped multiple times, she had been knocked unconscious and she had been hospitalised more than a dozen times—but the perpetrator of those crimes, from prison, summonsed her to family court on three separate occasions. She told me that on the third occasion she had to ask the taxi driver to stop on the way home so she could vomit in the gutter because of the experience of being cross-examined by the perpetrator of the crimes against her. She told me that if she was summonsed a fourth time, she would capitulate and give him whatever he wanted. She was broken, not just by the criminal who raped and abused her, but by the system that allowed her to be cross-examined by him, and that allowed the abuse to continue under the nose of judges, and in front of police—the very people the state appoints to support and protect women like her.

After a huge campaign, both from Members from across the House and in the media, the Government finally gave way and agreed to make a change. I credit Mr Speaker with granting me an urgent question on the subject in January 2017, almost three years ago, at which the Government relented for the first time and promised to change the law. The right hon. and learned Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald), then Minister for Courts and Justice, said in response to the urgent question:

“This sort of cross-examination is illegal in the criminal courts, and I am determined to see it banned in family courts, too.”

He reiterated the urgency thus:

“work is being done at a great pace...the urgency is there.”—[*Official Report*, 9 January 2017; Vol. 619, c. 25-27.]

That is important. The woman I mentioned cried with joy at the news that there would be a change. In her words, she felt liberated; a weight had been lifted from her shoulders.

However, we must recognise the scale of the suffering that there has been since the Government gave that commitment almost three years ago. While we celebrate the Bill finally being brought in, there has been much suffering as a result of the delays. As Lord Justice Munby said on Radio 4 recently:

“Every day that passes exposes more victims to what is intolerable. Today, in court somewhere in this country, there will be someone—a frightened victim—being let down by the system. It must stop”.

I pay tribute to Lord Justice Munby for the support that he has shown for the changes.

In the time left to me, I want to mention quickly the role of Domestic Abuse Commissioner. It is essential that we get that role right. We have seen how Brexit eclipses everything in this Chamber; we urgently need an independent, strong voice for victims of domestic violence that can rise above that.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share my concerns about how this place can scrutinise the new commissioner? I have absolutely no doubt that they will work in the best interests of all our constituents, but perhaps we are not yet sure how we will find that out.

Peter Kyle: My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important point. The Home Affairs Committee, after much

deliberation, wanted the commissioner to be independent of Government and to report directly to Parliament, and I agree. The Joint Committee on the draft Bill suggested that there be Cabinet Office involvement to avoid conflicts of interest in the Home Office reporting line. It is important to stress that the Children's Commissioner is independent of Government and Parliament. The Information Commissioner's Office is independent, even though it is supported and sponsored by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The independence of those organisations, even though they report every year to Parliament, is absolutely essential. That kind of independence would give a credible, powerful, unignorable voice to victims of domestic violence.

We hope that Brexit is in its endgame, but even if Parliament passes a deal, we will then enter years of negotiation and turmoil in this House. We need to make sure that we never lose our voice on domestic issues such as this, and particularly on support for victims of violent crime such as domestic violence. As the Bill moves into Committee, I urge a detailed re-examination of the reporting line to the commissioner, to ensure maximum independence for them, the greatest voice for abuse survivors, and maximum benefit to our body politic from the commissioner's role. The commissioner-elect is here; I say to her and others observing the debate that I am not criticising her role but making sure that she has all the powers she needs. If she uncovers something that needs to be voiced and that needs to change, and we are too busy, or the media are too occupied, to listen to her voice, and if that is buried in the normal Home Office reporting line, that will be to her detriment.

4.45 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am delighted to follow my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle), but I am also rather daunted—daunted because I am not a woman, because I am not Welsh and because whatever I say I am fated, along with everybody else, to be in the shadow of the outstanding contribution from the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield). If ever anyone needed evidence that domestic abuse takes on many guises, puts on many faces and can insidiously target anyone in any place, it was her emotional, harrowing and brave contribution.

I agree with everything that has been said, and I very much welcome the Bill. I want to comment on a few things that are not in it, however, rather than on what is. As we have heard, this is not just about changing legislation; it is about changing culture and the way we look at domestic abuse. We must demonise it wherever it rears its ugly head.

I want to concentrate on the impact on children. As we heard from the former Prime Minister, that is often overlooked. When I was Children's Minister, I was shocked to find that over three quarters of safeguarding cases had domestic violence at their heart. Incredibly, one third of domestic violence cases start during the pregnancy of the woman victim. When women are abused in the home, the impact can traumatise the children. When they are forced to flee, the disruption to the lives of those children, particularly if they are of school age, is immense. Refugees tell us that around half of their residents are children, while 770,000 children

live with an adult who has experienced domestic abuse in the previous year, according to the Children's Commissioner. It is the most prevalent risk affecting children in need.

I was very proud, along with the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), to be part of the "On the Sidelines" report by the London domestic abuse charity Hestia, in collaboration with Pro Bono Economics and the "UK Says No More" campaign. It highlighted that one in four women and one in six men experience domestic abuse in their lifetime, but that the millions of children exposed to it in their homes are too often considered merely witnesses to the abuse, rather than victims themselves. When children are exposed, they can suffer in the short, medium and longer term, and it is also intergenerational, as we have heard in so many cases. Over half of people suffering domestic abuse as an adult experienced it as a child: "Well, it happened to my mum when I was growing up, so inevitably it's going to happen to me, isn't it?" That is an extraordinary culture that we absolutely must dispel.

Children need to feature more prominently in the Bill. Domestic abuse is the single most common factor that leads to children requiring support from local authority children's services—and we know the pressure they are under. I have spent a lot of time on the doorstep with social workers. I spent a week being a social worker in Stockport. I met a fantastic and very experienced domestic violence specialist social worker who was the linchpin of that safeguarding team, a great authority who joined together various agencies. It is, however, a postcode lottery whether that experience is available in local authorities.

We need to embed in local authority delivery domestic abuse specialists able to draw together all the agencies involved to ensure an effective and comprehensive local offer. I welcome the national Domestic Abuse Commissioner, who started two weeks ago, but there is also a case for local domestic abuse commissioners—high-profile figures who can ensure that local authorities are living up to their duties to provide a local service. I believe that can be done only by including in the Bill a statutory duty on funding. By working with this cohort of expert frontline providers, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner could have a stronger role in strengthening planning at local and national levels to ensure that all are protected from abuse. That would help to embed the impact of domestic abuse on children in local safeguarding teams as well.

As an aside, I believe that health visitors have an important role to play, too, as an early warning system of trusted professionals going into houses to meet new parents. I reiterate, therefore, that it is a false economy to have reduced the number of health visitors by 30% since the excellent work the coalition Government did in building up their numbers by more than 4,000 by 2015.

Karen Bradley: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend. He was an excellent Children's Minister and speaks with great authority on these matters. I was struck in the briefing document by the cost of domestic abuse and the fact that just a 0.1% decrease in the prevalence of domestic abuse would pay for the measures in the Bill. As he says, it is a false economy to stint on this.

Tim Loughton: As with so much to do with child safeguarding, getting it wrong is the most expensive thing.

We need to do much more work on prevention. We should task the Domestic Abuse Commissioner with looking at not just how we respond and making sure that perpetrators are locked up, but how we can prevent it in the first place, and better education in schools about what constitutes an appropriate relationship is an important part of that.

I want to make a few other quick points. Proper funding of refuge places, which has been promised by the Government, is essential. There was still a shortage of refuge places last year. It is not just a question of money, though; technical factors are also impeding the availability of urgently required beds. Women without children who are fleeing violence and who seek safety in refuges are not automatically considered to be in priority need of housing. I have been told by refuges that in some cases women are staying in hostels for several years, which is again a false economy, when they could be in independent housing, living safely with their children. We also need to give children who are living in refuges priority access to schools, as we have done for children in care and adopted children.

We have to look holistically at the issue. It is not just about better funding for refuges; it is also about making sure that we have better services across the board, including specialist domestic abuse service providers, child support workers, outreach workers and especially better joined-up working for women fleeing local authority areas when they have to go to a refuge. We need a network of refuges across the country.

This is a fantastic Bill. It can be improved. It is long overdue. Let us not ruin it by making it too complicated.

4.50 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (LD): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who concentrated on and spoke eloquently about the impact of domestic abuse on children. I, too, want to concentrate on putting children first and will focus my remarks on how domestic abuse is considered in the family courts.

Members will recall the debate I secured on this issue in September 2016. In my speech I referred specifically to a tragedy suffered by my constituent Claire Throssell as a way of illustrating as powerfully as I could the need for reform. Claire is with us today, sitting in the Under-Gallery, and I welcome her to the debate. I make no apology for recounting again in this Chamber her account of what happened on that dreadful day when her boys were murdered at the hands of their own father. I only wish the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) was in his place to listen.

"It took just 15 minutes on the 22nd October, 2014, for my life and heart to be broken completely beyond repair. I had warned those involved with my case that my happy, funny boys would be killed by their own father; I was right.

My boys were both with their father on that October day, and at around 6.30pm he enticed Paul, nine, and Jack, 12, up to the attic, with the promise of trains and track to build a model railway. When the boys were in the attic, he lit 16 separate fires around the house, which he had barricaded, so my sons could not get out and the firemen could not get in.

Only 15 minutes later...the doorbell rang at my mum's. (We were staying there temporarily after the separation.)

'It's the boys, they must be early,' my mum said—but I knew that wasn't right. The boys would have run into the house and

[Angela Smith]

straight into my arms; they always did after a visit to their dad. They were frightened of him—he was a perpetrator of domestic abuse. The statutory agencies involved in our case knew this.

I opened the door. Blue lights were flashing.

‘There’s been an incident at your former home; the boys have been involved in a fire...’

Running into the hospital, the first thing I saw was Paul receiving CPR. A doctor, drenched in sweat and exhausted, told me they were withdrawing treatment.

I held Paul in my arms. I begged him to try, to stay, to not leave me.

He looked at me, smiled, and the life left his beautiful blue eyes. His hair was wet with my tears as I kissed his nose. Then Paul, my boy, was taken out of my arms and into another room. There was no further chance of touching him; his little body was now part of a serious crime enquiry.”

I can never read those words or hear them—and I know the Minister feels the same, because she has sat with me and listened to Claire—without feeling the enormous loss Claire has suffered. But Claire is brave. She has chosen not to turn in on herself but rather to embrace love as a means of dealing with her tragedy. She has chosen to protect all children, if she possibly can, by making sure that the law is changed.

By that I mean reform of the family courts. We need access to special measures in those courts to separate survivors from the perpetrators, as well as special protection rooms, entrances and exits, and screens and video links. Clause 53, in part 1, provides for that to apply in the criminal courts, but we need to amend the Bill to ensure that it is extended to the civil and family courts.

Jess Phillips: Does the hon. Lady agree—and Claire’s case speaks to this more loudly than almost any that I have ever heard—that the presumption of access by an abusive parent has to end?

Angela Smith: I completely agree. Indeed, I was about to say exactly that.

We need to extend the ban on cross-examination by perpetrators to the family courts, because the Bill does not do that at present, and, more than anything else, we need to change the culture of the family courts. Claire’s children died after their father won the right to unsupervised contact. The domestic abuse that she had suffered from Darren Sykes was not taken seriously by any agency, or by the courts themselves. It was assumed that his children would be safe in his care. The judge who made that judgment is still practising in the family courts in Barnsley.

The research on this indicates clearly that a man who abuses his wife or his partner is more likely to abuse his children. We therefore need to end the assumption of contact when there is a risk to a child from domestic abuse, as called for by Claire and by Women’s Aid, and we need a ban on unsupervised contact when a father is awaiting trial, or is on bail, for domestic abuse offences. The Bill, as it stands, does not deliver such a provision. We also need to ensure that the definition of domestic abuse in the Bill includes coercive control as a source of harm to children. That point has been made by many other Members today.

The Bill needs to be amended along those lines if it is to be fit for purpose. That is the legacy that Claire has campaigned for—a positive legacy that would stand as

a tribute to her children—and, in the name of Jack and Paul, we have a moral responsibility to secure these protections for all our children. Let us not miss this golden opportunity to secure the change that we need.

I support the Bill, but it can be better, and I hope that the Minister will agree when she sums up the debate.

4.56 pm

Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con): It is very difficult to follow the speech of the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), who talked of the terrible tragedy that happened to Paul and Jack, and to Claire Throssell, who is here in the Chamber today. I commend her bravery and courage in coming forward, and that is actually quite relevant to what I am going to speak about.

I am particularly pleased to speak in such a collaborative debate about such an important subject, and I commend the Government for introducing this landmark Bill. We have heard about harrowing cases today, and all of us will be supporting survivors of domestic abuse in all its forms in our communities. I welcome the focus on supporting survivors, because I have seen in my own constituency the enormous, positive difference that effective support can make.

The Ministry of Justice recently funded the brilliant Women Out West centre in Whitehaven, which was founded by the equally brilliant Rachel Holliday, and it is in that centre that I have met domestic abuse survivors. The recurring theme that I find so awful is the family courts system, and, specifically, the most dreadful cases in which mothers have been victims and, as survivors, have bravely and courageously sought help, only for a secretive family court to decide on the cruellest act, which is to remove their children. There can be no stronger bond than the bond between mother and child, and to have that bond torn apart is unthinkable, but it is far too often the outcome for mothers who seek help, or flee an abusive home and an abusive relationship. In some cases, the children are placed—by the state, by the family courts—directly in the hands of the perpetrator, with devastating consequences, as we have just heard.

I have been working with Safelives. I support its calls for cultural change in children’s social care, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service and the judiciary, and for the prohibition of unsupervised contact for any parent who is on bail for domestic abuse-related offences or undergoing the hearing process. The fear of social services is too often cited as the single main source of stress, and the cases of perpetrators of domestic abuse going on to abuse and even murder the children we are supposed to protect are a tragedy of our times.

At my local women’s centre, I learned of a survivor of domestic abuse. She is a qualified nanny who can continue to look after other people’s children, but her own children were taken away from her by the family courts and placed in the care of the perpetrator, who has no biological connection with them,. I commend the work of everyone who is campaigning to #getmhome. In support of the Bill, I commend all those—the organisations, the survivors and everyone else—who have worked hard to shape it and steer it to be as effective as possible. I reiterate the requirement for specialist domestic abuse training before cases reach the family courts which, I add, need to be looked at seriously.

5.1 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): I am pleased to be able to speak in this important debate. It is really pleasing that the atmosphere is one of unity, dignity and calm, as we all work together to get this Bill through and improve it.

I pay tribute to many hon. Members in the House who are strong champions of fairness and equality, who refuse to allow the Bill to die. Many of them have been in the House a lot longer than me, and should be proud of their record. I specifically want to mention my hon. Friends the Members for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) and, of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), who is no longer in her place. Her contribution this afternoon was amazing, and many people outside the House will take heart from it.

The Bill has the potential to transform our response and reaction to domestic abuse. We have an opportunity to make history and genuinely protect those who need our solidarity, and to raise up those who have been ignored for too long. However, the Bill as it stands falls far short of meeting and achieving its full potential. One in four women experience domestic abuse in their lifetime; two women a week are killed at the hands of their partner or ex-partner; three women a week die by suicide as a result of the abuse they have experienced; and 2 million people experience domestic abuse in England and Wales every year. I make no apology for restating those shocking statistics. They are why it is essential that this incredibly widespread, devastating form of abuse is given the attention that it deserves, and that we use the Bill to deliver the reform that we all know is well overdue.

To deliver those reforms we need to improve the Bill, which must be amended to include reforms to universal credit and to housing and immigration law. Most importantly, the statutory definition of domestic abuse must be amended to reflect the reality of this crime—namely that women make up the overwhelming majority of victims and survivors, and more than 25% of victims are over 60. The Bill must be amended so that all survivors are protected from the traumatising practice of being cross-examined directly by the perpetrator. Can we imagine how horrific and intimidating it must be to have broken free of an abuser and come face to face with them once again in the courtroom?

I hope that the Government will advance the Bill through the House and the other place as swiftly as possible. The Minister must guarantee that it receives the attention and support that it deserves. Opposition Members and, I suspect, many Government Members will hold the Government accountable until the Bill receives Royal Assent and the funding from the Treasury that it needs and deserves.

Lastly, I would like to say a word about strong women: the strong women on the Opposition Benches to whom I pay tribute for their activism, campaigning and championing of this issue; and the victims of domestic abuse, to whom I say, “Stay strong, ask for help, and Members of the House are with you.” With a strong Domestic Abuse Bill, strengthened in Committee, we will be able to prove that inaction, apathy and ignorance will come to an end once and for all.

5.4 pm

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I have sat here listening to this debate and been taken to thoughts and memories of my own, which has led me to cross out almost the entirety of my speech, to the great frustration of my staff. I have probably wasted a lot of their afternoon. I often find in this place, particularly when I end up with a very short time to speak, that I need to skip things that would duplicate what others have said. Perhaps I will stick to talking about personal experiences.

I want to pay tribute, as many others have done, to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) for her incredibly considered, experienced and passionate speech. Although many people have worked on this issue, the Bill should be considered a flagship and a real bastion of her time in No. 10. It is a hugely important legacy for her as an individual, as well as for the House. I also want to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for her incredibly passionate and moving speech, which took me back to an experience that I will mention shortly. Her speech has every right and reason to lead the news later, but it will not do so because Brexit will once again kick other news off the agenda. Her speech was incredibly important in its own right and it will help people, even aside from this legislation.

I said that the hon. Lady’s speech reminded me of something. I recently ran the Mansfield 10K, which also made me cry, albeit in a slightly different way. That was a painful cry, but I survived it none the less. I ran the 10K to raise money for the charity Nottinghamshire Independent Domestic Abuse Services—NIDAS. I have been working with it for two years, since I was elected. Like so many charities around the UK, it helps people in their time of need, and it has helped more than 5,000 people in Mansfield and Ashfield over the past five years. That is an area of roughly 180,000 people, and the fact that it has supported 5,000 people in five years just goes to show the extent of this issue in my part of the world. We have some of the worst figures for domestic abuse anywhere in the country.

The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), came to visit NIDAS, and we both had a really interesting time hearing about the services it provides. It was also a very emotional visit. I find myself feeling increasingly emotional since I had children—I do not like to admit how much that is the case—and I sat in that room crying as I listened to the accounts of some of the women who had been supported by the charity. In particular, a piece of creative writing that one of the women had done through her therapy, supported by the charity, was really moving. The contribution from the hon. Member for Canterbury brought that back to me, so I thought I would recount that experience.

Many of the Bill’s obvious benefits have been discussed in this debate, including preventing victims of domestic abuse from being cross-examined by their perpetrators, and the creation of the new Domestic Abuse Commissioner role, which I hope will ensure that the focus of scrutiny continues long after we stop talking about the Bill in this place. Another example that brought me back to a personal experience was the idea of broadening the domestic abuse definition in law.

[Ben Bradley]

The hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on the Opposition Front Bench mentioned older people and talked about how the over-75s do not necessarily get the same support. I can give the House an example from a working-class community that I represent. For a lot of people who were married in the 1950s or 1960s, the husbands would have had the money and paid their wives a housekeeping allowance on a weekly basis. In many parts of my community, that is still the case. It is something that we do not necessarily see or recognise, and these days we in the Chamber would all probably think that it was unacceptable, but it persists and we do not even notice it in many cases. I was reminded of it by a point made by the Opposition Front Bencher, and it is something that we can now prevent, hopefully through the passage of this Bill and by providing a clear definition to help some of those women to come forward and say, “Actually, I now realise that this is not right.” Obviously there is a more detailed debate to be had throughout the community if we are to get all this right. As was mentioned earlier, even a tiny reduction in domestic abuse will make the Bill pay for itself. If these measures make anybody feel safer or bring perpetrators to justice, the Bill will have done its job, and for that reason I trust that it will have unanimous support in the House today.

5.9 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): I would like to put my thanks on record for the leadership shown by both Front Benches on this important Bill.

For me, the debate is very personal, because domestic abuse has shaped everything I stand for and is what put me on the journey into Parliament. It is brilliant that once the Bill goes through women will have services available and we will have enshrined the definition of abuse in law. That was not always the case, and some women experienced so much abuse, when the services were not there, that they were driven to kill. Twenty-seven years ago, there was such a woman who killed her abuser and went to prison for 14 years. That woman was Zoora Shah, and she was my mum.

Jess Phillips: Does my hon. Friend agree that the recent case of Sally Challen has given voice to the issue? Hopefully, legal change will continue through the Bill to allow people to understand that some of these issues are not simply black and white, but the reality of the lives of people who have been terribly abused. The worst that can happen to a family can easily happen, as she is saying.

Naz Shah: I agree with my hon. Friend and thank her for that timely intervention.

Twenty-seven years ago, when Zoora Shah did not have the right services, she went to prison for 14 years. At the time, she did not tell her story. I am talking about this in this debate because I want to talk about specific services for BAME women, especially specialist services that understand domestic abuse, as my former colleague on the Home Affairs Committee mentioned.

It is more complicated for women of BAME heritage. My mother did not talk about being abused because of the concept of honour. I have talked about honour crimes before, and I shall give an example. Had Zoora Shah been arrested by an officer who was non-white,

she might have had a different experience. Had she been arrested by a woman of colour, or even a woman of her background, they might have understood her experience of abuse, which drove her to kill. Had she been represented by a female solicitor from her cultural background, she might have had a different experience. Had her case been dealt with by a judge with an ethnic background or who understood her culture, the outcome for her might have been very different. The outcome of my life might have been very different, and that of my siblings and my family.

That is why it is important to have a reflective workforce. It is about having specialist services for women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds who understand the culture. When a lady called Tahmina rang me on a Saturday morning three years ago to say that a girl in Pakistan had been murdered, I could identify it straight away as an honour crime. That girl was not just murdered and buried: she became a campaign and a cause, ensuring that we talk about honour crime and about her rape, and continue to try to seek justice for her.

I have an understanding of honour and the impact of it on me. I will describe it in the words that my dear friend Sal used to me last week:

“Izzat”—

honour—

“is the shroud that covers me, weaved from the threads of my identity, integrity, values and the decisions that I make.”

I am emphasising honour because my mother served extra time in prison—she could not speak up because of the impact of honour. It is a code of conduct in my community by which we behave.

It is apt today that I talk about honour in a different context. Yesterday, *The Guardian* reported that in my election campaign in 2017 I had felt suicidal because I was dishonoured. My opponent, having a background from my community, knowingly ran a campaign in which a man in the community stood up and actually said, “When we buy a dog, we check its pedigree. Look at Naz Shah’s character, look at her demeanour, her chaal chalan”—as he put it—“and how she presents herself”. What *The Guardian* did not report was that in this email I equated that to honour abuse, and I do not say that lightly, as a daughter of a woman who at one point in giving evidence about her abuse referred to herself as having become a “mattress” to men. When someone who comes from that background ends up being a Member of Parliament and the shadow Minister for Women and Equalities, sitting on these Green Benches and able to represent the voices of those who are dead and buried thousands of miles away—

Peter Kyle: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for her speech, which is very wide ranging. She is cramming a huge amount into a short time, but we are learning a huge amount. She has mentioned the importance of having staff who are trained in issues relating to different ethnicities and BAME backgrounds and cultures. Does she agree that now that the Government are finally recruiting more police officers, it is essential that these issues are taken into account, as we have the opportunity to get more people into police enforcement?

Naz Shah: I thank my hon. Friend for his comment. I absolutely agree with it, which is why I am so passionate. I teach and deliver the diversity session at the national

police strategic command course, because I want my experiences to influence that change so that we have a reflective workforce—the police officer, judge and solicitor I mentioned—for all these women.

Importantly, we must recognise that the experiences of women from BAME backgrounds are different. They impact upon us differently and they have ramifications for us. I was literally feeling suicidal during that campaign because my very fabric was being attacked publicly—honour really does play a part. When we talk about men who kill women because of “honour”, because they have been “shamed”, because it has impacted upon their *izzat*, I want this House to recognise the severity of that—of what it means. Even today, as a woman, I did not recognise my own forced marriage until I was in my 30s. I did not recognise that I was involved in marital rape until I was in my 40s. That is what domestic violence is.

As a proud survivor, I will say this to this House: we may be taking this into account and putting £300,000 into BAME specialist services, but that is not enough. We need much more for those women. We need that specialist service, in order to understand the experiences of migrant women—the experiences of women who do not have English as a first language. We need specialist services.

5.17 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) and to take part in this landmark debate. We have heard so many memorable contributions from all around the Chamber. This Bill has been a long time in coming, and although there has been much prior scrutiny it is very welcome. It provides the framework for tackling a crime that has scarred people's lives for generations. The personal cost is enormous and the impact upon society is devastating. Good work is already being done, whether by the Waveney Domestic Violence Forum or the police and crime commissioner for Suffolk, Tim Passmore, but in many ways they are working with one arm behind their back. We need to empower them. This Bill can do that, but to be fully successful it must be underpinned by adequate funding, proper support for victims, and the promotion of a cultural change in society and across the whole public sector.

The Lord Chancellor and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), must take great credit for doing an enormous amount of preparatory work on this Bill. They have done much of the heavy lifting, but, as he stated, this Bill must not be viewed as the sole responsibility of his Department; it must be owned across government. We need to take down those departmental silos.

Refuge draws attention to one of the unintended consequences of universal credit that must be addressed—the need to reform those aspects of UC that currently facilitate and exacerbate economic abuse. Those reforms would include paying universal credit separately by default and abolishing the five-week delay for survivors. Refuge is also seeking an amendment to protect survivors of domestic abuse from the trauma and intimidation of being directly cross-examined in court by their perpetrator, which is inappropriate and wholly unacceptable. SafeLives urges the need for reform in the court system, and

highlights the need for specialist support for adult and child victims through the family courts. It also emphasises the need for better funding of a larger number of independent domestic abuse advisers.

Nowhere—no home, no workplace—is a guaranteed sanctuary from domestic abuse. No one can be sure that they will never be a victim, but there are those who are more at risk—women, rather than men; children, who will carry the devastating impact throughout their life; and, as our society ages, older people, as my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) highlighted. That is a concern that Age UK has also highlighted. To age-proof the Bill, it has made four recommendations as to how it can be improved; I hope that the Government will take those on board.

The Bill has a great deal to commend it. It provides the framework in which we can eliminate a stain on society that has been there for too long. It must be a catalyst for change. This debate has provided an opportunity for the House to be seen at its best, led by the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and ably supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) and the hon. Members for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) and for Bradford West (Naz Shah). We need to put aside our differences, come together and put in place a new way of doing things that can mean such a great deal to so many.

5.21 pm

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): This has been a very hard debate to listen to, with some truly remarkable speeches.

When I became the MP in Hull North, I was told that it would be possible to fill the local football stadium, which holds 25,000, with all the domestic abuse perpetrators in the city, and that in a class of 30 pupils, you could expect three or four to be living with domestic abuse at home. This morning, a constituent emailed me to say:

“I was abused domestically for 30 years which included physical abuse—including getting my head smashed against a wall. I suffered the range of coercive control in which for periods of time I could not access money.”

I know that police in Hull respond to 800 calls per month around domestic abuse. I am very aware how important this Bill is, therefore, and I was very pleased to be asked to serve on the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee. That Committee made strong recommendations, and the Bill would be better if all of those were accepted.

However, the Bill is only part of the solution. We need to ensure that work on domestic abuse is properly resourced, and that it co-ordinates with the ending violence against women and girls strategy that the Government have put forward. Hon. Members have spoken about many issues. The need to ratify the Istanbul convention and the needs of migrant women must be addressed, as must our concerns about the DWP, especially universal credit, and the role of the health service.

I want to comment on two issues. First, the recruitment of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner is widely welcomed; the commissioner could be a very powerful agent for change. However, I have already expressed in the House my surprise that the Home Office went ahead and recruited to that post on the basis of the December 2016 job description, which was a part-time post with accountability to the Home Office alone. The scrutiny

[Diana Johnson]

Committee's recommendation was that it should be a full-time post, and that accountability should be looked at and addressed. When we took evidence from the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, we heard from him that the best way of doing that was to put the accountability on the Cabinet Office and have the reporting mechanism into the Cabinet Office, not the Home Office, to provide that cross-Government approach to this issue. I hope that the Minister will reflect on that, because I am sure that amendments will be tabled in Committee to that effect.

My second point relates to women who are suffering domestic abuse and having their lives controlled. In particular, I am referring to their fertility being controlled and to them being coerced into unwanted pregnancies. This, of course, goes to the heart of women's bodily autonomy. The Bill before us is an opportunity for us to recognise this particular problem. As the Minister knows, sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 says that, where a woman procures an abortion, she faces life imprisonment. The Abortion Act 1967 allows abortion in certain limited circumstances, but we know from Women on Web, which provides assistance to women who are seeking terminations, that the current law is not working for women, particularly for women who are suffering domestic abuse. Between May and June 2019, of 100 women who came forward, a third were not able to access abortion services because of domestic abuse and controlling behaviour, seven were hiding their pregnancy from a non-supportive partner, and one had been raped.

A few weeks ago, this House agreed to decriminalise abortion in Northern Ireland, which means that sections 58 and 59 of the 1861 Act will no longer apply from early next year. We now need to do the same in this Bill to protect the women in England and Wales who could face the full might of the law under sections 58 and 59 of the 1861 Act and ensure that women, including those in very desperate circumstances, are not criminalised. I am sure that the Minister will expect that, at some point during the passage of this Bill through the House of Commons, this issue will be raised, and the House will be asked to a vote on it to put women in Wales and England in the same position as, hopefully, women in Northern Ireland.

5.26 pm

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): It is a real privilege to speak in this debate. Over the past few weeks, the House has been criticised for some of our performances. Much of that has been set right by many of the speeches that have been made across the House today.

As other colleagues have mentioned, the majority of the Bill is devolved. However, just two weeks ago, when I was visiting Connect Alloa, a new youth club in my constituency, I was asked by a young person to raise the profile of domestic abuse, which is why I am speaking in this debate. There are several issues in the Bill that are pertinent to Scotland and I will come on to them shortly.

I am lucky that my constituency of Ochil and South Perthshire covers the two counties of Perth and Kinross and Clackmannanshire. In Perth and Kinross, we have

below average rates of domestic abuse—incidents per head are far below the Scottish average—whereas rates in Clackmannanshire are consistently higher than the Scottish average. In fact, in Clackmannanshire, we have the highest incidence of domestic abuse per head in all of Scotland, so we have an issue. This is something that I have raised in this House before. I have also raised it when visiting Women's Aid, locally and nationally, and local women's refuges. My office works regularly with police and community groups to help various constituents with many different issues, which manifest themselves not only in deprivation, but in domestic abuse.

One of the problems we have when we come into this is that constituents not only face truly harrowing situations and real difficulties, but find it difficult to navigate a system that often relies on local government authorities to supply the majority of support, and the standards in different local authorities are inconsistent. For example, a constituent who moves between Clackmannanshire and Perth and Kinross will sometimes experience different levels of support in those two counties. Furthermore, we have many examples of people who have been married in the south or in Northern Ireland and swap into different parts of the UK. The transfer becomes an issue as there are issues about support and agencies are not talking to each other. When people are at their lowest point, the services are not delivering the level of support that they require. There are also issues about protection and about trying to provide people with a proper opportunity to start again when, of course, they are leaving a seriously abusive relationship.

A lot of this policy is devolved and, as many people in the third sector have said, some of the legislation in place in Scotland has set a gold standard, for which I praise my MSP colleagues. It is good that England, Wales and other parts of the UK will now be joining that standard. One thing to note, though, is that there is currently no commissioner in Scotland. When going through the Bill, there was an element of disappointment and frustration on my part as someone who has raised this issue in the House and Westminster Hall several times, and had promises from the Dispatch Box that the UK commissioner would cover the entire United Kingdom. This is important because of the transfer issues that I just mentioned—the fact that many constituents live their lives day to day, not through different levels of government.

People transfer between the counties of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland on a very regular basis, and we need to ensure that they are getting the same level of support and the same standards wherever they are in the UK. I hope Ministers will address that when summing up, and tell us how they are going to take this forward in the next stage of the Bill. Indeed, I will be working with colleagues across the House to table amendments to ensure that the UK commissioner is UK-wide—not in order to take powers away from anyone, but to maintain and promote good practice through the way in which the role is defined in the Bill.

My final point is a minor one about the extraterritorial powers included in the Bill. Obviously it is incredibly important that the legislation pertains to the entire United Kingdom, and I hope that all the national agencies will co-operate. Domestic abuse has an enormous impact on our constituents and their families' lives. Everyone should be entitled to the support and services

that are available across the United Kingdom. When people are at their lowest point, they should have access to services that support them when they need it. We must ensure that no constituent is left behind.

5.31 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): It has been a privilege even to sit and listen to the debate, never mind to contribute to it, particularly given the contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and for Bradford West (Naz Shah). It took extraordinary personal courage to make such contributions, and I know that they will resonate with the individual experiences of a lot of people watching at home and make a real difference to their lives.

Like many colleagues present today, I have been waiting eagerly for this debate over the last couple of years, since the Queen's Speech in 2017. We thought for a while that we might not see the Bill in this Session, but happily we are here today. That is a testament to the lobbying and campaigning efforts inside and outside this place; and, I have no doubt, to the persuasive efforts of Ministers too. I think it is important to recognise the extraordinary leadership of the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), and the now Minister for Health, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), in getting us to this point. I hope that the Minister will take my comments today in that spirit as we seek to build on this work.

If we rewind the clock seven days to pretty much exactly this time last Wednesday, hon. Members will remember that we had a very difficult session in this place. We all have our version of events and our reasons why we think it was as it was. But collectively we know that, whatever those reasons, we all left with our reputations diminished. More importantly, the reputation of this place was diminished, and that is bigger than all of us. It is therefore really good and important that a week later, we have shown that when we come together in a spirit of co-operation and compromise, sharing our mixed and diverse experiences, we truly make an impact. It shows that the best days for this place are truly ahead—no more so than with this Bill.

This Bill will stand up for thousands of people across the country who are currently suffering abuse, and will hopefully avert it for many thousands of others. My views on the Bill are a matter of public record. I was lucky enough to serve on both the Home Affairs Committee when we had an inquiry on the Bill, and on the Joint Committee so ably chaired by the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), so it is pretty clear what I think about the Bill and where we should go next, but today I want to focus briefly on three things.

Refuges are a precious national asset, and we ought to think about them as such. They are literally the difference between life and death for a vulnerable individual. High-quality, accessible provision is critical, but it needs to be a national network too, because a woman in my community in Nottingham is as likely to need a refuge in Birmingham tonight as they are to need a refuge close to home. But at the moment there is a toxic combination of a reduction in support—Refuge reports cuts to 80% of its services since 2011, at an average of 50%—and significant demand, with almost 60% of all

refuge referrals being declined. This does not and will not work, and the Bill is a golden opportunity to get us to a position where we have a fully funded national network underpinned by statutory status. It is therefore disappointing that the Bill does not have a legal duty to provide. I hope that the Minister will expand a little on the thinking behind that, because both the pre-legislative Committee and the Home Affairs Committee majored on the value of this duty, which I believe is shown by the evidence.

There is also scope to be clear about the need for specialist services. I was lead councillor for commissioning in my local authority for three years. Local authority commissioners are under extraordinary financial pressures, which pushes councils to more generic commissioning, which is cheaper and more flexible. That will not work for refuges, so we should be clear in the Bill about our expectations.

Matt Western *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. From now on, if we have interventions, it will mean that other people will not get in, which would be a great pity, so it would be better not to intervene at this stage. If the hon. Gentleman insists, he will of course be in order, but he will be stopping other people speaking.

Alex Norris: We heard in both Committees about the dangers that single payments were creating. We know that split payments on request will not work. No one is going to march their abuser down to the jobcentre and ask for split payments. If the Bill is not the vehicle for addressing split payments by default, what is that vehicle? If the change does not require primary legislation, why do we not get on to it?

With reference to having a gendered definition, it is welcome to have a statutory definition of domestic abuse for the first time, but it is a failure to define it and not even mention women or girls. Of course men are victims too and require the best possible support, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that domestic abuse is a gendered crime. It is gendered in the volume of victims, in the level of violence perpetrated and what it leads to and, crucially, in its root causes. I have heard Members from across the House today talk about our noble and lofty goal to eradicate domestic abuse. I join Members in that cause, but if we think we can do that in a Bill that does not talk about why domestic abuse happens or what we are doing when we condition our young boys and men to value themselves differently from women, we will never eradicate it.

We must take a stand. I remind Ministers that, in both the pre-legislative Committee and the Home Affairs Committee, we came up with workable solutions after great discussions. I hope that they will consider adopting them at the next stage in the Bill's progress, because this is going to be a great Bill. We are coming together, we are doing a great job on it and I cannot wait to see it proceed.

5.36 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I welcome this Bill. Having sat through the whole of this debate, I want to pay tribute to the many Members from across the House who have made such moving speeches, which I cannot even begin to follow. I want to record my support

[Fiona Bruce]

for the Bill and the support that it enjoys across the House. It has been a privilege to be here today. Last week we saw the House at its worst; today we have seen it at its very best.

I agree with colleagues from across the House who have said that we should learn from reviewing the role of the anti-slavery commissioner and ensure that the Domestic Abuse Commissioner is truly independent of Government. I agree, too, with the many Members who have said that we must remember the impact of domestic violence on children. We must help to break the inter-generational cycle of abuse.

The Joint Committee on the Bill said:

“The cost of domestic abuse to the health service is high. We believe that a campaign to raise awareness and challenge behaviour should be undertaken. . . . Such a campaign could be targeted particularly on online pornography sites.”

I want to touch on that point, because I want Ministers to give more thought to the fact that watching pornography online, particularly violent pornography, is clearly recognised as a causal factor in domestic abuse. I hope that the Government will take action to counter it through amendments to the Bill, but there is also—if I may mention it in this debate—action that Ministers can take today.

The Government have rightly said that one of their achievements is having

“committed to introduce age verification for viewing online pornography through the Digital Economy Act”.

However, there has been an unfortunate delay in the implementation of that world-leading legislation because of a failure to notify the EU. The Government acknowledged that on 20 June. As it happens, the three-month standstill period with the EU ends at midnight tonight. Assuming the EU does not come back tonight with any serious concerns—I think it might be preoccupied with other matters—can the Minister assure me, or perhaps obtain urgent assurance from her DCMS colleagues, that the British Board of Film Classification age verification guidelines will be laid before Parliament tomorrow, so that the implementation date can be three months from tomorrow, on 3 January? This is really important. Last week, the BBFC, which is and will be the age verification regulator, published a summary of research. It is a concerning document setting out that young children are coming across violent pornography and feel that it is affecting their views of relationships and the opposite sex. There are many other findings confirming this. In 2017, the UK Council for Child Internet Safety reviewed the 2017 internet safety strategy Green Paper and said that

“there is...evidence that viewing extreme pornography may be associated with...coercive behaviour.”

The Joint Committee that reviewed the draft Bill said that

“the access young people have to often extreme online pornography...can shape their view of what a normal sexual relationship might be.”

Young people’s access to online pornography needs to be tackled now. There should not be any further delay in the implementation of age verification. The Women and Equalities Committee inquiry into sexual harassment of women and girls concluded last October. There is

significant research suggesting that there is a relationship between the consumption of pornography and sexually aggressive behaviours, including violence. The Government should take an evidence-based approach to addressing the harms of pornography. This is an opportunity for them to do so.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for her work on the Bill, and also for today stating that this is not a Bill to have tagged on to it the issue of abortion. That is right because, leaving aside the question of under what circumstances abortion should be available, reform of the technical aspects of the law underpinning abortion is extremely complex and should not be undertaken by using Back-Bench amendments to an unrelated Bill. To learn our lesson on this, we need only look to the unforeseen circumstances now about to play out, sadly, in Northern Ireland later this month, with a five-month lacuna in the law on abortion there about to start because this place rushed through, with completely inadequate scrutiny, amendments to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Bill.

5.41 pm

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): It has been an absolute honour and privilege to be part of this debate. Certainly, no one was unmoved by the contributions by my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and for Bradford West (Naz Shah). These personal contributions make so much difference to women outside this place.

In attempting to write my speech, and also listening to contributions from other MPs, what strikes me is the names of women and children throughout the year, and years previously, who were murdered as victims of domestic abuse. This Bill could not be more needed. The Home Secretary said yesterday at the Conservative party conference that the Conservatives are now the party of law and order once again. I would gently encourage Conservative Members to say to the Home Secretary that the way to bring murder numbers down is by committing 100% to this Bill.

We need to encourage the Government to accept the gendered nature of domestic abuse, with women being twice as likely to experience domestic violence and men far more likely to be perpetrators. As the Istanbul convention says,

“it should not be overlooked that the majority of victims of domestic violence are women and that domestic violence against them is part of a wider pattern of discrimination and inequality.”

I urge the Government to think again about ratifying the Istanbul convention.

I want to congratulate the family of Clare Wood for creating Clare’s law, including Clare’s dad, my constituent Michael Brown. The domestic violence disclosure obligation is vital in fighting domestic violence, but the heartbreak is that it is a postcode lottery, and only 45% of requests are granted. Early disclosure could save a woman’s life, so it is heartbreaking that this right to know and right to ask is a postcode lottery. When women are desperate—when they do need to get away—the Government must accept this obligation.

As my colleagues have said, refuges must be available. Over 400 women a week are denied a place of safety because there is not capacity. This is absolutely criminal. They go back to situations and we know what the conclusion is. We have heard their names today. We need

greater clarity on the definition of domestic abuse, including distinctions between intimate partner abuse and other forms of family abuse. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West that BAME victims of abuse must also have extra special resources to support them.

In the short time remaining, I will mention some of my constituents. Lucy, a young woman with a son, has suffered. The hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) alerted us to the Kafkaesque nature of the family courts. Her son has been taken from her and placed with the dad, and the mum is really concerned about the son's welfare. We must support these women to ensure that no child suffers because of the arcane nature of some of the family courts.

Jess and Kirsty were victims of economic abuse, driven to the brink by partners stealing from them and blocking legitimate sales of joint properties. The problem is that the banks have no legislation and cannot support. The police cannot support because no legislation is in place. These women are therefore pushed into poverty, often on to benefits and into temporary bed and breakfast, and the children suffer, all because the men in their lives are able to afford to drag them through the courts and strip them of their hard-earned cash and safety net. The Bill needs to go further with the banks so that they show flexibility and understanding when survivors are struggling to get out of financial agreements, such as a joint bank account or mortgage.

I pay tribute to my own council, Kirklees, in particular cabinet member Councillor Viv Kendrick, for taking a proactive approach to the issue. Just this week, Kirklees launched its own domestic abuse strategy based on a model used by the SafeLives charity. The partnership approach recognises that domestic abuse is not just a criminal problem or problem affecting children. It brings together, holistically, the police, clinical commissioning groups, safeguarding groups, community rehabilitation companies, the probation service, housing associations, drugs misuse services and more to tackle the problem, sharing information and pushing prevention and early intervention.

I must also mention meeting a young woman who was a victim of domestic violence and was saved by Sure Start. I also encourage the Government to think about those services for women with children.

5.46 pm

James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin). I echo all hon. Members who rightly said that, following what we might describe as the rumbustiousness of previous days, today we have seen the Chamber at its best, with some amazing, moving and powerful speeches, not least that of the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield).

I strongly support the Bill, but I want to raise an aspect that is not covered by it, which is that of coercive control in a professional relationship, specifically the relationship between therapist and client. This relates to the traumatic case of a constituent of mine. Her daughter was one of a group of young women—all from very affluent backgrounds, not coincidentally, because they were targeted as such—who in 2008 attended an art school in Italy, where they came into contact with a self-appointed therapist or, as she called herself, life coach.

The therapist practised dream therapy and professed to specialise in personal development. Over the course of the next year, the therapist saw up to a dozen of those women for regular therapy sessions. By early 2014, only three women were still seeing the therapist, one of whom was my constituent's daughter. By that time, two of the women had broken off all contact with their friends and families, and had rejected their inheritances. The reason was that the therapist had used a tactic known as false memory placement. She placed into the minds of those girls, those impressionable young women, false memories of being abused by their own mothers. That has been proven and substantiated since, but when the case came to the Crown Prosecution Service, it had to conclude that legislation did not cover that specific outrage.

The current legislation refers to abuse in a domestic setting, and this is the Domestic Abuse Bill—I entirely understand that; nevertheless, in the case of my constituent, there was a crime—call it what one might, but it was theft, the theft of love. The love between mother and daughter was indoctrinated out, being replaced by false hate based on false memories. This is a terrible story, which previously received quite some media coverage, but I will not name anyone because parts of it are still ongoing.

The key thing is that, for me, it would be preferable if the definition of A and B in the Bill was confined not just to family members, partners or ex-partners, but to other types of relationship where coercion and control can happen. I can tell the House that I am aware from other parliamentarians that this problem is not restricted to the case I have mentioned. There have been other cases. The hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) has tried to bring forward a Bill connected with the qualifications of therapists. Previously, Lord Garnier tried to amend the Bill so that it could be a crime to use coercion and control in a professional setting. That is certainly what I would like to see.

I do appreciate the fact that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins)—she is doing brilliant things—has previously seen me about that case. I understand that the desire in the Home Office is to focus on the domestic context, but the fact is that the incident has had profound domestic ramifications, as hon. Members can quite imagine. The good news is that my constituent's daughter did eventually get in contact and has returned, but there are many ongoing implications of the case.

As I say, I know from other parliamentarians, including Lord Deben, that there are many other cases like that one. I hope that, in the course of the Bill's passage, we can look at the specific, relatively niche cases in which the crime of coercion and the use of certain psychiatric tools can emerge but that would not be covered by the Bill as it is currently drafted. I hope to be able to explore that at a later stage, if at all possible.

5.51 pm

Jo Platt (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): May I take this opportunity to thank those on both Front Benches for their work on this Bill? I would also like to thank colleagues, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford West (Naz Shah) and for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), for their contributions.

[Jo Platt]

Before I talk about the Bill, I would like to pay tribute to Leanne McNuff. Leanne was the sister of my soon-to-be brother-in-law. Leanne was murdered in 2012 by her ex-partner in the most horrific circumstances—in front of their then four-year-old son. I know how this has affected the lives of all involved, and that grief will never go away, but I would like to think that this debate and any legislation passed by this House will go a long way to protect victims—and give Leanne’s family some comfort—so that crimes like this do not happen again.

May I welcome the broad intentions behind the Bill? It is a step in the right direction to give victims greater support and protection, but it is only a small step. A recent local case has exposed just how enormous the burden is that victims of stalking are expected to carry, and it has displayed gaps in support that these proposals will not fill. My constituent Nikita contacted me after she was subject to a horrific stalking ordeal, which included threats to her life and her children. Her perpetrator has now thankfully been moved to a psychiatric intensive care unit, but this has not been the end of her ordeal—far from it. He has been placed in an NHS unit less than a third of a mile from Nikita’s house. She has bumped into him in a local shop, and she has found him outside her house. Nikita can also see the NHS unit from her bedroom window.

Understandably, this is causing Nikita severe anxiety and concern for her safety and the safety of her family, but instead of moving the perpetrator away, Nikita finds herself offered new housing by the local authority, and she is expected to accept this move away from her support network. The expectation seems always to be on the victim to change their life. Indeed, when I wrote to the local NHS about their decision to place the perpetrator so close to Nikita’s home, it referred to its policy of placing individuals where they are close to local connections with friends and family in the community that they are familiar with.

The system has totally failed Nikita, and I am concerned that the Bill may become a lost opportunity to implement meaningful reform that protects the victims of domestic abuse and stalking. That underscores why we need a whole-system approach from across society not only to provide immediate support, but to prevent the unacceptable guilt or sense of wrongdoing that many victims feel when they are expected to change their life so dramatically. While this Bill contains many steps in the right direction, even if they are long overdue, it should go further. Until every victim of domestic abuse is given the protection, support and justice they deserve, we cannot rest. I hope that stories such as Leanne’s and Nikita’s bring to light just how far we have to go before society treats the victim with the dignity, compassion and basic respect that they deserve.

5.55 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): One of my frustrations with being in this place is that I am often harangued by constituents who tell me how appallingly behaved the House is, but when I give them examples of the House at its best, they have rarely seen them; they tend to watch only when the House is full and in a rather febrile mood. I very much hope my constituents have watched what has unfolded this afternoon. It is heartening to have such cross-party support on

such a vital issue, but it has also been incredibly moving to listen to hon. Members talk bravely about their own experiences.

I have always promised my constituents I would never break out into applause in the Chamber, but such was the feeling I had when the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) spoke that I did so for the first time. I also pay great credit to the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) for her bravery and for shining a light on issues for particular groups that, to be frank, it is very difficult for me to talk about in the same manner. She represents her community so well. I pay tribute as well to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). It is much easier to say “the Prime Minister”, and I wish I was still saying it, but it was remarkable to hear our former Prime Minister talk about this Bill, which she worked so hard to bring forward. I pay great tribute to her for all the work she has done to serve us.

It is hugely important that we not only shine a light on domestic abuse but do something about it. It is important that we raise awareness and understanding, but we must also improve the justice system and strengthen delivery for victims of abuse. If we do that, we will give them a voice and the ability to vanquish those who ruin their lives. It is essential that the Bill delivers for victims.

That is why I want to focus on what may occur in Committee. It is essential that the Bill remains roughly in a shape that allows it to succeed. There is a great danger that if it is overloaded with too many amendments, it ultimately will not deliver in the way we have discussed. Therefore, although I agree strongly with my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) about abortion reform, which I very much favour, I do not believe this is the right Bill to deliver that reform. I will vote for that reform when it comes, but I worry that there would be an impact on this Bill if it were used in that manner.

I also note the understandable desire to look again at the definition of domestic abuse. It is absolutely right that we recognise the disproportionate impact it has on women, which is understated, but if we insert that in the definition, we may well lose sight of what should be the definition in legislation. It is more important that we have strict guidance that ensures that, for example, local authorities take that disproportionate impact into account when making funding decisions. I look to Ministers to ensure that the Bill is strong enough that services reflect the disproportionate impact of domestic abuse on women.

There have also been calls for relationships between under-16s to be included in the definition of domestic abuse. If we did that, we would need to be very aware of the impact of criminalisation on under-16s and ensure that there were age-appropriate consequences. If the perpetrator is over 16 and the victim is under 16, that is child abuse. We must ensure that we do not lose sight of that.

On barriers to justice, it makes a great deal of sense to extend the prohibition on cross-examination by perpetrators to family courts and, indeed, civil courts. However, I have received petitions suggesting that we would need to think very carefully about how our family court system, for example, would look if we also prohibited cross-examination where domestic abuse was alleged rather than demonstrated, and if we widened the definition to include online abuse.

I am very concerned about the difference in local authority funding for statutory and non-statutory services. We are losing far too many non-statutory services,

which are often those to do with prevention and early intervention, and which prevent us from needing statutory services. Looking closely at statutory requirements in the Bill would help us to deliver its aims.

6 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I pay massive tribute, as everybody has done, to those who have spoken, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford West (Naz Shah) and for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), and the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier), whose contribution was so moving. When we in this place talk about these things, people really are watching. Victims of domestic abuse will today feel that we care about them, and even if that is all we achieve today, that is a good thing to have done.

I notice that during this debate, Prorogation 2.0 has been announced. Somebody sent me a tweet saying that there is a view that Parliament will prorogue—sorry, shut down—again. I want assurances from the Minister, when she sums up, that we will use Standing Order No. 80A—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I am delighted to be able to confirm that. Indeed, the carry-over motion is on today's Order Paper. The Bill is carrying on.

Jess Phillips: Super-duper. I am delighted to hear that.

As everybody else has said, it has been an honour to work on the Bill over the past three years—I wish it had been only one or two—not only with Front Benchers on both sides on the Chamber, but with the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and others who are no longer on the Front Bench, including the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes). She spoke of having listened; I feel delighted to have been in the meeting about migrant women under the Bill that she spoke about so eloquently. Also, I should mention the people sitting in the Box—the civil servants we have worked with to get the Bill in front of us today, and to carry it over. It has been a real privilege to help ensure that this place recognises the effect of domestic abuse on our communities.

For the past three weeks, I have been fighting for us to come back to this place just for the sake of this moment, this day—just so that we could get this Bill back into this place. I found myself in the treasured position of defender of the Domestic Abuse Bill, as though it were mine. It is not mine; it is a Government Bill, and that needs saying. However, as a defender of the Bill, I will defend the point that improvements certainly need to be made to it.

As the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North stated, in the Bill's next stages we absolutely must aim for it to be for all victims and all women—I am not afraid to say “all women” in this context. I truly mean that. It does not matter what a person's status is; if my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury has taught us anything today, it is that it does not matter who someone is; the primary thing we should see when they first disclose abuse is what happened to them. It should not matter if they were born in this country, if they are here on a spousal, student or refugee visa, or if they are an EU citizen. What we should see in front of us is the person, and we should ask what we can do to help them.

The Bill needs a huge amount of work in that area—not just around migrant women, but around disabled and older women and LGBT people.

With all the good work being done in here and across Departments we still need to stop essentially just seeing a benefit-dependent woman with a couple of kids in a refuge. Disabled women are being turned away. I ran refuges and I think we had two disability access beds out of hundreds of beds. It is simply not enough any more. We live in a society where we have to take need into account, no matter what. We have to take into account the likelihood of someone being abused if, for instance, they are a carer or have someone caring for them who can easily control them.

I want to say one final thing—I could speak for weeks and weeks, but I won't. The statutory duty on refuge accommodation is so welcome. I had to explain to my husband what it was when the Ministers rang to tell me they were going to do it. I was not allowed to tell anyone, but I really wanted to tell someone. My husband was slightly nonplussed. We were promised at the time of that brilliant step forward that there would be £90 million in the next comprehensive spending review. We have now had that comprehensive spending review and it was not in there. I would be grateful if the Minister could tell us where the cash will come from.

6.5 pm

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): It has been a true honour to listen to this historic debate. It is a landmark Bill and this needs to be a watershed moment, not only in how we protect victims of domestic abuse, but in how we stop that abuse happening in the first place.

I would like to put on the record my deep respect for my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), who never forgot the importance of this work, despite the many other responsibilities she had as our Prime Minister. I also thank the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), whom I enjoy working with on the Select Committee, and I particularly thank the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for letting us into her heart today.

I recently had the opportunity to speak to a barrister who spent decades specialising in family law cases and who shared with me many examples. We spoke about some of the specifics of the Bill—the importance of a legal definition, the practical support—but what he said was most important was the overall message it would send: that domestic abuse is simply not acceptable, that society stands behind the victim, and that we will not tolerate giving a hiding place to perpetrators.

As a constituency MP, over the past couple of years I have often had victims of domestic abuse come to speak to me because they do not know where else to turn. They are fearful of their abusers and that if they speak out the system will be loaded against them. Those who are brave enough to call for help are fearful during the investigation and in the court process, especially if they have to give evidence in front of their abuser, because they have heard that witnesses can sometimes be intimidated. That fear leads them to suffer for years in silence. It is the fact that the Bill takes action to address these issues that has been welcomed by so many organisations that support victims up and down the country. I would especially like to put on the record my thanks to Safer Places in Essex.

[Vicky Ford]

Many Members have called for action in specific areas, and I would like to mention three. First, I have had cases of parents or siblings who suspect that their son or daughter, or brother or sister, is the victim of violence—they have seen the evidence with their own eyes—but who do not know where to go for advice, and if they report the situation, they find themselves powerless to protect their loved one. Can we look again at these cases of family members who want to help?

Recently, I had a case of a couple where the victim was renting a shared private property with her abuser. Both tenants needed to give permission to cancel the tenancy, so one tenant could not get out of the property without the other's approval, meaning they were trapped in their home. Can we look at the tenancy law in these cases?

Finally, we have seen time and again how online abuse tips over into real-world violence. I recently met representatives of the Revenge Porn Helpline. They are helping thousands of people, and nearly all of the cases involve women. They explained to me how threats of revenge porn trap the victim of violence in the abusive relationship. They shared their concerns that, as the internet moves into deepfake videos, it will be possible to superimpose someone's face on to another person's actions, send the video over the internet and use it as a threat to hold that person in an abusive relationship.

The digital world is evolving at an exponential rate. Time and again we explain to people that we are working on online harms in order to keep people safe, but the work in that space has to accelerate.

6.10 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is a privilege to participate in this debate, and I congratulate all colleagues who have been involved in bringing the Bill to this point.

I will speak briefly about a particular group of women who have experienced domestic abuse and violence: women who offend. According to Ministry of Justice data, 57% of women in prison and under community supervision who have had an assessment are, or have been, victims of domestic abuse. Research suggests that the true figure is, in fact, likely to be very much higher. Some women are particularly vulnerable—for example, those with learning disabilities—and, as we heard earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), some will suffer traumatic brain injury, a situation disproportionately reflected in women in the penal system.

The Prison Reform Trust report of 2017, "There's a reason we're in trouble", makes clear that for many of these women it is specifically the abuse that drives them to offend. Many offend as a result of coercive control or abuse or threats by an intimate partner. That can lead them to commit offences such as shoplifting, theft, fraud or dealing in illegal substances. The Crown Prosecution Service and sentencers do, of course, take account of that context for a woman's offending behaviour, but the approach can be patchy and inconsistent. It would be appropriate, therefore, to consider introducing, through the Bill, statutory protection in such circumstances.

We have a precedent for that in the Modern Slavery Act 2015, section 45 of which provides victims of human trafficking and modern slavery with a statutory defence

if they are compelled to offend. That opens up a route to proactive early case management. It allows all agencies, including the courts, to become more adept at recognising and responding to circumstances that should indicate either that there is no public interest in prosecuting a case or that a statutory defence should apply.

We do not have equivalent statutory protection in relation to victims of domestic abuse who are driven to offend in not dissimilar circumstances. There is a common law defence of duress, but it applies only in restrictive circumstances. Introducing for victims of domestic abuse a new statutory defence equivalent to that in section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act would lead to improvements in how they are dealt with in the criminal justice system, including identification of victims and provision of support. It would also help the UK meet its international legal obligations.

I understand that Ministers are considering that possibility. Indeed, it was pleasing to hear the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, the hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), who has responsibility for prisons and probation, refer specifically to that at the Prison Reform Trust's recent transforming lives conference. As the Bill continues its parliamentary passage, I hope that the option will be taken to include statutory protection for survivors of domestic violence and abuse who offend. I look forward to hearing from the Minister, in her final remarks, the Government's attitude to that proposal.

6.15 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Let me add my congratulations and thanks to everyone who has been involved in the Bill's introduction. Let me also pay tribute to the many moving speeches we have heard today. The debate has brought out the best in this place, but I want to mention in particular the moving accounts given by my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and for Bradford West (Naz Shah).

We need to recognise that, although we are taking a momentous step, it is sad that we need to be here to introduce a Bill such as this. It is a sad indictment of our society. Given that leaders have such an important role in determining the culture and tone of society, we have to ask what that says about the quality of our leaders and our leadership. Although we have legislation which says that women are equal to men, we all know that that is not the case. Unless we address the power inequalities that women face in their jobs, whether they relate to gender pay gap or glass ceilings, it will be a challenge to tackle the power inequalities in their relationships. We need to address the two together. I should like to hear from the Minister how the Government will go about adopting the whole society approach—not just a cross-departmental approach—that has been recommended by Women's Aid.

In the remaining time that I have, I want to add to the comments that have been made today, and also to ask specific questions about our public services and, in particular, our social security system. We need to ensure that the system is supportive, and does not impede women—or men—who may want to escape from abusive relationships. We have already talked about universal credit and the single household payment that is the norm. I know that the Minister will refer to the alternative

payment arrangements that are available, but someone in an abusive relationship may have problems with access to those. The wait of at least five weeks for universal credit is a penalty in itself, but women in refuges may wait for double that time, especially if they have had to leave without any paperwork. One of my constituents, Suzanne, was very brave and left an abusive relationship, but was moved from tax credit to universal credit because of her changed circumstances—the so-called natural migration—and is now £400 a month worse off. The two-child limit is another issue that must be addressed.

I also want to say something about disabled women. As I told the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities when it was investigating breaches in the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities back in 2015, disabled women are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse as non-disabled women. That abuse may be physical, emotional, sexual or financial, and the abusers may be personal assistants or, in many cases, carers. We must ensure that that is recognised.

Finally—I am being quite brief today, Mr Speaker, which is not like me at all—the Equality and Human Rights Commission has said that there needs to be a statutory approach to ensure that public services support both men and women, and has drawn particular attention to the importance of the social security system, which I have already mentioned. That needs to be a human rights approach, and those services need to be adequately funded.

6.18 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (LD): In my time as a GP and also as a forensic medical examiner, I learned very quickly never to make assumptions about who are the victims of domestic abuse, or about how much courage it takes to come forward because of the extent to which such abuse isolates and terrorises its victims.

I pay particular tribute, as others have done already, to the hon. Members for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and for Bradford West (Naz Shah) for sharing their deeply moving personal stories. They will have done so much to encourage others to come forward and take that first step to safety—and this is about safety. Two women a week are killed at the hands of their current or former partners. We also need to do something about the under-reporting of the number of women who take their own lives as a result of being in abusive domestic relationships. We must ensure that there is proper reporting, and also better reporting of the gendered nature of this crime.

It is the job of this House to do all those victims justice and to make sure that the services are there to meet them when they come forward. Likewise, we must ensure that the criminal justice system responds rapidly and sensitively, and that services are also there for perpetrators and we do more on prevention and early intervention, because this crime goes through cycles of generations. Those who have witnessed terrible abuse may be more likely to become abusers themselves.

I will touch briefly on protection orders, on tackling variation, and on alcohol and services. I welcome the change in the Bill to domestic abuse protection orders rather than orders for domestic violence prevention. Those provisions will take us a lot further. It is encouraging that the Bill gets rid of the 28-day limit and that there

will be an increased number of settings in which people can apply for the orders and more individuals who can do so.

There is much to welcome but, as the Minister has set out, that takes time. The Stalking Protection Act 2019 received Royal Assent in March, but sadly it will not come into force until the new year. However much we welcome the legislation, we know that there will be a delay. When the Minister responds to the debate, will she explain how we tackle variation in the existing orders? She will know from Home Office data that there is huge variation. For example, three orders were applied for in one assessment period in Cambridge, as opposed to more than 250 in Essex. There can be no reason for that kind of variation. Some data from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary show that the use of the orders had gone down. Will the Minister set out what we are going to do to encourage the uptake of existing orders while we are waiting for the improved version to come into force?

I would particularly like to touch on the role of alcohol, because I do not think it has come up in the debate so far. Of course, alcohol is never an excuse for violent crime, but typically 25% to 50% of perpetrators have been using alcohol at the time of the offence. In particular, we know that there is a link with the very violent forms of domestic abuse—in those cases, alcohol is twice as likely to be involved. Will the Minister look at how we can take an evidence-based approach to alcohol in our policy? Will she set out what she is going to do to review alcohol policy so that we can make a difference to domestic abuse, as it is a significant factor?

Services must also be available for perpetrators. We are going to introduce protection orders, and it is welcome that there will be positive as well as negative requirements. If people are referred, those services need to be in place so that they can respond. I am out of time, so I shall conclude.

6.23 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a contribution to this important debate. It has been my privilege to be here for the whole debate and to hear many brilliant speeches, particularly the amazing speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), whose courage in speaking about the domestic abuse and coercive control that she suffered will give others the hope and courage they need to speak up and get away.

I pay tribute to the Mother of the House for raising the issue of the “S&M” defence in relation to the terrible death of Natalie Connolly, which was the subject of a powerful speech by the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier); and to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah), who spoke courageously of her own family experience and the needs of BAME women under the Bill.

I particularly want to raise the effect of domestic abuse on children and their inclusion in the Domestic Abuse Bill. Under the Bill, the definition of domestic abuse would not extend to relationships between persons under 16 years old, but this subject has been hotly debated. The Children's Society is arguing for a wider definition and suggests that an age limit of 13 years would be more appropriate, to include teenagers who

[Liz McInnes]

are in relationships and experiencing violence or abuse and to allow for an early response to prevent abuse from escalating. This view is supported by the Office of the Children's Commissioner, but opposed by Action for Children to ensure that abuse of under-16s is always regarded as child abuse. However, the NSPCC makes the point that child abuse can include the emotional impact of being exposed to harm as a result of witnessing the abuse of one parent by another. It says that by failing to recognise children as victims in law, the Government are missing a crucial chance to give young people an extra layer of protection.

At the Labour party conference last week, I met a representative from Barnardo's. She was delighted that the Bill was going to be discussed, and she welcomed the Government's commitment to it. However, she talked to me about the impact of domestic abuse on the lives of vulnerable children. Living in an abusive household is hugely traumatic for children and can cause long-lasting emotional scars. Without the right support, children in this situation are at risk of becoming trapped in a lifelong cycle of violence. These children need access to vital services such as counselling and mental health services so that they can recover from the harm they have suffered and work towards a positive future.

Research demonstrates that specialist children's services reduce the impact of domestic abuse and improve children's safety and health outcomes, which is why it is so concerning that dedicated support for children and young people is falling. The Joint Committee supported retaining the age limit of 16 because of concerns that a consequence of lowering it would be the criminalisation of perpetrators under 16 years old. However, the Joint Committee recommended that the Government conduct a specific review of how to address domestic abuse in relationships between under-16-year-olds, including age-appropriate consequences for perpetrators, and I hope to see the results of that review and that guidance colouring the way in which we debate this Bill.

Women's Aid has recently launched a website called LoveRespect to support teenage girls at risk of relationship abuse and to challenge myths around the nature of coercive control. Teenage girls may not realise that they are experiencing relationship abuse, and they are less likely than older women to call a helpline. Researchers found that two thirds of teenage girls who had been in abusive relationships did not recognise the behaviour as such. This highlights the importance of educating young people on what healthy relationships should look like. Having a bad boyfriend should not be seen as an acceptable rite of teenage passage. We need to get the impacts of coercive and controlling behaviour into the Bill, given that it will inform efforts to address domestic abuse and guide the response of agencies and statutory services. It is vital that the needs and experiences of children are reflected on the face of the Bill.

6.28 pm

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate and the spirit in which it has been conducted across both sides of the House. There has been an atmosphere of support, particularly to those who have experienced coercive control and violence, and that is very welcome.

I also very much welcome the bravery of my hon. Friends who have spoken out about their own personal experiences. We need people to recognise across the House and across the country that this can happen to anyone, and that everyone can need our support at some time. I hope that the atmosphere of this debate can feed through into a zero tolerance of domestic abuse and coercive control, because these things are happening too widely. With 2 million adult victims and millions of child victims, this is happening in a substantial number of households across every constituency and across every walk of life.

There are so many areas that we need to cover in the Bill, in other Bills and in other Departments, as I said to the Secretary of State in an intervention earlier. From my personal experience on the Work and Pensions Committee, I can say that the first is the way in which the benefit system does not support women who are leaving violent or coercive relationships. They can be left without even the fare for a taxi to get away from the household they are living in. It is welcome that each Jobcentre Plus now has a domestic violence specialist, but unless people are prepared to come forward and declare that they are a victim of domestic violence—or exhibit the signs strongly enough for it to be recognised—it will not be recognised.

The former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions declared that universal credit payments should go to the main carer in the first instance, and I hope that that will be done. Just 60% of payments go to the main carer, and that is not good enough. It means that for 40% of parents on universal credit the money does not go to the main carer, and it is important that that happens.

Other hon. Members have mentioned the two-child limit, the benefit cap, and the local connection rules for housing, which often mean that women who have escaped a relationship simply cannot get by and have to return to a violent environment. That is just not good enough.

We also need to make sure that employers support victims of domestic abuse. I worked for the shopworkers union, USDAW, and the reps did some fantastic work learning about the signs of domestic abuse and how to support victims. We are still seeing employers seeking to avoid giving paid leave to victims of domestic abuse; failing to allow them flexible working; and refusing to allow them to change to another branch of the firm if they have had to move away from their original address. Those are all simple ways in which employers can support victims of domestic violence.

We also need to make sure that those who work on the frontline are protected from third-party harassment. In a shocking case, one of my constituents had been abused in a long-term relationship. She left the relationship, and her ex-partner came to the shop where she worked to threaten, harass and violently assault her. Even though she had a protection order against him, her employer told her that it was not good for the image of the company for her harasser to turn up, and if she did not stop him doing it, she would lose her job. We cannot have victims of third-party harassment from any member of the public—and, particularly, victims of abuse—not receiving protection under the law. I hope that the Minister will look at including that protection in this Bill or another that comes forward very soon.

We need to make sure that victims of domestic abuse feel that they can come forward in any situation, whether they are claiming benefits or in work. I hope that the Bill will enable us all to make that happen.

6.33 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be the final contributor from the Back Benches in this amazing debate. It has been a fantastic debate in which we have heard the personal stories of my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford West (Naz Shah) and for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield)—and how moving were their accounts.

I want briefly to pay tribute to three of my constituents who are experts in this field. The first is Harriet Wistrich, a barrister from the Centre for Women's Justice, who led the work on the Sally Challen case. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West will appreciate the work that Harriet has done in driving forward legal change so that other women who have been forced into a situation in which they have killed their husbands or partners receive a fair trial and access to the law.

The second person I briefly wish to mention is the outgoing chief executive of Solace Women's Aid, Mary Mason, a constituent of mine and an expert in her field. Her life has been dedicated to improving the situation for women, and I am sure everyone in this House would like to thank her for the years and years she has given to women who have been facing violence.

The final person I wish to mention is a woman who has tragically passed away but who also did an amazing amount of work. I understand that she worked closely with the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) in developing not only the beginnings of this Bill but the Modern Slavery Act 2015. I refer to Denise Marshall, who tragically passed away due to cancer a couple of years ago but who did an incredible amount for Eaves, a fantastic charity that works closely with government to promote better services for women.

Each of us will have a domestic violence charity or statutory sector service in our constituency, and mine is Hearthstone. What is wonderful about it is that it is based in the local authority but it has its hands on the allocation of housing. Before, when best practice was considered to be in the voluntary sector or civic society, it could be an advocate, but being based within the council allows Hearthstone to keep a close eye on allocations. It is hearthstone in a great position to assist women who are escaping domestic violence.

I wish to make two quick points that we have to consider when we finalise the Bill. The first relates to women and families who have no recourse to public funds and the second relates to women on different spousal visas. A number of Members have mentioned that today, and I want to mention it so that we can be assured that it is looked at once again before Third Reading. I would be grateful if the Minister clarified what view she is taking on different immigration arrangements, as there are women who are trapped in violent relationships because of their spousal visa arrangements. We desperately need that element of the Bill to be sharpened up before it goes to Third Reading.

Matt Western: My hon. Friend is making some extremely important points. Does she agree that there are two issues here? The first is about access to accommodation,

particularly for women who have been in refuges. There is a lack of capacity in council house provision, so authorities are struggling to place women out of refuges and those women are then spending considerably longer than expected in refuges. The second issue is the lack of provision within local police forces of specialist officers who can deal with victims of domestic abuse.

Catherine West: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. The right hon. Member for Maidenhead put it well in her good speech: this is not just about the legislation. We have to have resources, more police and more services at local level. We can have the best legislation in the world, but if we cannot enforce and we cannot prevent, what is the point of our sitting here and having beautiful legislation?

6.38 pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): It is a privilege to reply to the debate this evening, which has shown the House of Commons at its very best. I wish to start by paying tribute to the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), who made what I believe to have been her first speech from the Back Benches since leaving office as Prime Minister. She set the tone of the debate and said that domestic violence was not something that should ever be viewed as being “behind closed doors”. That attitude was prevalent in the past and we must do all we can to ensure that it is not prevalent in the future.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for making a courageous and extraordinarily moving speech. Not only did it have a considerable impact on everyone in the House who heard it, but it will have an extraordinary impact on everyone outside this House and give them extraordinary confidence about speaking out in the dignified way she has done today.

I also pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), and to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier), for their remarks about the harrowing Natalie Connolly case. I am sure that amendments will be tabled in Committee that relate to the issues that were identified in that case.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) for her remarks about serial perpetrators; to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), who drew on her experience of working in the domestic violence field in the past; to my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman), who spoke very well about the Bill's potential impact; and to my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle), who spoke very well about an issue to which I shall return—the cross-examination of victims in the family courts by their perpetrator.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) spoke about the various people who have had an impact on the Bill's coming into being. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) for her extraordinarily moving contribution, both about her mother and her experience as a survivor. Her speech, too, will reverberate far beyond this House. Her achievements are an inspiration to others.

[Nick Thomas-Symonds]

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), who spoke about controlling behaviour; my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), who spoke about refuge funding; my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin), who also mentioned the need for reform of the family courts; my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Jo Platt), who spoke very movingly about the experiences of Leanne and Nikita; my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), not just for her speech but for all her extraordinary work in this area; my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), who spoke very movingly about experiences in prison; my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), who talked about the importance of a whole-society approach; my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), who spoke about the impact of domestic violence on children, and my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Ruth George), who spoke about reform of universal credit. It was fitting that my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) ended with a tribute to charities in this area, who do so much across all our constituencies to make lives better.

The Bill has produced a remarkable degree of welcome consensus in the House today, but it will clearly need work in Committee. I will start with the definition of domestic violence. I agree with the former Prime Minister, who said that it was clearly a step forward to have a statutory definition. Reading clause 1, though, it seems to me not to include abuse perpetrated by a person in a position of trust. I believe the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) mentioned an example of it, but there may be other examples in the domestic context that are not quite covered by clause 1. I ask the Minister to go away and look at that issue. Hon. Members across the House have picked up other issues, including the impact on children and the gendered nature and impact of domestic abuse, that need to be considered as the Bill progresses.

I welcome the appointment of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner, although I consider that person should be full time. The commissioner must obviously have the powers to provide the strategic oversight that we need, and to hold public authorities in this area properly to account.

I welcome the domestic abuse protection notices and domestic abuse protection orders, and the extension of special measures for complainants mentioned both by the Lord Chancellor and the Chair of the Justice Committee in their opening speeches. I consider that the domestic violence disclosure scheme should be on a statutory footing, and I am pleased to see that in clause 55. As many hon. Members have mentioned, one of the issues with domestic violence is that it is often the victim who ends up homeless. I welcome in the Bill the suggestion of new secure lifetime tenancies in England, which is a step forward.

I return, though, to the issue of cross-examination in the family courts. It has been the case for some time in the criminal courts that perpetrators of domestic abuse could not cross-examine their victims in person. It is high time that that protection was extended to the

family courts. However, as I think the Joint Committee picked up, it does not seem to be mandatory; it still seems to be at the discretion of the court. The last thing we would need is for that to be inconsistently applied; it should be consistently applied across the system. That point that has been picked up already.

There are other issues, of course, that are not a part of the Bill as it currently stands. There is, for example, no statutory duty to fund refuges, but we all know that refuges are in dire need of more funds. There also needs to be a whole look across Government at other policies that have a huge impact in this area, including, for example, to whom universal credit is paid and the five-week wait, just to mention two particular issues that clearly have an enormous impact on domestic violence that the Government need to consider.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), in an intervention, mentioned migrant women, which is a very important issue. They are too often denied the chance to apply for indefinite leave to remain and prevented from accessing the public funds and the services they require. I urge the Government once again to go away and look at that situation.

This Bill before us today clearly contains a series of measures that will be welcomed across the House, but I urge the Government to keep an open mind in Committee about various issues that will arise in the course of this Bill. If the Government are willing to be constructive, we can, together, make it a much better Bill. I do pay tribute to those on the Government Front Bench and, indeed, to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for the work that they have done so far. I urge them to continue working together to make this a truly historic Bill of which we can all be proud.

6.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I hope that colleagues will forgive me if I depart from what Ministers normally do in winding up—which is to look at our files and the prepared speeches that our wonderful officials write for us—and speak from my heart because this has been an extraordinary debate. We have had the most compelling, the most heartfelt, the most heartbreaking examples of domestic abuse laid out before us. I cannot hope to do justice to those accounts in the short time that I have, but I will do my best. Any points that I have not been able to cover, I will, of course, write to hon. Members and put letters in the Library.

There have been 38 Back-Bench speeches in this debate and every single one has had an extraordinary contribution to make to the Bill. I should say that I am particularly grateful to the Lord Chancellor, who joins me on the Front Bench. I also want to record my thanks to the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), who is replacing—if he can be replaced—my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) in working through this Bill. I want to record my thanks to them.

In those 38 speeches, many, many experiences—horrific experiences—have been put before us. Hon. Members have very much drawn us into the lives, the suffering and, as I have said, the heartbreak of millions of our fellow citizens, whether constituents or not.

There are a few names out of an incredibly long list that I will mention because they have caused such an impact in the Chamber and, indeed, outside the Chamber. The first is that of Natalie Connolly. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) and, indeed, the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), the Mother of the House, set out the agony that the Connolly family have gone through in the case coming before the court concerning their dear daughter, Natalie, the facts of that case and of similar cases. I cannot help but be horrified by some of the experiences that victims of sadomasochistic sexual acts, which defendants then claim as a defence in court, have gone through. It is extraordinary and I will very much go away and reflect on the matter. It may not be this Bill that deals with that, but I do think that we must look at it very carefully and see what more can be done.

The next set of names that I think the House was touched by—I am very mindful that Claire is here in the Gallery—are those of Claire, Jack and Paul Throssell, represented very ably by their Member of Parliament, the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith). I have had the privilege of meeting Claire and listening to her experiences at first hand. I would challenge anyone not to be incredibly moved by Claire's story and not to be haunted by her story for many, many days after they have heard it, so I thank and salute Claire for being here today and working on behalf of other victims.

The hon. Member for Leigh (Jo Platt) mentioned Leanne and Nikita. I thank her for bringing their experiences into this debate.

Then we move on to our friends and colleagues who have themselves been incredibly brave in describing their own experiences. My friend the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) talked about her mother Zoora, and of course about her own experience of forced marriage. I am very keen that we all understand that although the words “forced marriage”, “FGM” and so on are not in the Bill, they are examples of the categories of behaviour that we have set out in the definition, and they will be in the statutory guidance, so people should be under no illusion: we consider those acts within intimate relationships to be examples of domestic abuse.

Then, of course, there was the account of our friend the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield). I sat here listening and thinking, “She is doing a very good job of representing her constituent. This is a terribly sad tale.” It was not until she said, “and then you introduce him to the leader of your party” that I shook myself a bit and thought, “My goodness—are we on a journey different from the one that I had anticipated?” She used words that every person who works in the field of domestic abuse will recognise, such as “hyper-alert” and “abject rage”. She spoke of bills piling up and finding out months later that they were unpaid. And then there was the final phrase: “emotionally exhausting”. The hon. Lady has done more to further the cause for victims of domestic abuse today than we have seen in a very long time, and I thank her sincerely for her contribution.

This Bill is truly groundbreaking, and I am delighted that we have agreement on that. I fully accept and acknowledge that we are not all agreed about parts of it, and of course that will come through in the scrutiny of the Bill. But we have this Bill before us today because

of the determination, commitment and grit of my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). I think it is extremely telling that, after some 20 years on the Opposition and Government Front Benches, she has chosen as her first contribution to speak in this debate about a cause that is very close to her heart. I am extremely grateful to her not just for her contribution today, but for the fact that we have this Bill and are driving this work forward in Government.

There are other colleagues I feel obliged to mention, because I see this as a Bill that is owned by the entire House. I must thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), who started the journey by bringing in, with the Lord Chancellor, the controlling or coercive behaviour offence. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton), who was my predecessor in this role and who insisted on the terminology of economic abuse being included in the definition, because our understanding of it is so much better than it was even a few years ago. Though wanting to spare the blushes of a member of the Whips Office, I must also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) because when he was on the Front Bench in another guise, he worked hard on the secure tenancies provision that we now see in the Bill.

As I say, I consider this to be a Bill that is owned by the whole House, and I thank colleagues across the House for their work not just today, but in the run-up to Second Reading. That includes, of course, the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). I tried to learn some Welsh before I got to this part of my speech, but I am afraid that it is beyond me. I also thank the “professional feminist”, the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), who does so much work—work that we are now much more comfortable talking about—tackling the perpetrators, including serial perpetrators, to stop the cycle of abuse.

I also thank the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) for his work on cross-examination—it is always a pleasure to work with him—and, of course, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), who has been and continues to be a staunch advocate for victims of domestic abuse. I look forward to grappling with some of the more difficult issues with her in due course.

I am delighted that the Bill received the level of pre-legislative scrutiny that it did through the Joint Committee, which was chaired so ably by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). Her leadership and that of others on the Committee has meant that the Bill is in a better place than it was before they scrutinised it. We have accepted many of the Committee's recommendations and there are still recommendations that we are working on and may add in Committee. I thank every member of the Committee and its Chair.

The hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) asked Ministers to be open hearted. We are absolutely open hearted in admitting that this Bill is not yet in the place that it should be. It has to be perfected through scrutiny. In particular, hon. Members have rightly raised the issue of refuges. Hon. Members may recall that, when the Bill was introduced, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's consultation on refuge accommodation was still live, so by definition we could not make amendments to the Bill or add clauses at that stage. However, we are working through the

[Victoria Atkins]

consultation responses and I am confident that we will be able to move amendments in Committee, which I very much hope will meet with hon. Members' approval.

I am conscious, too, of the comments made by the hon. Member for Bradford West and others about specialist services. I myself have been on a learning curve when it comes to the particular requirements of women who are perhaps suffering cultural difficulties as well as abuse, in the more conventional sense that we would understand, in the home. That will very much form part of our review of those services.

Colleagues have also rightly been holding me to account on funding. This year's spending review, being a one-year review, is unusual, but we are clear that funding will be a priority in the 2020 spending review and we will push for appropriate funding for all the important services that hon. Members have mentioned.

I also acknowledge the concerns about migrant women. Women—all people who are suffering domestic abuse—must be viewed as victims first and foremost. We have not got it right yet with migrant women, but we are conducting a review, as we told the Joint Committee we would. We are looking at everything and will do our very best to bring forward those proposals in Committee. There might be things that we can do that do not need to be in primary legislation. The House should bear with us while we work through the review and we will see what more we can do.

Colleagues have rightly mentioned the definition. There have been many thoughts about whether it goes quite far enough. I am very conscious of the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge), who raised the impossible situation that a constituent and their family found themselves in with a person—a therapist—in a trusted position. There are concerns about positions of trust. [Interruption.]

I have just had my dress tugged, because if I do not sit down before 7 o'clock, the Bill will fall, so forgive me if I stop mid-sentence, Madam Deputy Speaker. I very much hear colleagues' concerns about the definition and, if I may tackle the gendered point, we absolutely acknowledge that domestic abuse predominantly affects women. However, we are conscious that, of the estimated 2 million victims in our country, about a third are male. We cannot ignore those victims. In fairness, I do not think that anyone is suggesting that we should, but we are going to make the gendered nature of the crime apparent on the face of the statutory guidance, which I think will be significant.

To sum up, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead said, this statute is only part of the solution. There is consensus that we all have to ensure that people begin to understand what domestic abuse entails, that the relationships that they are entering into are not healthy and that girls growing up can expect much better from relationships in their adulthood. That is absolutely what this law and the non-legislative measures are directed at. The Bill is vital, but there is so much more that we need to do to ensure that everybody understands that domestic abuse is everyone's business.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Thank you. What an excellent, thoughtful, constructive, calm debate. I sincerely hope that those who observe our

proceedings will see just how well Members of this House behaved when we were bringing about an important piece of legislation that actually affects the lives of millions of people.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Domestic Abuse Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 21 November 2019.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—*(Mr Marcus Jones.)*

Question agreed to.

DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Domestic Abuse Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(a) any expenditure incurred by virtue of the Act by a Minister of the Crown; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable by virtue of any other Act out of money so provide.—*(Mr Marcus Jones.)*

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the motion in the name of Secretary Priti Patel relating to Domestic Abuse Bill: Carry-over.—*(Mr Marcus Jones.)*

Question agreed to.

DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL: CARRY-OVER

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 80A(1)(a),

That if, at the conclusion of this Session of Parliament, proceedings on the Domestic Abuse Bill have not been completed, they shall be resumed in the next Session.—
(*Mr Marcus Jones.*)

Question agreed to.

Welsh Language

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mr Marcus Jones.)

7.2 pm

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): Diolch, Madam Deputy Speaker. Rydw i'n falch iawn o gael y cyfle i wneud araith am yr iaith Gymraeg yn San Steffan heno. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak about the Welsh language here in the Palace of Westminster tonight.

I tabled my request for this Adjournment debate for several reasons: first, because I believe the Welsh language to be of such importance that it should be on our agenda here at Westminster at least once in every Parliament; and for the rather more selfish reason that this may well be my last speech in the House of Commons before I retire at the forthcoming general election, and I wanted to speak on an issue of special personal interest and importance to me.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): First, on a personal level, I want to wish the hon. Gentleman very well in his retirement. I have always enjoyed debating with him over the years we have been together in this House. Secondly, I commend him for his choice of topic for this final debate. Many parents in my constituency—increasing numbers, actually—seek Welsh-medium education for their children, and it is great to see him here putting that forward on a national stage.

Glyn Davies: It is good to find myself, and anticipate finding myself, in agreement with quite a few Members in the Chamber, which is probably quite pleasant.

I speak with a special personal interest in that Wales and matters Welsh have been absolutely my focus as an MP, my overriding interest, and almost at times, I think, my obsession since being elected in 2010, as they have been throughout my 40 years in public life before that. Other hon. Members will have their own perspectives, which will inevitably sometimes be different from my own. The first half of my comments will be about the history of the Welsh language and where it has touched on my own life, before I share thoughts about attitudes and investment for the future.

I was born in Montgomeryshire, or Sir Drefaldwyn in Welsh. I have always lived there, and I have no ancestors who were born anywhere except in Sir Drefaldwyn—at least that I know of. More unusual is that I think every single ancestor spoke Welsh as their first language. Again, that is as far as I know, but I have gone to a lot of trouble to try to find out.

There were two main reasons why my five sisters and I were the first generation not to be bilingual—we were Davieses, Lloyds and Evanses, and everyone was bilingual until my generation. First, my parents moved from the Welsh-language villages of Llanerfyl and Pontrobert to the predominantly English-language villages of Castle Caereinion and Berriew. The second reason was more significant and pertinent to this debate. At that time, and for some time before, Welsh was seen as the language of failure. It was simply not encouraged. It was the age of the Welsh not. I do not remember hearing my parents, both first-language Welsh speakers, ever speak

[Glyn Davies]

Welsh in front of the children. That is not in any way a criticism; it was not at all unusual at the time. That had an impact on all of us.

I left education aged 16, to join my father on the family farm, during a long period of his illness. However, I fancied myself as a writer, and in the early 1960s I wrote an essay for an eisteddfod competition, "The Future of the Welsh Language". We could write in either English or Welsh, it was 20,000 words—quite significant—and it involved weeks of research. My reward was to win the chair and to be crowned bard, but the key point that I want to make is that my essay predicted the end of Welsh as a spoken language—not at all an uncommon belief at the time. Many academics would have taken the same view. But time has proven my conclusion to be too pessimistic. The future, as it so often does, decided to take a rather different course.

Throughout the period of my youth, the inevitable reaction was a strong pro-Welsh language protest movement, in response to the long-term decline. There were marches and protests, and even properties burnt down. There were Saunders Lewis, Lewis Valentine, Gwynfor Evans and others well known in the history of Wales. There was also the early development of the political voice of Wales, and of Plaid Cymru. In fact, as I have admitted in this Chamber before, the first time that I voted it was for Plaid Cymru, as it happens—[*Interruption.*] I have told my own party, so it will not come as a shock.

Crucially, from the mid-20th century, there was a change of political attitude. I have no desire to make any partisan or political points, except to record my pride that my party played a significant and proactive part in that change. Mrs Thatcher's Government established S4C with what I shall call encouragement from the great Gwynfor Evans, who went on hunger strike to support the cause. The biggest advance, in my view and that of many others, was the Welsh Language Act 1993, when Lord Wyn Roberts was such a key player.

Today, we have reached the stage in the recovery of the Welsh language at which the Welsh Government have formally adopted the aim of there being 1 million Welsh speakers in Wales. That is beyond the imagination of any of us 20 years ago. I do not know how realistic that aim is, but 20 years ago it would have been laughed out of court. We can now have that sort of serious prediction, which is unbelievable for those of us who care so much about the language.

Today, yr iaith Gymraeg is in a far better place than anyone could have predicted in the middle of the last century, but those who want to see the Welsh language succeed cannot be complacent. Across the world, there is always ongoing pressure on all minority languages. Survival depends on continuing support, battling against political and economic pressures.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Rydw i'n ddiolchgar iawn—I am grateful to my hon. colleague and, in particular when talking about Welsh, friend. I would like to raise with him the great significance for the future of languages of the increasing digitalisation of our means of communication. With the Government looking at digital by default, it is essential to ensure that the language is not only available but accessible. Someone

should be making sure that Welsh speakers are encouraged to use the Welsh language by default. In some instances, such as the Disclosure and Barring Service scheme, we need to look at how to ensure that happens—we are looking at the future now. I briefly congratulate the hon. Gentleman, and I hope that we will have a few more speeches from him, but this is a very worthwhile one.

Glyn Davies: The right hon. Lady makes a very good point, which could be spread to quite a lot of other areas as well. Our means of communication change so much, and we always have to be looking forward to different ways of ensuring that the language has its place.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

Glyn Davies: I will take another intervention. I will allow others, although I would prefer them to be on the Minister later because I want to finish my comments.

Jim Shannon: May I add my thanks to the hon. Gentleman for all the debates he has been involved in, and for his work on the all-party groups in which I have sat alongside him? I thank him for his contribution.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned minority languages. As an Ulster Scots speaker and one who loves the language, I believe there is something beautiful in speaking with our cultural and historical tongue. Does he not agree, however, that it is inappropriate to use any of our historical languages as a political weapon—it is very important to take them forward as something we love because of what they mean, rather than to try to use them for any other purpose—and that any attempt to do so must be vehemently and actively opposed by any true historical linguist?

Glyn Davies: Again, I very much agree with that point.

Because Welsh language policy is devolved, I accept that our role here at Westminster is largely, though not exclusively, a supportive role. The main policy levers lie with the National Assembly for Wales, but in my view it is important that the UK Government make clear policy statements that we support constructive policy objectives, rather than just pay lip service. Over time, we have seen some objections to interventions designed to grow and protect the Welsh language, because they do carry responsibility and cost. However, I hope we can all support a policy that all children should have meaningful contact with the Welsh language, and that we can support increasing opportunity to use Welsh outside the education environment, particularly in the workplace. Personally, I believe we should encourage more learning of Welsh through sport and culture, and where young people take their forms of entertainment.

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing the debate. I know that he has indicated his intention to stand down at the next general election, so although he and I do not always agree on a lot of policy areas, there are some areas in which we stand united—our love for Wales, for example—and I thank him for his service to date.

I am a Welsh learner, but my husband is a Welsh speaker naturally, so I know how important our national language is and how much we all still welcome the Welsh

Language Act 1993 and its amendment, the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. Will the hon. Gentleman join me in highlighting the immense pride many Welsh speakers feel, and the need to maintain its parity and equality with English and to encourage as many people as possible in Newport West, Montgomeryshire and the whole of Wales, as well as the rest of the United Kingdom, to think about learning Welsh?

Glyn Davies: I thank the hon. Lady, and I would like to return to that point, if I may, in the last sentence of my speech.

Welsh language policy is devolved, but devolution is not totally clearcut in all areas. There are opportunities within the devolved settlement to promote the language here at Westminster. Today, I believe the Secretary of State for Wales has committed Government investment to mid-Wales as part of the mid-Wales growth deal—£55 million towards a total investment of £200 million. The programmes will be guided by Ceredigion and Powys County Councils, but I hope the investment will be able to take into account the impact on the language and support the language. I very much hope that there will be an opportunity for input from the MP for Montgomeryshire, and even perhaps from an ex-MP for Montgomeryshire—who knows?

Finally, I want to finish with another personal reflection on life, and what happens in life when we grow older and start to ask ourselves who we are as an individual and where we come from, perhaps when sitting by the fence in the garden, enjoying a *glasiad o gwrw* and thinking about life. For me, it was when a lifetime of playing rugby and squash and running was coming to an end, and perhaps it was the lectures from my nain about the disgrace of my not being able to speak Welsh striking home after 40 years, and not being able to communicate with all of my family. I remember not being able to communicate at all with great-nain, who lived in Dolanog and was monolingual Welsh. She was one of the very last people who could speak only Welsh. I do not know whether there is anybody left now, but she died when she was 97 and she was one of the last, and I could not speak with her.

Anyway, I decided to learn Welsh, and because I became sufficiently fluent to appear on Welsh media quite a lot, many people now engage me on the street in Welsh, in Welshpool, Newtown and all over the place. It is incredibly satisfying. It is just reward for struggling over to Millbank or College Green on a cold, wet, frosty morning at half-past 7 to speak to the audience of “*Post Cynaf*”. To me it is a huge reward and makes it all worthwhile. I am going to miss it when I am not here.

We Welsh MPs must resist a “devolve and forget” attitude. I sometimes think it is so easy for Ministers, when the pressure is on them to deal with what is on their desk that day, to devolve something and then suddenly take it off the agenda and forget about it. We must not do that. Welsh language policy may be devolved, but we retain a responsibility for it. We must not just put Welsh language policy in a box. It is an issue for every Department, not just the Wales Office.

Welsh is a Great British language. It is older than English. Backing the Welsh language is backing the Union. I hope that is not seen as too controversial. It is what makes Wales special. Yes, we have wonderful Welsh landscapes, wonderful mountains and really

wonderful Welsh people, but other parts of the United Kingdom have special landscapes with special people and special mountains. In my view, where Wales is unique in the UK is that we have our own distinctive, widely spoken Welsh language. We must never, ever forget that.

7.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Kevin Foster): *Diolch, Dirprwy Llywydd. [Interruption.]* I thought it was worth an attempt. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) on securing a debate on this important issue. He is a known champion of the Welsh language and campaigner for the right to use Welsh in the House; the Secretary of State for Wales has worked alongside him to see Welsh spoken in the Welsh Grand Committee.

This debate is timely as this is UNESCO’s International Year of Indigenous Languages, the purpose of which is to raise awareness of the critical risks historic languages face and their value as vehicles for change, knowledge systems and ways of life. Indigenous languages play a crucial role in enabling communities to participate in their countries’ economic, cultural and political life.

My hon. Friend was absolutely right to say that this cannot be a matter of “devolve and forget”. The UK Government are committed to supporting the UK’s indigenous languages. As he touched on, Welsh is recognised as an official UK language and is one of the oldest living languages. It is also one of the greatest inheritances for our Union as a whole, so we have a responsibility to protect it and develop a strong future for it. We also have a duty to represent the communities we serve and to understand that, for many people, both fluent speakers and learners, the Welsh language forms an integral part of their identity—their British identity as well as their Welsh identity.

It is good to see that, far from what my hon. Friend’s essay concluded back in the 1960s, almost 30% of Wales’s population aged three and over now say they can speak at least some Welsh. We are therefore seeing progress towards the aspirations of *Cymraeg 2050*, which aims for there to be 1 million Welsh language speakers by 2050 and for the Welsh language to be part of everyday life in Wales, empowering and representing Welsh speakers and their communities.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) on his fantastic speech. In counties such as mine—in Staffordshire, Shropshire and Herefordshire, which border Wales—huge numbers of our constituents go on holiday to Wales and enjoy Wales. We would like at least the opportunity to learn Welsh in our areas. We would like it at least to be offered as an option in some of our schools and colleges. It is vital. I have tried to learn Welsh; I have not had much success so far, but as I too am stepping down at the next election, it is something that I hope to do in the future.

Kevin Foster: Putting my Union hat on briefly and speaking as Minister with responsibility for the constitution, it would be wonderful to see more of the culture of our Union being spread across it, including opportunities to study the Welsh language—and Welsh law, given the nuances that there are, following the devolution of

[Kevin Foster]

law-making powers to the Welsh Assembly. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire would be happy to help my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) learn a bit more Welsh after their joint retirement from this place. It would be good to see schools offering to teach Welsh. Certainly the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales will at every opportunity look to promote the ability to learn Welsh, and not just in Wales, so that people in the rest of the Union can get an understanding of the language, and the rich culture attached to it.

The UK Government will continue to support the targets I have outlined, and will use every opportunity to promote them. My Department is proud to have lead responsibility for the Welsh language in the UK Government, and for ensuring it becomes the language of success, rather than what it was once described as being.

Jane Dodds (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): Diolch yn fawr iawn. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies), who is a good friend, I hope, for the work that he has done in Montgomeryshire. I thank him for his service to his constituency. I am sure that he would agree that there is a real need for more Welsh teachers. I was lucky enough to attend a Welsh school, and to have a nain who lived with us who was monolingual and could not speak English. For me—I am sure the Minister will agree—the important thing was to have Welsh teachers in my Welsh school. I hope he supports the initiative being taken to promote the recruitment and training of Welsh language teachers.

Kevin Foster: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. Of course I support the work being done in Wales to recruit more Welsh teachers. Immersion in a language is the best way to learn it. There is only so much that can be learned in a classroom. It is important to see the language used, and be able to use it for real, not just, as was touched on in one or two interventions, in an educational setting. It is important to be able to see it online and in media, and obviously to be able to speak it with friends.

As part of the work being done by the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, at the National Eisteddfod in August, the Secretary of State, together with the Welsh Language Commissioner, Aled Roberts, launched new guidance for UK Government Departments when planning and delivering bilingual communications targeted at audiences in Wales. This guidance, endorsed by the Government Communication Service, is the first of its kind for the UK Government. Included in this guidance are recommendations and good practice on designing and creating quality bilingual content in areas including events, consultations and campaigns. This guidance will support people working across both Governments, in Wales and in Whitehall, to help us achieve the Cymraeg 2050 ambition, ensuring the Welsh language is visible, audible and, above all, accessible.

My Department has also promoted Welsh as part of Wales Week in London. I was proud to see every aspect of Welsh cultural life represented, alongside showcases of Welsh culture and identity, tourism, and food and drink products; I particularly enjoyed the latter two. We

also celebrated our champions of the Welsh language. My Department has sought a commitment from all UK Government Departments to preserving and promoting the Welsh language. I am pleased to say that 11 UK Government Departments now have a Welsh language scheme, including most recently the Cabinet Office. As some may be able to guess, there has been a series of bilaterals between me as Under-Secretary of State for Wales and me as the Minister with responsibility for the constitution. I found very persuasive my argument that the Cabinet Office, as the Department that very much takes the lead for constitutional and Union matters, needed to resolve the issue and get a Welsh language scheme in place.

It is not just the Office for the Secretary of State for Wales taking the initiative in promoting Welsh language and culture. My colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have encouraged its network of posts to mark St David's day across the overseas network. This year's activities included a digital campaign highlighting Welsh culture, including the Welsh language.

Bringing Welsh to a global stage does not stop there. The Department for International Development launched Connecting Classrooms through their Global Learning Programme, which connects Welsh pupils and teachers with schools all over the world. The FCO and DFID are examples of Departments playing their part in promoting the Welsh language.

The UK Government are also funding award-winning creative output, providing bilingual services and developing initiatives where Welsh plays a central part. This includes the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, which has announced that Welsh language programming will benefit from up to 5% of its young audiences content fund and audio content fund, with the aim of stimulating the creation of dynamic and distinctive Welsh language productions from the independent sector.

The UK Government have also committed to maintaining S4C's funding at its current level for 2019-20. S4C does not just make a contribution to the promotion of the Welsh language; it also makes an important contribution to the creative economy in Wales. It recently moved its headquarters from Cardiff to Yr Egin in Carmarthen, and I am proud that through the Swansea Bay city deal we will be supporting the next phase of this move, which will generate major and positive change to the creative and digital economy of Wales. This will ensure the Welsh language will be seen and heard not only throughout Wales but beyond its borders.

The UK Government are also supporting civil servants to learn Welsh. For example, the DVLA is one of many departments registered as an employer with the National Centre for Learning Welsh, and as a result over 280 of its staff have registered to undertake online Welsh language training courses. It is also championing Welsh in its service provision and has developed a new "Welsh language call handler of the year" award category in its annual contact centre awards to recognise the importance of providing excellence in this service.

The UK Government are constantly looking to improve our Welsh language services. Most recently, the Department for Work and Pensions implemented a Welsh version of the universal credit online system and is ensuring that all its digital services are in Welsh as well as English. It has also undertaken a number of Welsh language-specific recruitment exercises to ensure it has enough Welsh-speaking

work coaches. This has been considered a leading case study of best practice for Welsh language recruitment, and it has been sharing its experience with other UK Government Departments.

Welsh language considerations are also being embedded in other Departments. The Home Office has Welsh language champions who raise the profile of the Welsh language across the Department and its arm's length bodies. It has also run successful campaigns in the Welsh language on forced marriage and female genital mutilation. I hope this gives the House a flavour of the UK Government's passion for and commitment to the Welsh language.

I would like to end on a personal note. It is sad news that my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire

will be standing down at the next general election. The £55 million announced today for the mid-Wales growth deal is perhaps another example of what he has achieved for his constituents during his time in the House. I know that his support for the Wales Office has been greatly appreciated by me, my predecessors and the Secretary of State for Wales, and he will be greatly missed in this Chamber. The House will also lose a great champion of the Welsh Language. That said, we will be delighted, I hope, to welcome back in his place another champion of the Welsh language, Craig Williams.

Question put and agreed to.

7.27 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 2 October 2019

[SIR DAVID CRAUSBY *in the Chair*]

Community Pharmacies

9.30 am

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the role of community pharmacies.

May I say what a pleasure it is, Sir David, to serve under your chairship this morning, and to have you join us for this important debate?

Between the ages of 14 and 18 I worked in a local chemist shop two evenings a week and some Saturday mornings. There were the usual first job responsibilities: restocking shelves, cleaning, and meeting and greeting customers and patients who were not always well, for a variety of reasons. I loved it, because there is never a dull moment in a pharmacy. I remember a frantic mother handing me dead headlice taped to a piece of cardboard, and someone asking me to run a pregnancy test on a bottle of cough medicine, before discreetly letting me know that it was actually a urine sample rather than cough medicine and that that was the only secure way she could find of transporting it to the chemist shop.

The shop was exactly what it said on the tin. It was a community pharmacy, and the whole community would walk through those doors for advice, medication and reassurance. I remember the older people, whose relationship with the pharmacist was the longest-standing and most trusted relationship they had with a clinical professional. I remember a long-term recovering addict, who would bring his daughter with him every day. We watched her grow up, and supported him as he worked hard to stay the course on his journey to recovery.

That is why community pharmacies matter, and it is why they work. However, it appears from the community pharmacy contractual framework announced in October 2016 that that was not appreciated. There was a reduction from £2.8 billion in 2015-16 to £2.68 billion in 2016-17 and £2.59 billion in 2017-18. That represented a 4% reduction in funding in 2016-17 and a further 3.4% reduction in 2017-18. When inflation is factored in, as well as all the services that pharmacies already offer free and whose costs they absorb, that was a near fatal blow to the service nationwide. The then Minister, the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), told the all-party parliamentary group on pharmacy that he expected between 1,000 and 3,000 pharmacies to close, as they would no longer be viable in the face of the cuts, with multiples and chains of pharmacies best placed to survive, and independent and more rural chemists left at a disadvantage.

In March this year the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee found that 233 community pharmacies have closed in England since the Government funding cuts were introduced. Sixty-nine were independent pharmacies and a further 22 were independent multiples. The number of closures anticipated by the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire has not yet been

reached. However, I have spoken to people in pharmacies, and others contacted me ahead of the debate, and many are operating at a loss, clinging to the hope that the funding arrangements will improve, but with a business model that, as the right hon. Gentleman predicted, is not viable.

The impact that the funding cuts have had on patients is really difficult to justify. The cost of delivering prescriptions to those who find it hard to leave the house was previously absorbed by local chemists, but that is no longer possible. Boots was the last of the big four chain pharmacies to start charging for delivery over the summer, with all patients having to pay £5 for delivery, or £55 for a 12-month delivery subscription, by the end of the year. All have some exemptions for particularly vulnerable customers, but Boots, LloydsPharmacy, Rowlands Pharmacy and Well have all reduced free deliveries, or started charging for delivery.

There is no funding for arranging drugs in trays. When I worked in a pharmacy, it was a big undertaking to arrange medicines in trays by time and day, predominantly for older people who needed that degree of support if they were to live well for longer by taking their medication at the right time and in the right doses. Pharmacies were delivering a degree of invaluable social care, and that is no longer possible in the present financial climate. We can all see what the consequences will be. Ultimately the result will be more costly clinical interventions.

In addition to the financial pressures that pharmacies face, drugs shortages are now becoming debilitatingly resource-intensive across the NHS. Pharmacies have no ability to absorb the costly hours spent sourcing drugs or speaking to GPs about possible alternatives. A Bristol GP, Zara Aziz, recently wrote in *The Guardian* of her experience of medicines shortages. She explained that EpiPen users in Bristol are now being told to use their old EpiPens up to four months after the expiry date. She also tells the story of a patient in acute distress from arthritis pain when a commonly used anti-inflammatory, Naproxen, suddenly became unavailable. Eventually, a very small quantity was found, but the patient was forced to use it sparingly, not as she had been prescribed, as none of the alternative anti-inflammatories would have been suitable for her.

My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) shared with me a photo of a poster from *Pharmacy Magazine*, which has gone up in her local hospital. It says, "Please don't blame us for the NHS medicine shortages. It is a nationwide problem. Please ask your local MP to help." The poster included contact details of local MPs handwritten on the bottom. We very much hear those concerns, and we are here to ask the Minister to get a grip on this problem.

Shortages are caused by a combination of different issues. The implications of Brexit are inevitably a factor that will play out over the coming weeks and months. However, we know that the NHS and the UK are potentially losing out to more profitable and attractive markets. In addition, the stockpiling, as a precaution, of certain drugs that are harder to source, coupled with the deliberate and more alarming manipulation of the markets by some wholesalers to deliberately push up prices, is having a detrimental effect. New regulations are also having an impact on manufacturing processes.

[Holly Lynch]

On top of that, cash flow is a massive challenge in community pharmacies. Community pharmacies pay out for drugs and are reimbursed by the Government the following month. The situation is made even tougher still, however, because they are not always reimbursed what they have paid out for drugs, particularly for drugs that are in short supply. By law, pharmacies have to do everything in their power to source a drug and dispense it, even where prices have become inflated due to a shortage. Let us take Naproxen as an example. One of my local pharmacies tells me that earlier this year the cost of a box shot up from about 26p to about £15. The tariff price paid by the Government to reimburse pharmacies for Naproxen peaked around February, at £12.50 a box. The medicines shortage is having the perverse effect of forcing pharmacies to dispense at a loss. In previous budgets, there might have been just enough for the pharmacy to absorb this cost. Those days are long gone. The system is clearly no longer fit for purpose.

Earlier this year, the Government introduced the serious shortage protocol in the Human Medicines (Amendment) Regulations 2019. It was intended to be a safety mechanism to help cope with any serious national shortage. It gives pharmacists the ability to dispense a reduced quantity, alternative dosage form or generic equivalent to that stated on the prescription. There would be a small payment to pharmacies for undertaking that process. Despite pharmacists and GPs feeling that they are spending unprecedented amounts of time sourcing medicines or researching alternatives, not a single drug has appeared on the list, which means that pharmacies and GPs do not get paid any extra to compensate them for the time they now have to dedicate to that element of dispensing.

Although there are no drugs on the serious shortage protocol, there is a separate concessions list, which acknowledges that, due to a shortage of a drug, the price has changed. At the end of September, there were 45 drugs on that concessions list. Again, inclusion on that list does not acknowledge the time involved in having to source the drugs, which is becoming the largest part of the pharmacist's day. Nor is there any attempt to fund that work.

There was some hope for community pharmacies more broadly in the community pharmacy contractual framework published in July, which takes effect from October 2019 through to 2023-24. The five-year deal commits to not cutting the budget any further. However, when inflation is taken into account, it will still see pharmacies unable to meet costs, for all the reasons I have outlined.

Strangely enough, what the framework does do is realise the potential for pharmacies to alleviate pressures on the wider NHS, paving the way for a much more integrated approach. The 111 service is now able to refer a patient directly to a pharmacy for an appointment. The framework seeks to expand the delivery of clinical services in pharmacies. It is all great stuff, which is very welcome, but I return to the clear warning given by the then Minister back in 2016 that between 1,000 and 3,000 pharmacies will not be viable and will be forced to close if overall funding does not increase.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. Given the pressures all our A&Es and acute hospitals face, does she agree that the community pharmacies in many areas across the UK do a magnificent job—particularly those specialised pharmacists who relieve the pressure on A&Es? If community pharmacies are put at risk and we lose them, there will be even more pressure on our A&Es and acute hospitals at a most awkward time for our society.

Holly Lynch: I could not agree more. I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that important point. It was very welcome that in the community pharmacy contractual framework—for the first time, I think—the Government really did understand that. However, the funding to allow pharmacies to survive long enough to deliver those services has not been forthcoming. For all its aspirations to deliver more clinical services, a pharmacy that has been forced to close can deliver diddly-squat. Does the Minister accept that community pharmacies' potential will be realised only when they are funded to survive?

Like many colleagues, I am incredibly concerned about the impact of medicine shortages, both on the NHS and on patients themselves. It is contributing to the mix of factors that are piling unbearable financial pressure on our local chemist shops. I hope the Government have a plan to respond and keep our trusted, effective community pharmacies open.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. I will call the three Front Benchers at 10.30 am. Several Back Benchers wish to speak. I will not put a time limit on speeches, but if hon. Members keep them to about seven minutes or less, everybody will get an opportunity to speak.

9.41 am

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) for securing this important and pertinent debate and for giving me an opportunity to raise an issue of great concern to residents of Heywood and Middleton.

We know that community pharmacies have struggled with the funding cuts that the Government have introduced since October 2016. As my hon. Friend pointed out, figures compiled in March by the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee show that 233 community pharmacies in England have had to close since those cuts were introduced. Evidence from local pharmaceutical committees across England supports the picture of community pharmacies struggling financially. Independents are being hit the hardest and have been forced to cut hours or staff as a result.

A consequence of that was highlighted to me last week by my constituent Karen, who told me that her local independent community pharmacy was to start charging £5 for the home delivery of medicines. As my hon. Friend said, the same measure has already been adopted by the four multiples: LloydsPharmacy, Rowlands, Well and—the latest to join—Boots, which recently announced that it would charge a one-off fee of £5 or a 12-month subscription fee of £55 for delivery of prescriptions ordered in branch.

The actions of those multiples seem to be having a knock-on effect on our local independent community pharmacies as they struggle to cope with year-on-year funding cuts. With the cost of a prescription now at £9, the additional charge bumps up the total cost to a hefty £14 for those who pay for their prescriptions and makes an absolute mockery of free prescriptions for those who qualify. If someone is on free prescriptions but cannot get to their local pharmacy because of illness or disability, the delivery charge means that their prescription is no longer free.

As a result of these decisions, some of the most vulnerable people in our communities will suffer, including many who rely on the delivery service to access much-needed and essential medication. Sadly, many people in our communities suffer from chronic loneliness and simply do not have the social contacts to ask someone to collect their medicine for them. I would be interested to hear the views of the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), the Minister for loneliness, on this draconian measure; I will write to her after this debate, when I hope I will have received some response from the Minister who is present.

I urge the Minister to look carefully and seriously at this really important issue, which appears to be a growing problem. The Association of Independent Multiple Pharmacies says that continuing challenges to pharmacy funding are not helping the situation, with the five-year funding cap not covering

“inflation, volume increases and national minimum wage increases.”

The five-year period will be increasingly painful for many pharmacy businesses already under heavy financial pressure. It is only to be expected that many pharmacies will reassess all their existing costs, including the costs of services that they currently deliver for free. The financial model is simply unsustainable for the next five years. I ask the Minister to think about the impact that the changes will have on vulnerable, lonely and housebound people, and to consider approaching the Chancellor to request funding for this vital service and bring an end to this tax on the sick.

9.45 am

Sir Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) for securing the debate. I have a non-financial interest to declare: I chair the all-party group on pharmacy.

Community pharmacies play a major role in supporting the prevention agenda, which is a key development in the NHS long-term plan. As an integral part of the NHS, they are also a valued community facility with a positive track record of improving access to healthcare services. Compared with GP surgeries, there are more than 11,600 community pharmacies across England, and 89% of the population are estimated to have access to one within a 20-minute walk. That percentage rises to 99% in the most deprived areas of our country. We should recognise that community pharmacies are crucial.

There is still much more that could be done to unlock the huge potential of pharmacies and to further integrate them with emerging local healthcare networks. For example, service commissioning is patchy across the country, meaning that not all patients can access the same services from their local community pharmacies. More than 95% of community pharmacies now have

a private consultation room from which they can offer advice to patients and a range of nationally commissioned services, such as the flu vaccination service. In 2018-19, 1.4 million flu vaccinations took place in community pharmacies. Two years ago, when the service was first introduced, other parts of the medical profession did not like the idea of pharmacies moving into that area, but the figures show that it was a good idea.

The new medicine service allows pharmacies to provide support for people with long-term conditions who have been newly prescribed a medicine to help improve medicine adherence. My hon. Friend mentioned it in relation to the elderly. I am sure we all know that more than 70% of NHS expenditure in the UK is on people with long-term conditions in the acute or primary sector. It is important to recognise that. Many pharmacies are commissioned to offer public health services by local authorities and the NHS.

On the new national services in 2019-20, my hon. Friend mentioned the community pharmacist consultation service, which is something we should look forward to, with the community pharmacists as the first port of call for minor illness or for the urgent supply of medicines. Pharmacies will offer patients a consultation to help manage their minor illnesses or provide an emergency supply of medicine. The service will take referrals from NHS 111, but in years to come such referrals could come from other settings such as GP practices and the NHS online. That is a progressive move so that we can access services far better than we can at the moment. We will see how it goes.

The other national service is hepatitis C testing. Pharmacies will offer testing for people using pharmacy needle and syringe programmes to support the national hepatitis C elimination programme. There will, however, be an extension of the reach of the six mandated public health campaigns that community pharmacies have to take part in, and many community pharmacies will also choose to take part in the pharmacy quality scheme. This year, that might involve preparing for engagement with primary care networks, which is crucial. When I first talked to my local primary care network about where the pharmacy fits in with this, they were not at all sure. We also have: carrying out audits on prescribing safety for lithium, on pregnancy prevention for women taking valproate, and on the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs; checking with patients with diabetes whether they have had annual foot and eye checks; reducing the volume of sugar-sweetened beverages; complete training and assessment on look-alike, sound-alike errors, which is crucial for us all; updating risk reviews; completing sepsis online training and assessment, along with risk mitigation; and completing the dementia-friendly environment standards.

From April 2020, all pharmacies will be required to be able to process electronic prescriptions and to have attained healthy living pharmacy level 1 status. Accreditation will mean the pharmacies are local hubs for promoting health, wellbeing and self-care, and providing services to prevent ill health. That is the real move we should be seeing in community pharmacy now, to promote population health and reduce health inequalities. Pharmacies have a major role to play in that.

With regard to other future pharmacy service developments, as part of the five-year deal community pharmacies may also be able to support the appropriate

[Sir Kevin Barron]

use of medicines through the expansion of the new medicine service to other conditions. In addition, the NHS will use the national pharmacy integration fund to pilot services for potential roll-out. These include a model for detecting undiagnosed cardiovascular diseases and smoking cessation referrals from secondary care. That is crucial—this is a matter for another day—when we see the reduction in smoking cessation services here in the UK, yet still more than 85,000 of our fellow citizens are dying prematurely each year from smoking-related disease.

Further services include: the use of point-of-care testing around minor illnesses to support efforts to tackle antimicrobial resistance; routine monitoring of patients, such as those taking oral contraception, under an electronic repeat dispensing arrangement; activity to support primary care network priorities, such as early cancer diagnosis and tackling health inequalities; and a service to improve access to palliative care. These are the ideas that the community pharmacy has got and where it is going to move in the next five years. That is crucial.

Once again, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax for securing the debate and providing this opportunity. The issue of expenditure has been mentioned, although I will not go into the history of it now. The Minister will be acutely aware that when we had the pharmacy integration fund, it was set aside after the cut. In fact, it was not used very well and lots of money was left in there. We are now moving into areas where that money should have been used. It is crucial that we get the money now on the table into frontline pharmacy services.

9.53 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Sir David; it is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) on securing the debate and thank her for doing so. Community pharmacies are an important issue in my constituency, as they are in hers, and indeed in the constituencies of everyone who is here to contribute. Elected representatives who keep their ear close to the ground will know that community pharmacies have a critical role to play, why is why I wish to touch on them here.

It is a pleasure to see the Minister in her new post. This is only her second debate in Westminster Hall, and the first in which she is going to have to answer some hard questions, but I have no doubt that she is up to it.

I have spoken numerous times about the importance of community pharmacy funding, especially in rural areas, because it is absolutely essential. For people who are rurally isolated or ill, knowing that their local pharmacy will collect their prescription and have it ready to collect—or even deliver it, as they often do in my constituency—is very important. That point cannot be emphasised enough. It makes all the difference to an ill person and it is critical that we have that system in place.

I agree with the NHS protocol that does not allow GPs to prescribe annually, but I also know the strain that it puts people under to undertake to have a new prescription allocated, collected, left at the pharmacy

and then further collected. It is time-consuming and means a lot of effort for those who are ill and rely on public transport. Community pharmacies take much of the legwork and stress out of this.

We all know the problems of getting community transport in rural areas, whether buses, taxis or even getting friends to help with collecting prescriptions. They are as important to our ill and vulnerable people as any other NHS service, and the funding cuts have put too much pressure on that service already.

I assume that all the elected representatives here today have received letters similar to those that I have received outlining the difficulties facing community pharmacies in Northern Ireland. I will highlight those that frighten me the most—I use the word “frighten” because that is exactly what they did. They hail from a rural constituency with stretched service provision. One such letter states:

“The results illustrate the cumulative impact of the funding and the workforce crisis as stark.”—

these are strong words—

“Aside from pharmacy staff leaving by choice, a significant proportion of pharmacy owners, 39%, have been forced to reduce their workforce as they can no longer afford to cover the salary costs. To try to compensate for staff losses, 95% of pharmacy owners have increased their own working hours”.

In other words, they are now working longer hours just to ensure that their pharmacies cope. Some report regularly working 80 to 100 hours a week, which I suggest is above and beyond the call of duty. In addition, the letter states that

“93% of contractors report being forced to reduce the level of additional services they can offer, with 41% reducing or applying to reduce their pharmacy opening hours.”

Those figures illustrate the issues: 30% of staff are leaving by choice; 41% of pharmacies are reducing their staff; and those in charge of the pharmacies are working almost 100 hours a week. Against this demonstrable crisis in workforce, the core workload continues to increase. Dispensing activity over the past nine years has risen by almost 40%—again, pharmacies are doing more work with fewer staff, which compounds the issue—to a level of around 55 million dispensing episodes in 2018-19 alone. That is a colossal number of prescriptions handled and dispensing episodes.

Over the same period dispensing fees have been reduced by around 30%, which is an example of marked underinvestment in an essential service, where safety and accuracy are critical to the public and the health service. I am not saying for one minute that things are going wrong, but we want to ensure that the general public's safety is always at the forefront. For that to happen, pharmacies need to be assisted financially, and they must have the opportunity to get the staff they need.

The community pharmacy workforce survey contains a number of recommendations for turning things around in the sector. I have no doubt that the Minister's response will help make these things happen before it is too late. I ask her to be cognisant of the recommendations, because if they are applicable to Northern Ireland, then they are applicable to the UK mainland. The thrust of the recommendations is that there must be better communication. How often do we say that there should be better communication? There must be better communication between Government Departments, elected

representatives and their constituents on new legislation coming through. It is critical that we have better communication between the Department and pharmacies, because they need to know what is happening. The Government and the Department need to be responsible to them too.

We have TV campaigns outlining when it is appropriate to seek a pharmacist's attention, rather than to see a GP. That is all good stuff. People can now visit their pharmacist to ask about minor ailments, taking some of the pressure off A&E departments. That is part of what they are trying to achieve over the next period of time. Yet the information about what can be treated and how to get that help is not communicated. Better communications are a way of doing things just that wee bit better.

Over the years I have suggested to Government Departments, including the Department of Health in Northern Ireland—health is a devolved matter—and to Health Ministers here that we could perhaps do things a lot better. For example, we could let pharmacies take on responsibility for some minor things, such as checking for glaucoma or diabetes. It would be helpful if those things could be checked for in pharmacies.

In conclusion, with this body of trained professionals we have the potential to ease the burden on GPs and enable better surgery efficiency, yet that has not been tapped into. We have the potential to make people's lives a lot simpler with an appropriately funded community pharmacy. By not doing that, we are losing highly trained professionals and adding more strain to an already overburdened GP system. If we do not help the pharmacies, we do not help the GPs or the A&E departments. This needs an overhaul, and who better to feed into that than those operating the service at present? I look forward to hearing the Minister's response and, hopefully, some positive replies.

9.59 am

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir David. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) for securing today's debate.

A couple of weeks ago, I went to visit a local community pharmacy in my constituency, and the superintendent pharmacist sat me down to tell me his tale of woe, which has been echoed across the Chamber this morning. He runs seven pharmacies across the city, serving 20% of the population, but he has seriously struggled over the past three years and is wondering whether he will be there next year. He has ploughed in tens of thousands of his own money just to keep the business afloat. That certainly highlights how many single-handed pharmacies have closed in the city.

Part of this is about the Government funding cuts, not least to the establishment payment, which covered things such as rent, regulatory registration and insurance. Part of it has also been about the loopholes for the clinical commissioning group and how it is now buying branded generics and not giving the headroom that pharmacies used to have. For instance, if people were purchasing a drug at, say, 60p and it had a value of 90p on tariff, there would be headroom of about 30p. That money was then ploughed back into the business to run other essential health services and to ensure that there

could be free deliveries of pharmaceutical products to the community. Pharmacies just do not have that headroom any more.

The situation is made far worse by the multinational companies—we have heard about Boots, Lloyds and the others—which have the buying capacity and the space to be able to drive up the price at the wholesalers, which in turn means that the independents pay more when they go to purchase their pharmaceuticals. I have always called it the Walmart model, because that is how many of these companies operate. They try to push out the competition by making it impossible for the independents to participate in the market. That is certainly what we see here.

There is a toxic combination of cuts, CCGs facing tough financial lines—the CCG in York is always struggling—and, on top of that, the wider market pressures. Of course, the multinationals can spread their risk. They sell other products, and they are owned by multinational corporates, which gives them a further cushion in their operations. The impact is that, where some of those big companies have bought up independents, they are then closing them in crucial communities.

Clifton in my constituency is an area of high deprivation, with one of the lowest ages of mortality in the city and a real need for a community pharmacist, but Lloyds has pulled out of that community. That means that while people are waiting, say, three weeks to go and see their GP, they cannot just pop down the road to their community pharmacy as an alternative, because it is simply not there.

That is building more pressure on the independents, because people go to them to get the free delivery now that, as we have heard, the big companies have seen a gap in the market—surprise, surprise—and are charging their drug delivery tax to get more resource. That means that the independents, which are trying to provide that community service, are delivering further and further afield, which is costing them more, and they have less resource to do that with. We need to address the drug delivery tax to ensure that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax set out, we get these products to those people in our communities who are incredibly vulnerable.

I draw the Minister's attention to one other scandal in the industry, which is that companies such as Boots are paying only 9% corporation tax. As a result, the Government are losing out on £1 billion a year. If we think about the scale of the cuts and the £200 million that has been removed, it does not take long to realise that, if Boots was forced to pay its corporation tax, we would not see pharmacies struggling and going to the wall, or communities suffering and losing those essential community services.

I ask the Minister to go back to the Treasury and make sure that those tax loopholes are closed. Boots moved into a multinational company, which I believe is 49% American-owned, and it is now registered in Switzerland, so it does not have to pay the same overheads. That is another inequality built into the market that must be addressed. The pressure cannot continue, or we will lose our community pharmacies. As I said, one pharmacist, who oversees seven pharmacies, does not think he will be there next year. That is seven communities across my constituency and York Outer that will not have a community pharmacy on the street corner.

[*Rachael Maskell*]

It is vital, therefore, that the new Minister gets to grips with this issue. She must make sure that the right investment goes into our communities, that those loopholes are closed for the CCGs and for tax, and that the drug delivery tax is not put on pharmaceutical products.

10.6 am

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) for bringing forward this issue, which is important for the whole country. Community pharmacies play a vital role wherever they are, but that is especially so in large dispersed rural communities such as mine.

As we have heard, many of those community pharmacies are in increasingly marginal positions and are at risk of closure—indeed, many have closed. That is tragic for them, their patients and the communities that they are at the heart of. It is also a tragic wasted opportunity. The Government should make far better use of our community pharmacies to secure their futures and to benefit patients. The Government could provide sufficient funding for pharmacies so that they can provide an agreed range of patient services to prevent ill health and to keep people who are living with chronic conditions from getting worse, as hon. Members have mentioned.

I sat down with one of my local pharmacists in Kendal a few weeks ago. He told me that the Government have an opportunity to commission a national minor ailments service provided by community pharmacies. The key objective would be to use the talents and expertise of our pharmacists and, in doing so, to remove pressure from GPs and A&E departments in other parts of primary care in the NHS.

Pharmacists in my area serve communities as diverse and widespread as Sedbergh, Hawkshead, Ambleside, Staveley, Windermere, Milnthorpe, Kendal, Kirkby Lonsdale and many others. All the pharmacists I speak to fear that their numbers may be further whittled away by the Government, either by design or by attrition. The Government and people in the sector have talked about there being 3,000 fewer pharmacies. On behalf of local pharmacists and their patients, I say that that would be unacceptable. We want clarity from the Government on the number of pharmacies that they envisage, and we want a commitment to maintain the number that we have.

In the past, Health Ministers have expressed admiration for the French community pharmacy model, which pays for community pharmacies across the board to provide more patient services, such as conditions tests, smoking cessation and blood tests. Will the Minister commit to commissioning such services from community pharmacies across England comprehensively, not just case by case?

Community pharmacies would also be aided by having greater flexibility to dispense authorised medication when the pharmacist is away for a short time, perhaps visiting a local care home. The Government should also consider allowing big national pharmacy chains to share their automation platforms for prescription assembly with smaller independent community pharmacies to reduce costs across the board.

There is also the issue of fair payments. Many independent pharmacies in the south lakes are in danger of going out of business because of reductions in payments for prescriptions by NHS England. Often, the money that pharmacies receive from the national health service does not even cover the cost of the drugs being dispensed. In one shocking case, a pharmacist in my constituency in a relatively small Lake district village, who I have visited regularly, received in one single month £5,000 less in NHS payments than they had to pay out in wholesale drug payments. And that is on top of that pharmacy losing on average 10% of its NHS income each year over the last three years. That is utterly unsustainable, but it is replicated across our communities. So I ask the Minister to intervene personally to put this matter right.

We see a picture of a community pharmacy network that is full of wonderful, talented, highly skilled and dedicated professionals, who provide vital services to patients and their families, and that is part of the glue that holds communities—particularly rural communities—together, but it is being let down by an unambitious approach to community pharmacy from Government, which undervalues what these pharmacies do and, even more importantly, undervalues what they could do.

Therefore, I ask the Minister to consider the proposal in my early-day motion—which, thanks to the non-Prorogation, is still alive—for an essential community pharmacy scheme, to support community pharmacies in rural areas such as mine and to keep them open and thriving. Moreover, will she heed the calls from pharmacists across the country, who are merely calling for fairness in payments and for the ability to use their skills to serve their patients and communities, removing debilitating pressure from other parts of the NHS?

10.11 am

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you chairing today, Sir David. It is also a pleasure to speak in a debate in which the contributions so far have been full of knowledge and experience of the grassroots. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) on securing it and on setting out at the start, from her own personal experience, the strength and importance of community pharmacies in their communities. They really are at the heart of communities.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron) spelled out clearly the potential of community pharmacies. I think the Government recognise that potential in their NHS long-term plan, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax pointed out, they do not provide the funding to deliver on that potential.

Every day in this country, 1.6 million people visit a community pharmacy, so it is not surprising that the 2016 petition to save community pharmacies was one of the largest ever seen in this House. It demonstrated the commitment of communities across the country to their community pharmacies.

In visiting local community pharmacies across Scunthorpe, Bottesford and Kirton in Lindsey, I have seen the huge range of work that they do: dispensing medicines, dealing with minor injuries, administering flu jabs, and, as has already been said, being at the sharper end of drug shortages. Making sure that the drugs are there is a massive job and needs a lot of resource to

ensure that it is done. As other colleagues have said, community pharmacies are a core part of the public health network, doing important work.

Community pharmacies are at the heart of communities and keep an eye on people, arranging their medicines in trays and delivering them free of charge to people's doors. However, as my hon. Friends the Members for York Central (Rachael Maskell) and for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) have said, what is now developing is a drug delivery tax, which threatens the survival of this service. That is because the very people who most need it are the very people who will not use it—that is the nature of the loneliness and other challenges in these communities, as my colleagues have said.

As the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) said, pharmacies are very important in rural areas, but they are also crucial in areas such as Westcliff, which is in the heart of the urban part of my constituency. There, the community pharmacy is the only health service that is close to the local community, which has many health needs.

A local community pharmacist contacted me recently, and I will use his words to describe what it is like at the sharp end. He points to

“Huge shortages and price hikes by suppliers of generic drugs from July 2017 onwards”,

and says that the Department of Health is

“not reimbursing us for even the cost of drugs, let alone giving us a purchase margin”—

something my hon. Friend the Member for York Central talked about in great detail and with great clarity. He says his pharmacy has been losing £10,000 a month since July 2017. He has not been able to afford to replace the two dispensers who have left in the past three months, so local people are losing their jobs as a result of the cuts, and the pressure on those remaining, although they continue to work really hard—I know because I visited them recently—is beginning to take its toll.

He says:

“The government has agreed to a five year funding package with no annual increase to the funding package. I would have at least expected an index linked funding package with index linking to NHS pay rises. The DHSC has given pay rises to all the other sectors of healthcare like GPs and Dentists but has chosen to effectively give a 9% cut over 5 years to community pharmacies.

As you know, community pharmacies are still struggling from the impact of the £250 million cut announced in December 2016. Since then, I have struggled...and...I have had to borrow hugely just to keep afloat. The net result is that my business is in danger of defaulting on the bank loans/overdrafts and might be potentially looking at bankruptcy. I have 20 employees who are mostly Scunthorpe residents and they are unlikely to find any work quickly if we were to go under.”

That pharmacist asks me to ask the new pharmacy Minister, who I congratulate on her appointment—she has shown since she came into this House her commitment to this area of work, and I can see from the way she is listening to the debate that she wants to make a difference—several questions. They are:

“why the Government chose not to give community pharmacy a pay rise given to other primary care health sectors...why the funding was not index linked...how the Government expects us to invest in our staff and premises with what is essentially a cut”

and

“how community pharmacy is expected to be part of Primary Care Networks when our sustainability is in jeopardy.”

That is from the frontline, from a man who is delivering excellent service to my local community and to patients locally and who wants to carry on doing so. The Government recognise the value of community pharmacies. If they want community pharmacists to continue to deliver, they need to give them the ability to do that, and not to speak nice words, without delivering. As well as talking the talk, the Government need to walk the walk on community pharmacies.

10.17 am

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) on securing this important and timely debate on community pharmacies. Those are critical resources at the heart of all the communities in our constituencies and the first port of call for many of us who experience common or low-level health complaints.

In the North East Lincolnshire clinical commissioning group area, there are no fewer than 30 pharmacies, ranging from branches of Boots—we have already heard some discussion about that this morning—and pharmacies operating out of supermarkets to companies such as Periville, which runs three pharmacies on Cromwell Road, Wingate Parade and Ladysmith Road, two of those out of medical centres. Day Lewis Pharmacy, in Scartho medical centre, gave me my flu jab last year—thanks very much—while Cottingham Pharmacy on Wellington Street in the East March area has been run by the family for 60 years.

We talk about the community element of pharmacies, and Tim Cottingham recently joined me and the Labour campaign for drug reform in a community event hosting about 150 people to talk about the development of drug treatment, the lack of community drug and alcohol support, and the essential role played by pharmacists. Tim knows so many of his customers and provides an incredibly intimate service, working with them to improve their health and move them further away from the trappings of addiction. The tales he told the audience, with compassion and empathy for the human being behind the addiction story, were quite remarkable. That was something I had not seen or heard before, and I was not necessarily expecting it. It was very eye-opening, and we should recognise the important role that pharmacists play in people's day-to-day lives. Pharmacists provide vital services to residents in Grimsby, and not only do they dispense medicines to those who need them, but they provide residents with advice and guidance to ensure they make a rapid recovery.

North East Lincolnshire pharmacies also take pressure off GPs by providing a minor ailment scheme for anyone who does not pay for their prescriptions, and by providing free advice and treatment for illnesses such as colds, coughs, flu, hay fever, dry eyes, athlete's foot, conjunctivitis and many other complaints that might end up at a GP's door without the presence of such an amenity. Given how important our pharmacies are to our health system, it seems counterproductive for the Government to say that they want to develop sustainability and transformation plans for the long-term needs of local communities, and then to cut nearly £300 million from the community pharmacy budget, thus harming those amenities that sit at the heart of our communities.

[Melanie Onn]

The impact of the cuts has been severe. The Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee found that in the two years since the cuts were introduced in October 2016, more than 200 pharmacies across the country closed their doors. That includes E A Broadburn of Scartho, which operated and moved into a medical centre, but ended up closing due to loss of footfall.

Lloyds Pharmacy on Dudley Street is part of a much larger corporate structure, but presumably it was not making the returns from that site and decided to close. It sits right on the edge of the West Marsh, which is one of the most deprived communities in Great Grimsby, and that closure meant the loss of another service, including out-of-hours provision.

Independent, stand-alone stores are not necessarily inside medical centres, hospitals or supermarkets, and they can provide 24-hour pharmacy services much more easily than those that are co-located in medical centres. Such closures therefore mean the loss of another service and emergency access pharmacy on which communities rely. Both those shopfronts remain empty, which means another hole in the small parades of shops in which they sat. They were not quite on the high street, but they were certainly on community high streets, and such things make people feel that their communities are not being properly invested in.

In 2017, Ian Strachan, then chair of the National Pharmacy Association, pointed to pared-back services, reduced opening hours and lower morale in the pharmacy workforce as evidence of the pressure that all pharmacies are experiencing. Will the Minister confirm that the extra investment in primary and community care that was announced by the Government last month will not only cover the costs of any extra service that pharmacies might be expected to provide, but will reverse the cuts in real terms?

Great Grimsby contains a number of good medical centres that include multiple GP centres and often contain pharmacies. However, there are also an awful lot of empty spaces, and for a number of years the intention has been for some services to be offered in those community settings. Some things that are done in hospital could be done in the heart of the community, which would be much easier—and there is space available. If that happened, and if some of those services were to operate out of those community-based centres, that would increase footfall and aid some of those pharmacies by giving them the opportunity to reach more people who would otherwise go to hospital.

Pharmacies are often on the frontline when patients encounter wider problems in the NHS. For example, when the contraceptive Microgynon 30 went out of stock earlier this year, it was the pharmacists who spent time informing patients and trying to find solutions to get around the scarcities. All that takes far more time than simply dispensing the drug and can have an impact on pharmacies' bottom line. The Operation Yellowhammer report told us that we might face many more drug shortages in the event of a no-deal Brexit, so have the Government involved pharmacies in no-deal planning and taken into account the pressures that pharmacies might experience due to drug shortages in the event of no deal?

10.25 am

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) on bringing forward this important debate. I do not want to spend too much time summing up and repeating what has already been said by other Members—I have a list of them here—because I want to leave time for the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) to make her case and for the Minister to answer the many questions that have been asked—I know she will appreciate that.

As everyone here should know, the NHS operates differently in Scotland. There are many plus points to being a patient and a user of community pharmacies in Scotland, not least of which are free prescriptions for all and the way the Scottish Government value and support local pharmacies. As we are all aware, pharmacists are in a unique position to improve medication safety. They have the time and clinical expertise to make a difference to how patients manage chronic conditions, for which they might be taking multiple medications.

For many patients, it is probably much easier to consult a pharmacist than a GP. The community pharmacy often becomes the de facto community health centre, and most of us know the value of what those centres do. They can be the first point of care, and how many of us here have just popped into the chemist for a bit of advice when we did not feel well, taking some strain off our GPs?

I pay tribute to my local pharmacy, because I could not have managed the last year and a half of my husband's life without the help and support of its staff. They provided help, advice and reassurance in equal measure and took a real interest in how I was doing. I saw them do exactly the same for other people who visited what is an invaluable point of help.

In Scotland, pharmacists already play an active role in coaching patients on the potential side effects of medication, going out of their way to say why it is important to take medicines exactly as prescribed. Unfortunately, due to this Tory Government's disastrous handling of Brexit, there is a real possibility that community pharmacies and their customers will be left without an adequate supply of medicines. The Operation Yellowhammer documents gave us a real insight into how that will affect our communities. The threat remains significant and, with just 30 days to go until the Brexit deadline, information about medicine supplies and stockpiling is lacking. Pharmaceutical companies tried to stockpile for the 29 March deadline, but warehousing space is much reduced at this time of year, especially as warehouses fill up with Christmas goods.

Of the 12,300 medicines licensed for use in the UK, around 7,000 come to Britain either from or through the EU. According to the Government's reasonable worst-case scenario, the flow of goods could be cut by 40% to 60% on day one following a no-deal break, taking a year to recover. As we have already heard, that would play havoc with our local community pharmacies, because they are very much on the frontline. They are where our communities turn when they need help with medication.

Jim Shannon: I declare an interest as a type 2 diabetic who is on tablet medication. Over the past few weeks, I have been contacted by type 1 diabetics who depend on

insulin. The hon. Lady refers to the need to ensure that medication such as insulin is available after Brexit. I understand from my discussions with the Government that they have assured us that it will be. Does she agree that it is important for the public record that we say that in this Chamber today?

Marion Fellows: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I am not standing here to cause panic; I have spent a long time not trying to cause panic, but I have been wondering what will happen if the medications that people rely on do not arrive, because that really is a critical concern for lots of people. I know that community pharmacies and pharmaceutical companies are doing their very best to make sure that it does not happen.

Because the NHS in Scotland is different, I have had my eyes opened to a number of things that I did not realise were happening. I had assumed that what happens in my own country would happen in England, but it very much does not; I have had that experience in my dealings with Vertex Pharmaceuticals with respect to cystic fibrosis drugs as well.

I have to say that the SNP Scottish Government really do recognise the importance of community pharmacies and are taking action to ensure that they remain properly resourced. In April, the Scottish Government announced that community pharmacies will receive an extra £2.6 million in funding this financial year. We must compare that with the cuts in spending that this UK Tory Government have made to community pharmacies' funding over a number of years, with absolutely no provision being made for inflation, as we have heard.

The package announced by the Scottish Government includes confirmation that the Pharmacy First scheme has been integrated with the national Minor Ailment Service, so there is a real drive for people to consult their pharmacist first. People who can register with the Minor Ailment Service, such as those who are over 60 or in full-time education up to the age of 19, can see a pharmacist and be given medication there and then without having to see their GP. The scheme has recently been extended; it now covers not just things such as diarrhoea, but treatment for uncomplicated urinary tract infections and impetigo. All those things reduce the strain on GP services—we know that across the country, with its ageing population, they are under strain.

The increases in funding have been welcomed by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society in Scotland, which states:

“The RPS supports the Scottish government’s vision for more people to use their community pharmacy as a first port of call.”

The Scottish Government have reviewed pharmaceutical care of patients, and they really want to understand how community pharmacies can be better supported. They are putting their money where their mouth is.

I do not always get to stand here and tell an even better story, but in Scotland we care about how our communities can be better treated and have better health outcomes. To my knowledge—I need to verify this—a local pharmacy in Scotland does not charge for delivery to patients because, as the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) pointed out, people who qualify for a free prescription service are really hammered if they then have to pay for the delivery of their drugs. I ask the Minister to look at that. As hon. Members all

know, I frequently stand here and say, “Can you look at how things are done in Scotland and see whether that can be adapted for better use here?” I plead with the Minister to look at that again.

The Scottish Government really do recognise the vital role that community pharmacies play in Scotland, in rural and in urban areas. I will sit down now and leave the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West to sum up for the Opposition.

10.34 am

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) for securing the debate, and for her excellent opening speech. For their contributions early on this cold Wednesday morning, I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron), the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), my hon. Friends the Members for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) and for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), and the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows), who speaks for the Scottish National party.

It is clear that community pharmacies are valued across all our constituencies. On Friday I will be visiting Davy Pharmacy in Castletown in my constituency. I will hear once again at first hand how my constituents benefit from community pharmacies, and the impact that their services are having.

I welcome the new Minister to her role. I look forward to hearing from her today and to shadowing her in the months to come. I know that health is very important to her, and that it is one of the reasons why she stood to be a Member of Parliament. We previously worked together as officers of the all-party parliamentary group on breast cancer.

I will begin with one of the first things that springs to all our minds when we think about community pharmacies: prescriptions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), the shadow Secretary of State for Health, announced in Brighton last week, the next Labour Government will introduce free prescriptions for all. We believe that prescription charges are a tax on sickness. When as few as 5% of patients actually pay for their prescriptions and many of them struggle to pay, surely it is time that the charge was scrapped.

The £9 per item prescription charge results in some patients on low incomes reducing their medication or going without, which is dangerous and can impact on a patient's long-term health. It can even be fatal, as in the heartbreaking case of 19-year-old Holly Warboys, who died of an asthma attack. Holly did not have a full inhaler because she could not afford one. Nobody should have to pay to breathe.

A large proportion of the 5% of people who pay for their prescriptions budget for them by taking advantage of prepayment certificates, to reduce what they have to pay to the equivalent of about one and a half prescriptions per month. When all the costs of administering the fines and prepayment certificates, and the whole kit and

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

caboodle around charging, are taken into account, it seems eminently sensible, fair and cost-effective to extend free prescriptions to all.

Research backs that up. A study from the University of York has shown how beneficial free prescriptions can be as a means of prevention. When patients suffering with Parkinson's disease, for example, were given free prescriptions, hospital admissions were reduced by 11.4%, patient day care was reduced by 20.4%, and accident and emergency attendances were down by 9%. I am sure that the Minister will see that the policy will improve patient outcomes and save precious NHS resources. I know that she is new to her post, so she might want to make a bold announcement today. Will she match Labour's commitment to ending this tax on sickness? The subject was definitely on the radar of one of her predecessors on the health team, the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), as I had conversations with him about it.

As we have heard, filling prescriptions is only the tip of the iceberg of the services that our community pharmacies provide. There is the potential for the expansion and development of a whole range of services. For example, I would like to see an expansion of pharmacists being able to prescribe, especially basic medications, in order to relieve pressure on our GPs. I understand that that service is very successful where it currently happens. Community pharmacists are the most accessible healthcare professionals, and community pharmacies are a genuine hub for the delivery of a diverse range of health and wellbeing services. The Government's television campaign advises people to ask their pharmacist, because it really is an easy thing to do. That is especially true for traditionally hard-to-reach people who benefit from the barrier-free access to healthcare that community pharmacists provide.

In some circumstances, if there is a high turnover of GPs in an area, the community pharmacist is the only one providing continuity of care, which builds invaluable trust and the capacity for important health interventions. It is therefore a natural and sensible progression to allow basic prescribing, especially if it is coupled with a sort of triage service that is linked to an ability to make appointments for people with more serious concerns directly with their GP.

As we have heard, community pharmacies have long provided a range of services in addition to the provision of medicines, including minor ailment schemes, smoking cessation services, blood pressure testing, support for asthmatics and diabetics, emergency hormonal contraception and monitored dosage systems. Despite that, community pharmacies are in many ways the NHS's best kept secret. They are invaluable in a health service that is overwhelmed by increased demand.

There is so much untapped potential in community pharmacies, as well as some excellent examples of best practice across the country that could be rolled out nationwide. For example, when patients phone the Central Gateshead Medical Group with a minor illness such as earache or a sore throat, they may be offered a referral to one of 13 community pharmacists in the Gateshead area for a same-day booked consultation, which creates capacity for GP appointments for patients who need to be seen by a GP. The patient's referral details are sent to the pharmacy using a secure NHS mail account. Patients are then sent a text message to confirm the details of the

appointment with the community pharmacist. Community pharmacists are already doing some great work and they have a huge role to play at the heart of every primary care network. The Government are failing to recognise that if they do not try to roll that out.

I welcome the Government's commitment to prevention, but they must put their words into action, for example by reversing the terrible cuts to local authority public health budgets and by recognising the importance of community pharmacists in particular and the role that they can play in prevention. As we have heard, thousands of people—millions, actually—visit their community pharmacy every day. Every one of those presents an opportunity for a positive health or wellbeing intervention. In the words of Simon Stevens, "Make every contact count".

The profession and its representatives, the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee and the National Pharmacy Association, have offered to deliver more services. The recently negotiated new pharmacy contract begins to recognise what the NHS has been missing for so long. There are many welcome features, including the new community pharmacist consultation service, which will take patient referrals from NHS 111 and will be extended for referrals from other parts of the NHS, such as GPs and A&E. Similarly, the new Medicines reconciliation service will ensure that medicine prescribed in secondary care is appropriately implemented on discharge to the community, which will reduce the number of unnecessary hospital readmissions. Those changes will be not only convenient for patients, but enormously important in relieving pressure on GP surgeries and A&E departments, which is what we all want to do.

That is why we need a shift to service-based remuneration in the context of a five-year agreement. If community pharmacies, with their huge potential, are to remain viable, the remuneration must be adequate. Can the Minister tell us today what the new funding settlement will look like? I hope that, in her response, she will celebrate the work of community pharmacies—I am sure she will—and set out what the Government will do to utilise their potential.

10.44 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank each and every right hon. and hon. Member who has contributed. Most importantly, I thank the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) for securing this debate and allowing us to discuss the challenges and celebrate the opportunities that lie ahead in community pharmacies, as well as how we best deliver to patients. The right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Sir Kevin Barron) and the hon. Members for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), for York Central (Rachael Maskell), for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) and for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) all made excellent speeches that gave food for thought, as did the contributions from the hon. Members for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) and for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). They celebrated exactly what community pharmacies can do if they are embedded in the heart of their communities and what untapped potential there is for moving forward.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to set out the vision for community pharmacy at a pivotal time for the pharmacy sector. As we have discussed, the past three years have been challenging, but there is a new pharmacy sector agreement. I am continually inspired, as everybody has been—we heard about the experience of the hon. Member for Halifax of working in a pharmacy—by the compassion, dedication and commitment of those who work in the NHS family. I saw that myself last week when I met pharmacists and the chief exec of the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee at the local pharmaceutical committee conference. That underlined to me again what an essential part of the NHS the pharmacy is, working day in and day out on improving outcomes for patients and for the community, which lies at the heart of what they do.

We have heard about the challenges of different communities. The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale made his point very well, as did other Members who represent rural constituencies. The hon. Members for Strangford and for Motherwell and Wishaw mentioned that the challenges are slightly different in rural, dispersed communities. We hope that the new contract will not be one size fits all but will give additional help to rural pharmacies to help them deliver, because we know that they are an important and integral part of their local community. Ensuring that we maintain a good level of access in England and support pharmacy where there are fewer pharmacies is important and built in.

Community pharmacy always has been an integral part of our communities. We have 11,500 community pharmacies delivering. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Rother Valley for his work in chairing the all-party group on pharmacy. He explained clearly how pharmacies are close to 96% of people, who can get to one by foot or on public transport in 20 minutes. The key thing for me was when he said that the majority were in areas of high deprivation. That is hugely important as the contract moves forward, because we are determined to double down on health inequalities, and we know that the pharmacist is a key frontline expert who can help deliver in those communities. Pharmacy can play a greater part in helping people to stay well in their communities.

Today's debate is timely because the new landmark arrangements for pharmacy—a five-year deal for pharmacies—came into force yesterday. I have heard the deal criticised as flat, but the PSNC said that it wanted certainty; it wants to be able to use its skills better and further, and we have determined the deal in collaboration with it. The deal is the beginning of a programme to transform the sector and to see community pharmacies play a much expanded role in the delivery of health and care across prevention, urgent care and medicine safety. Those new arrangements will support the pharmacy team to utilise all its extensive clinical expertise, further developing new roles and providing the community with the knowledge, skills and support to prevent ill health, manage minor conditions and stay happy and healthy for longer. We have heard from virtually every Member who has spoken about how much that goes on. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby told a moving story of how intimate the relationship is between the community pharmacist and the community that he serves.

The deal sets a programme of work that the Department, NHS England, NHS Improvement and the PSNC have collaboratively developed and agreed—we have worked together to get there. Our direction of travel is clear, and we will continue to work together on the detail, strengthening the role of community pharmacy and the delivery of health and care year on year for the next five years and beyond.

Nic Dakin: The Minister is setting out the aspiration well, but does she recognise that having no increase—even by inflation—for five years is a desperately big challenge for community pharmacies?

Jo Churchill: On the matter of reimbursement, which was also raised by the hon. Members for York Central and for Westmorland and Lonsdale, we seek to ensure a fairer system of reimbursement for pharmacy contractors and value for money for the NHS. I am sure we would all agree that that is the challenge that we face the whole time. That is why, in July, we launched a consultation on community pharmacy drug reimbursement. We have engaged widely with pharmacy stakeholders and have had an excellent response. We will consider all those responses fully and set out plans for the fairer system in due course. I appreciate that the response will be, “But it's needed now,” but a pharmacy is a private business, and reimbursement is not pharmacies' only form of income. What I am talking about will take a shift. There is an acknowledgment that that shift—that transition—will need to be assisted. There is also an independent funding stream from the flu vaccine, for example. I would like to see—and have been discussing with officials—whether a broader vaccine programme could be rolled out through pharmacies as well, and reimbursed. We know we need to do better.

Jim Shannon: The Minister has so far given a comprehensive response to our concerns. I suggested in the debate that, when it comes to medical attention, pharmacies could do more to oversee small things such as the flu vaccination that she referred to and diabetes and glaucoma. As other hon. Members have mentioned, there are small things that pharmacists could do to take the pressure off GPs. Is that something the Government would consider—giving more responsibility to the pharmacist and taking pressure off GPs and accident and emergency?

Jo Churchill: If the hon. Gentleman will just bear with me for a second, he will hear me largely repeating what the right hon. Member for Rother Valley said when he so beautifully laid out the skills and expertise that lie in the pharmacy sector, and how they can be utilised better.

As I said, the deal sets out a programme of work we shall be working on. Our aim is that collaborative working across the system will deliver an integrated and accessible community health service for all. I want to name-check the hon. Member for Strangford here because, as he articulated, communication lies at the centre of this issue. One instance might be the digital expertise that the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West said exists in Gateshead, where people's greater readiness to get services from pharmacists, and the fact that pharmacists can do more, is having a positive effect for patients.

[Jo Churchill]

First, pharmacists told us that we must utilise and unlock the potential of the highly skilled pharmacy teams that are embedded in communities throughout the country, including in the constituency of the hon. Member for Halifax, with everyone celebrating what pharmacists can deliver. That is why the settlement aims to deliver more fulfilling, patient-facing careers for community pharmacists and technicians, as highly valued members of the NHS team. Additionally, populations will be helped by much better services.

Secondly, pharmacists told us that they wanted continuity. The settlement funding over five years gives certainty, and gives community pharmacists the confidence to invest in their business. However, there is no one size fits all. Being in the centre of a town is not the same as being in a rural village. Looking at these things in the round is why we want this to be collaborative.

Rachael Maskell: How will the Minister measure the impact of the settlement, particularly on independent pharmacists? If more of them close or are struggling financially, what other interventions does she plan to make?

Jo Churchill: As I said, there is no one size that fits all. As the hon. Lady articulated in her speech, the difficulty is that we are not looking at a system where businesses are run on the same scale model. At any one point, there are single pharmacists. She stated that the pharmacy she visited was part of a seven-strong business. Then there are the multiples. We need to look at what is the best scheme. However, I would argue that independents have a much higher footfall from their local population, because they are more trusted than many of the multiple pharmacies due to the continuity that comes from their having been in their communities for longer. There are opportunities there for independents.

We know we will need to design new ways of working to make a success of this, and we will need patients to be confident in how they use the services. The enhanced role for community pharmacy will support patients in getting access to help where required and in using the NHS in the best possible way. When people are suffering from minor conditions such as earaches or sore throats and need health advice, we want them to think “Pharmacy First”.

We want to build on that, with other parts of the NHS proactively signposting to local pharmacists. We want everyone to recognise the high-level skills held by pharmacists and to get people to understand that we need them as a first-line service to go to. That will grow trust in the system and spread the load. We will, of

course, need to reform the way we work to free up pharmacists’ time so that they are able to deliver these new services.

Liz McInnes: I am sorry to interrupt, but the Minister has not referred to delivery times yet, and we have only two and a half minutes to go. Will she mention what she is going to do about those?

Jo Churchill: I thank the hon. Lady, but I would like to push through and to come on to the supply of medicines, which the hon. Member for Halifax spent much of her speech discussing.

We must recognise that we need to work in partnership and that this is not only about treating ill health. One of the first services to come online under the new arrangements will be the community pharmacist consultation service, which will start on 29 October. It will establish the first ever national triage system, which will look at community pharmacies referring patients into pharmacy directly from NHS 111 for minor illnesses, wellbeing support and self-care advice, as well as urgent problems. It is important that everybody involved makes this work a success, because we want this to be a two-way process. Over the next five years, we want to include referrals from GPs, urgent treatment centres and NHS Online, but we want to do that based on evidence, sensibly and in collaboration with those in the sector. Registration opened only last month, and more than 2,000 pharmacies have been signed up.

Additionally, by 2020, being a level 1 healthy living pharmacy is expected to be an essential requirement, so that pharmacies can give advice. Integration across primary care is hugely important; the new contractual framework is about not moving minor illness, but about using the whole system better. Community pharmacies are a vital part of the picture if we want to think “Pharmacy First”.

Coming on to the question of medicine supply and shortages, I appreciate the issues that the hon. Member for Halifax mentioned, but, as recognised in last week’s National Audit Office report, we have done an enormous amount in collaboration with pharmaceutical and medical device companies. There are always ongoing shortages, but the Department works all the time to ensure that they are mitigated and that a proper supply of medicine can be got to people. With the issues of Brexit, we know that that is doubly important, and that is what the Department has been doubling down on.

Sir David Crausby (in the Chair): I do not think there is really time for Holly Lynch to wind up.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the role of community pharmacies.

Free Movement of EU Nationals

11 am

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered proposed changes to free movement of EU nationals.

I am delighted to raise the issue of freedom of movement in the EU, and I thank you, Sir David, for your chairmanship. “End freedom of movement” is a Brexiteer slogan that we have all become so accustomed to that it is easy to forget what it is really saying, and what it would really mean to this country, people living here and British citizens living abroad. We all know the basic numbers: freedom of movement allows 1.3 million British citizens to live, work, study, fall in love, marry, or retire across the European Union while more than 50,000 non-UK EU citizens work in our national health service, including support staff, nurses and doctors, all of whom play a vital role in our nation’s health.

More than 80,000 EU citizens work in social care, and even more in the UK construction industry. As the Government love to tell us, unemployment is at its lowest rate for 40 years, but where are the British workers who are queuing up and clamouring to take those jobs? If we end freedom of movement, who will care for our sick and elderly? Who will build the 300,000 homes a year that Britain needs? The Government’s own figures show that non-UK EU citizens bring far more to our economy and public services than they use. If free movement ends, services will suffer because we will not have the people to continue to provide them at the same level.

Those are the numbers, but what about the human cost and the sheer inhumanity of ending freedom of movement? Edinburgh West has constituents from France, Spain, Poland and many other EU countries who have made their lives in the city. Their children were born there, but now they are being told that they are not welcome. They feel they have no option but to leave.

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): That is not correct.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I must take exception to the language used by the hon. Lady. We have given a very clear message that all EU citizens currently residing in this country are welcome to stay. At the end of August, 1.5 million people had been granted settled status or pre-settled status, and there had been only one rejection.

Christine Jardine: With respect, that contrasts completely with what non-UK EU citizens tell me every week on the doorstep.

Steve Double: It is a fact.

Christine Jardine: Although there is a settled status scheme, that does not make anyone feel welcome, and that is the issue. People no longer feel that they are wanted. They have to go through paperwork to stay in a country that has often been their home for decades.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Members across the House should understand that simple messaging is often far more powerful to people than complex explanations and systems. If we vote to leave the European Union and declare the end of freedom of movement as a great triumph—to great cheers, “I will remove your liberty.” Amazing!—we should not be surprised if the response of people already in this country and elsewhere is to think, “The United Kingdom is not for me.” The simplest message received by many EU citizens through us voting to leave the European Union is that they are not wanted. That might be inaccurate, but it is the perception, and it is human and understandable.

Christine Jardine: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I have in my constituency a family who came here from France more than 20 years ago. They have worked here, and both their sons were born here and are in schools in Edinburgh. While one son is automatically entitled to a British passport under the new system, the other is not. They have been asked to provide proof of residence and employment. They have only ever worked here, they pay tax here and they have national insurance cards, but they are being asked to prove their entitlement to stay here under the settled status scheme. They have also been asked to prove how long and how often they have visited France. I do not know whether any other Members here keep plane and train tickets for 20 years, but I certainly do not. However, that is probably the only way to prove where and when we were in the European Union at any time in the past 20 or 30 years under freedom of movement.

What about the many thousands of students who have travelled to or from the EU as part of the Erasmus scheme? Last year at my daughter’s graduation ceremony at Edinburgh University, an honorary doctorate was given to the man who established that scheme. As I looked out on that hall, I saw students, graduates and academics from all across Europe who have come here to make a contribution.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I represent a university constituency and have students, academics and researchers coming to see me every week. Does the hon. Lady agree that the international standing of our universities—a global brand that has been so successful—is at risk from this isolationist, inward-looking policy of ending free movement?

Christine Jardine: I completely agree with the hon. Lady. There are many projects in this country that have been initiated by academics from elsewhere in Europe and that we would not have had without freedom of movement. Our reputation stands to be damaged by the ending of freedom of movement.

Amid all that concern, and despite what the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) has said, we still have no clear picture of what the Government intend. For example, the Home Office changed its position in August, saying that free movement would end on 31 October. In September, the Government rowed back, admitting that primary legislation is needed to end free movement and saying that free movement will continue until the end of 2020.

The Government now say they will just make some changes to free movement as of 31 October. Are we surprised that everyone, including hon. Members, is

[Christine Jardine]

waiting for some clarity from the Government and perhaps thinks that the Government themselves do not know the implications of ending free movement or how to end it?

There is confusion and lack of clarity about what the Government will do on immigration and what will replace the current immigration system. Then there is the impact on different sectors. Only 2% of employers in this country sponsor visas from non-EU nationals, but thousands more have EU nationals working for them and will now need to grapple with an immigration system of which they have no knowledge. What will they do? Will they have to employ lawyers? What about landlords who will have to have visas for immigrants? What about schools, many of which are now informing parents about the settled status system on which, as we have heard, there is no clarity whatever?

There is one other issue that particularly bothers me: the Good Friday agreement, which protects, in its words, “the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose, and accordingly confirm that their right to hold both British and Irish citizenship is accepted by both Governments and would not be affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland.”

The Government simply have not got to grips with what that will mean when we lose free movement. What about the rights of the people in Northern Ireland? How will they be affected by the loss of free movement?

One other thing comes to mind. When I was a young woman starting out on a career, I heard a British Prime Minister talking about how wonderful the single market would be, and how it would allow businesses in this country to prosper by putting no limitation on them and allowing the workforce to move freely across Europe. About a week ago, I was talking to a young girl who is slightly older than I was when my parents took part in the original EU referendum, in which we decided to stay in what was then, I believe, the European Economic Community. I thought about all the opportunities that I have had and that my generation have all enjoyed, including my generation of students, academics, business people and entrepreneurs, or those who simply wanted to travel. I thought about the benefits that we have enjoyed for 40 years, and I thought about what the end of that single market and that collaboration with Europe, which that Prime Minister promised us, will mean to this generation.

I also thought about what that Prime Minister might think, and I wonder what this Conservative Government would tell her, about their bringing an end to what in many ways was her vision of Europe, which they are now betraying, and the generation that they are betraying, who will not have the opportunities that every person in this Chamber has had for 40 years. How will we explain that? How will we look members of this generation in the eye and tell them that, while it was good enough for us and we benefited from it, they cannot? I say that because, while people can dress this up however they want, with red buses with numbers on the side, and while the Prime Minister can say whatever he likes about leaving, deal or no deal, it boils down to the simple fact that without freedom of movement we will all be poorer.

Tim Farron: My hon. Friend makes a massively important point about the great mass of us in this country; this issue is about our freedom of movement, and that of generations to come, as much as it is about anybody else’s.

I wonder whether my hon. Friend will say something about those people in the most marginal position. There is a real need to ensure that the provisions of the Dublin system for refugee family reunion are maintained post-Brexit. However, does she share my concern that unaccompanied minors in Europe who have family in the UK might find themselves in a much more marginalised position?

Christine Jardine: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point, because unaccompanied minors will find themselves much more marginalised. They will find it much more difficult to come to this country, as everyone will, which is another illustration of why I think this Government have not thought through what leaving the European Union will actually mean, and what the end of freedom of movement will actually mean, to immigration, employment and the economy. We have seen that the Government have papers that tell them what it will mean, but are they paying attention?

On Radio 4 yesterday morning, the Prime Minister said that this Government are working to mitigate the impact of a no-deal Brexit, and of Brexit. Even the Prime Minister knows that there is an impact—a detrimental impact—to be mitigated.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am really appreciative of the hon. Lady’s speech, which is excellent, particularly around the research community. Brexit has a massive impact on my constituency, not least because of the university in it. One of the issues that constituents have raised with me regularly is that they now cannot plan for their future, or that of their family unit. That is because they do not know what will happen if, say, their mum or dad becomes ill and that parent is French or Spanish, or lives elsewhere in the EU. They do not know whether they will still be able, as they are now, to bring family members into their home to care for them, because they do not know whether those family members will still be eligible, if they continue to live in the EU country they are in currently, to come here to be with them. This issue is really penetrating the family unit, too.

Christine Jardine: The hon. Lady again makes an excellent point about what we in this country will lose: the ability to be sure that family members who live elsewhere in the European Union can come here and be looked after in our homes, and the ability to go and look after them easily. I am sure that, like me, every MP has constituents who come to them regularly because they have issues with family members who have travelled to other parts of the world outwith the European Union, and they know how difficult it is to go at a moment’s notice if, perhaps, a family member is ill. We should cherish the fact that we have that ability in the European Union.

Returning to the Prime Minister, if he is saying publicly that he is trying to mitigate the effects of a no-deal Brexit, surely that is an acknowledgment that that is not going to be good for this country. A Prime

Minister and a Government who acknowledge that they are doing something that has to be mitigated have serious questions to ask themselves.

11.14 am

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): Thank you for presiding over this morning's debate, Sir David. I apologise for the fact that you have a Minister responding who is not directly responsible for this area of policy but, as you may know, things are going on in Manchester that mean we are ducking and diving slightly.

It would perhaps be easy to dismiss some of the issues that the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) raised, not least because much of the emotion and assertion is incorrect, but I recognise that she, like many people, is grieving—mourning the outcome of a referendum three years ago with which she profoundly disagreed. Much of her speech this morning was a rerun of the debates held during that referendum and since, accompanied by great emotion and controversy across the nation. I urge her and other hon. Members to try to be as measured as possible about the coming changes in the immigration system, not least because, as she says, they will affect a great number of people. This morning I aim to provide clarity on some of the points that she has perhaps not yet grasped, unlike the 1.7 million people who have applied for EU settled status.

The Government have been clear that on 31 October the UK will leave the European Union. Our intention is to leave with a deal and, as you will have seen in the newspapers, Sir David, work is ongoing to get that deal. But we must also prepare for a no-deal exit, not least because the EU may choose that outcome itself. At that point, free movement as it stands will end. On 4 September the Home Secretary set out the immigration arrangements for European economic area and Swiss citizens moving to the UK after a no-deal Brexit on 31 October. To be clear, those new immigration arrangements will not affect EEA citizens who are already living in the UK before we exit. The Government value the enormous contribution that they make to our economy, public services and national life. They are our friends, our families and our neighbours. That is why we have given an unequivocal guarantee to the more than 3 million EEA citizens resident in the UK that their rights will be protected, and we urge them to stay.

The Government have delivered that protection through the EU settlement scheme, which will give them a UK immigration status and rights in UK law. They will have at least until 31 December 2020 to make an application to the scheme. The EUSS makes it easy for EU citizens to get the status they need to remain here permanently after we leave the EU, with the same rights to work and to access benefits and services as they have now. Applicants need only complete three key steps: prove their identity, show that they live in the UK, and declare any criminal convictions. It is free to make an application. There is less hassle than when applying for a bank account or renting a flat.

Jo Stevens: I seek the Minister's help. A couple of weeks ago I met a constituent whose wife has applied for settled status and has received a letter from the Home Office confirming that her application has been

successful, but it also says that the letter is not proof that she has settled status. How does somebody prove that they have settled status?

Kit Malthouse: My team will provide me with the answer shortly, and I will come back to the hon. Lady on that question.

Thus far, 1.7 million people have applied to the scheme and more than 1.5 million have already been granted settled status. In a no-deal scenario, law-abiding individuals will also be able to live, study, work and access benefits and services in the UK until the remainder of the free movement framework is repealed by Parliament at the end of 2020. If they wish to stay beyond that point, EEA and Swiss citizens and their close families will be able to apply for European temporary leave to remain through a new scheme that we will launch after exit to provide them with a bridge into the new immigration system.

The ETLR scheme will be opened by the Home Office after exit. Applications will be free and involve a simple online process and identity, security and criminality checks; successful applicants will receive permission to stay for three years. This will give individuals and their employers confidence and certainty that they can remain in the UK after the end of 2020. Anyone who wishes to stay in the UK after their temporary status expires will need to make a further application under the new points-based immigration system.

On that future immigration system, our vision is for a truly global country where we welcome the brightest and best, where we are more outward-facing, and where we decide who comes here based on what they have to offer and their circumstances, not where they come from. That is why the Home Secretary has commissioned the independent Migration Advisory Committee to review the benefits of a points-based system and what best practice can be learned from other international comparators, including the Australian immigration system. The MAC is also undertaking an existing commission on salary thresholds.

We will announce the details of the UK's future immigration system early next year, after considering the MAC's advice on these issues. That will provide time for businesses to adapt ahead of the implementation of the new system from January 2021.

Rachael Maskell: Will the circumstances that the Minister describes include the scenario that I raised about family members being able to come to the UK—or vice versa, where EU citizens go to their home state?

Kit Malthouse: If hon. Members do not mind, I will finish trying to give broad clarity and then, at the end, give answers to specific questions, which are being provided by my officials behind me.

Post exit, if we leave the EU without a deal, free movement as it currently stands under EU law will end on 31 October, as I said. The Government will make tangible changes at the border to reflect our status outside the European Union. We will introduce visual changes, such as removing the blue EU customs channels and introducing blue UK passports, later this year. We will also supply a tougher UK criminality threshold to conduct at the border and in the UK, to keep out and deport those who commit crime. The Government have

[*Kit Malthouse*]

also signalled our intention to phase out the use of EEA national identity cards to travel to the UK during 2020. Where we need to legislate to make those changes, we will do so with secondary legislation.

Immediately after exit, EEA and Swiss citizens can continue to enter the UK with a valid passport or identity card. They will be able to use e-gates if they have a biometric passport, and they will not require visas.

Christine Jardine: On the point that I was perhaps too emotional, may I make the counterpoint that what we are hearing at the moment is a list of facts—a list of procedures? When will the Government accept that this endless, meaningless list of facts has an impact on people, on the economy, on lives and on this country's future? When will they acknowledge its impact on people's lives?

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Lady is quite right that there will be an impact. The intention of leaving the European Union is that it should be impactful. During the referendum campaign, in which I know she participated, no doubt she outlined what she felt that impact would be. The question is how the impact is felt by individuals. What we are trying to do in creating the EUSS, the EUTLR scheme and the future immigration arrangements in this country is ensure that that impact is as beneficial and smooth as possible, both for us as a country and for the people who participate in it.

I happen to be married to an immigrant myself. She is not from the EU; she is from Canada. I had to go through the existing immigration system to be able to marry her and for her to be able to stay in the country, so I have some experience of what it is like for people coming from outside the EU. We also travel regularly to and from Canada, a country that operates a perfectly humane and compassionate immigration system but is not part of a free movement bloc. Its universities flourish, its communities are as varied and lively as we would expect—in fact, it is a nation built on immigration, yet it operates a perfectly sane and reasonable immigration system. That is what we intend to do.

As for Members' specific questions, these obviously relate to relatively complex situations, so if Members do not mind I will take the inquiries about repatriation, families being brought into the country and proof of settled status letters and provide some clarity in writing. However, my understanding is that EUSS is meant to be and should be a smooth and simple system—the over 1.5 million people who have applied for it thus far have seemingly found it so—that allows people to continue, if you like, unmolested in their status in this country. That is what we are trying to achieve.

Turning to a couple of other specific matters, the hon. Member for Edinburgh West referred to the impact on Northern Ireland. Of course, the island of Ireland

has benefited from a common travel area for many decades—since well before our membership of the EU—and the UK Government, the EU and the Irish Government have committed to the preservation of the common travel area in perpetuity, so I would not have any concerns there.

Finally, the hon. Lady also raised an issue about academics and their ability to travel to and from the EU. It is the case—the Government have already announced this—that we will favour academics in the immigration system, making it easier for scientists and others to come and do academic research in this country, not least because we recognise the benefits to this country and, indeed, to international effort towards solving humanity's problems with science and technology. However, please be aware that there are scientists outside the EU. There are many scientists in China, India, Pakistan and the United States who also want to come to this country to do their research. In fact, there are a lot more of them than there are in the European Union. For example, there are more top 10 science-based universities outside the EU than there are inside it, and I speak as a former chair of the all-party parliamentary group for life sciences. We want an immigration system that opens our academic endeavour in this country to the world, not just to the European Union.

Christine Jardine: The Minister says that he wants to open the system, but are we not just making it as difficult for everybody from the EU to come here as it currently is for academics from the rest of the world? Should we not be looking at making it as easy for everyone to come here as it currently is for academics from the EU?

Kit Malthouse: As the hon. Lady will be aware, we will be developing our plans for our future immigration system over the next few months but, as I said in my speech, we want to operate on the basis of a person's circumstances and what they can offer, not on where they come from. We should not discriminate in our immigration system based on geography, but we should discriminate based on circumstances and what someone can offer this country. That is what I think people felt was encapsulated when they voted to take back control of the immigration system, and that, I think, is what we are going to try and achieve over the next few months and years.

However, I recognise that the changes to immigration are providing some uncertainty for many people, and I hope that I have been able to provide an element of clarity and that the remaining 1.5 million—or whatever it is—EU citizens who are eligible for settled status and who can apply for it up until the end of next year will do so with speed and alacrity.

Question put and agreed to.

11.28 am

Sitting suspended.

Trophy Hunting Imports

[STEWART HOSIE *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered trophy hunting imports.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, and I am delighted that the relatively new Minister from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who has championed many different environmental issues, will respond to this important debate. I am particularly delighted to have secured this debate on banning trophy hunting imports to this country: although the Government have already announced that that is their plan, I wish to check exactly what their policy will cover. It makes a change to take part in a debate in Westminster at the moment that, I suspect, has cross-party support.

Oren Lyons, the chief of the Onondaga, was invited to address the United Nations in 1977. He made a long speech about our responsibilities. When talking about who had been invited to speak at the UN, he said:

"I do not see a delegation for the four footed. I see no seat for the eagles. We forget and we consider ourselves superior, but we are after all a mere part of the Creation. We must continue to understand where we are. We stand between the mountain and the ant, somewhere and there only, as part and parcel of the Creation. It is our responsibility, since we have been given the minds to take care of these things. The elements and the animals and the birds, they live in a state of grace. They are absolute, they can do no wrong. It is only we, the two leggeds, that can do this. And when we do this to our brothers, to our own brothers, we do the worst in the eyes of the Creator."

We, the human race, have done wrong. Over the last few years, often through the greed of humans, we have brought to near-extinction many animals that used to exist in large numbers.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Is my hon. Friend aware that it is a widespread view on both sides of the House that there is something nauseating and revolting about someone who would slaughter an endangered animal to use part of its body as a trinket or trophy?

Mrs Latham: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. I will touch on such things later, but they are absolutely abhorrent. As I said, this is a debate that we can all agree on.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Further to the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight), is she aware that a recent opinion poll suggests that 86% of people across the UK support a trophy hunting ban? It is not just this House that is united on the issue, but the vast majority of this country's population.

Mrs Latham: That is an interesting statistic, because I think that would not have been the case 20, 30 or 40 years ago. The extinction of many animals and the talk about that—for example, David Attenborough talking about it—have raised awareness among the general population, which can be only a good thing. I am sure the Minister is listening intently.

Local people in different countries do not benefit financially from this appalling trade, just the big greedy bosses of the operations. Elephants, tigers, rhinos, gorillas, lions and many more species are endangered—even giraffes are affected. British big game hunters have travelled to every corner of the globe, from Africa to Asia, North America to South America, and across Europe, in pursuit of often-rare hunting trophies. The most popular destination for UK hunters is South Africa.

Thanks to the determination of the Government and the previous Secretary of State, the ivory trade will be reduced, which will hopefully have an impact on the poaching of elephants for their tusks. Although other countries did that before us, we have at last caught up. With respect to trophy hunting, we might get to the forefront, although other countries have in fact banned trophy hunting imports.

During this debate, I wish to concentrate primarily on lions. Once they roamed free across many countries in Africa, but now there are far fewer truly wild lions. Although killing a lion for sport is bad enough, I can almost understand why that was done when they were plentiful, but I find the new, popular canned hunting of lions especially offensive.

Imagine being born into captivity, stolen from your mother at the age of about two weeks to three weeks and sold by merciless breeders to face death at the hands of bloodthirsty tourists. Laughing, smiling tourists pose for photos with dead lions, and I have even seen a photo of tourists kissing next to that fabulous being. That is the face of the animal that was once hailed as king of the jungle.

For 11,000 lions in South Africa, there will not have been one day of freedom. At a young age, they will be shot by a hunter who cannot miss. Lions are bred in cages for the canned hunting industry at more than 300 farms in South Africa. There will be no chase, no escape, no mercy. It beggars belief that British hunters are among those propping up this desperately cruel industry. The lions are reared in cages and forced to breed too young, and their cubs are taken away from them soon after birth so that the mothers can breed again, but too quickly.

The cubs might then be taken to petting zoos where tourists—possibly unaware of the past or future of those cubs—are able to bottle-feed them. Some tourists are even able to walk with the young lions until they are about nine months old, when they become much harder to control. From then on, these immature lions are kept in small pens until they are about two years old.

These animals have trusted humans because they know no different. They have been bred in captivity. This trust is tragically misplaced. The lions are either let out of the cages and shot at almost point-blank range by the trophy hunter or are taken by truck into the bush to make it more like the kill of a wild animal. In this instance, the lions are allowed out of the truck and shot—again at almost point-blank range—although some are never let out of the cages and are actually shot while in captivity, through the bars, by these so-called trophy hunters.

These magnificent animals have had no freedom to roam and live as nature intended, thanks to an industry that is, believe it or not, legal in South Africa. This kind of hunting is often given a licence thanks to the sometimes-corrupt authorities turning a blind eye, or because the

[Mrs Latham]

owners of these “farms” persuade them that it is being done in the name of conservation. That is simply a lie. It is a heinous activity that lines the pockets of greedy owners. Every time a trophy hunter shoots a lion, they have paid many thousands of dollars for the privilege. These lions are farmed in great secrecy to produce cheap, quick trophies for hunters. In some cases, the breeders themselves shoot the lions so as to sell lion bones in the far east for ritual medicines. It is easy to see that it is only a matter of but a short time before the only lions we will see will be those in zoos.

Shamefully, Britain still allows so-called hunter trophies to be brought into the country. Yes, lions’ heads may be flown into our airports by hunters who glory in adorning their walls with them. We need to make it clear that the UK condemns the killing of lions, as well as other threatened species. This should start with legislation preventing hunters from bringing back the heads, tails, feet, skins and other body parts of these animals to the UK. We need a clear moral response.

The Government should impose an immediate moratorium on the importation of trophies until legislation is made. There is no reason this cannot be done immediately. People’s lives are in danger when they speak out about this terrible practice, so we need to protect those who whistleblow about it. People might not be aware that there are three times more canned lions than wild lions in South Africa today. There are fewer than 15,000 lions left in the wild across the world. Indeed, our own Prime Minister mentioned this recently at Prime Minister’s Question Time.

Over the past decade, 10,000 lion trophies have been taken. Despite the very small number of lions, trophy hunting of adult males is still allowed in Zambia, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Tanzania. There is an absolute dearth of information that such activities are in any way sustainable or contribute to the conservation of the species in any way. In fact, it has been shown in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Tanzania that trophy-hunting concessions are now so devoid of wildlife, largely due to overhunting, that they cannot garner any further interest in tenders from trophy-hunting operations. There has never been a population count of lions in any trophy-hunting concession in any African nation that permits lion trophy hunting. It is no wonder that trophy-hunting operators are increasingly reliant on illegal hunts inside national parks, luring lions such as Cecil out of national parks, along with many other such transgressions on lion populations that should be strictly protected. The UK has put in place much funding to combat the illegal wildlife trade, but hunting transgressions on protected areas should be considered as one of the important illegal activities.

It is now abundantly clear that the future of wild lion survival in Africa is dependent on not more than four populations, which still have more than 1,000 individuals. Those populations are located in Northern Botswana; perhaps in the Kruger National Park in South Africa; in the Serengeti in Tanzania; and in the Selous in Tanzania. The estimate of 15,000 lions in total depends on an accumulation of small, scattered and isolated groups of lions across this very large continent. For example, there are 16 lions left in Senegal, 34 in Nigeria, 32 in Malawi, 34 in Angola and maybe 60 in Ethiopia.

This practice should stop and should stop now. Britain should not be allowing trophy-hunted imports of any species from any country. How can we allow zebra, rhino, lions or, indeed, any single animal from an endangered species to be brought in to go on someone’s wall at home or in the office when we are supposed to be a nation of animal lovers? Other countries have banned imports, but, so far, we have not banned them all. I am told we still allow some to come into this country. Why? That does not help conservation.

Shockingly, the infamous killing of Cecil the lion has encouraged British hunters to go to South Africa and shoot dead more big cats than ever. Experts had believed that worldwide revulsion at the shooting would mark a turning point for the endangered species and the start of a decline in trophy hunting. Instead, the number of British hunters targeting farmed lions and bringing home their body parts more than doubled in the three years after Cecil’s death, compared with the three years before, according to statistics from the global wildlife trade regulator.

This is not about telling African countries how to manage their wildlife. It is not even about laying down the law on trophy hunting to them. It is simply saying that the UK does not agree with killing lions, elephants and other threatened species for sport, nor with allowing hunters to bring back the heads, tails, feet, skins and other body parts of these animals to the UK.

Sir Greg Knight: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way again; she is being very generous. Does she agree that a ban on import should also include the body parts being traded through Britain?

Mrs Latham: Yes, I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend. We must put a ban on everything that makes more species endangered, and we should be regulating and being very careful about what we do or do not allow into this country. As I said earlier, we are supposed to be a nation of animal lovers.

The times we are living in and the threat facing all wildlife demand a clear moral response. Things need to change so that live animals are better for the economy than dead ones. I understand that the US had a total or near-total ban when Obama was President, but the current President has decided to release the pressure and to allow some trophy hunting. I understand that that is because two of his sons like trophy hunting. That is something that should not happen in America. It should not happen here. It should not happen in Europe. It should happen nowhere.

I am fortunate to have seen many lions and other endangered species in various African countries, but I want my grandchildren and their children to have that privilege too when they are old enough to travel. We can visit a zoo, but that is such a poor relation, compared with seeing a lion, or any animal, living in freedom in its own natural environment. David Attenborough has spoken about the animals in Africa and other places, and indeed in the oceans, and his programmes whet the appetite, but unless we stop all trophy hunting, those beautiful animals will disappear from our reach, as many very nearly have.

I have a series of questions for the Minister, following the Government’s welcome announcement at the weekend, and I know he will listen hard to them. Which animals

will be covered by the trophy hunting imports ban? When will it come into effect? Every month we take to pass legislation means more endangered species getting closer to eradication and extinction. Which countries will be banned from importing trophies into Britain? If it is not all of them, greedy businesspeople will find a way around the ban by moving the dead animal to a country from which we do allow the import of trophies. Which countries do we still allow trophies to be imported from? Will animal parts, such as bones, hands, tails and so on, be covered?

What about trading through a country, which my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight) mentioned? Obviously, countries such as China value the body parts of these endangered species. I ask the Government to impose an immediate moratorium on the importation of trophies until legislation is made. Is there any reason why that cannot or should not be done immediately?

Can I be assured that the welcome announcement by the Government a few days ago will not result in just more consultation? There have been multiple consultations over a number of years, and the longer that that continues, the fewer lions there will be truly in the wild. I understand that the previous Secretary of State was holding a consultation—another one—and said that we had to listen carefully to both sides, but while we do that, more and more lions die. I thank the Minister for his passion on this and many other environmental issues, and I look forward to his positive response later.

2.48 pm

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. With your permission, I may leave a wee bit early so that I can synchronise with the Virgin Trains timetabling. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) on securing this important debate.

Trophy hunting is a particularly emotive topic but, as usual with such an issue, the situation is not entirely clear-cut. While most of us are instinctively opposed to such a practice, as I certainly am, we must surely endeavour to set that emotion aside, albeit briefly, if we are to properly consider how best to respond. While a number of animal welfare and environmental groups are firmly opposed to the practice, other institutions, such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the European Parliament and the convention on international trade in endangered species maintain that trophy hunting has beneficial side-effects. Those include generating revenue for landowners to conserve or restore wildlife on their land and for wildlife management, including anti-poaching activities.

However, we must ask ourselves whether there is a better means to support those ends than revenue raised from hunting and associated tourist activities. What, after all, is the value of an anti-poaching effort for an endangered species if it is funded by the hunting of other species under the guise of big game hunting, often carried out in a merciless way, simply to secure a trophy or a photograph?

The natural assumption in this debate is that we are considering those who travel abroad from the UK for a trophy hunt, but of course the problem is broader than that. This is not just about British nationals bringing

trophies back from other continents; the practice also operates the other way. Many hon. Members will recall the furore caused this time last year by an American television presenter, Miss Larysa Switlyk. She came to the beautiful island of Islay off the west coast of Scotland—I know it well—to shoot wild goats, which she then, in my opinion, glorified on social media. Those animals have no natural predator, and are classed as an invasive non-native species in the United Kingdom. They have been the subject of several official culls over the years, and they are thought to have roamed parts of Scotland and the north of England for 5,000 years. Although hunting them on private land is not illegal, we as a society were appalled at the sight of Miss Switlyk posing with one of her kills. Perhaps it was the glorification of the process and the trophy hunting element that most offended sensitivities throughout the United Kingdom.

Given our increasing concern as a nation for animal welfare, I was surprised to note that, between 2013 and 2017, trophy imports rose by 23%—a rise of almost a quarter over such a short period. That must surely be of concern worldwide, and is perhaps an indication that current regulation is ineffective. Additional red tape is seldom the solution to any problem, but do the Government—with their recent announcement of a call for evidence, they appear to be moving towards improving regulations—feel the time is now right for action? I know they have been keeping the situation under review, and although I cannot predict the outcome of that review, I hope it will be acted on and not simply placed on a shelf.

I understand the basic human need to hunt an animal to feed a family, and we must all consider rural life, in whatever country, and accept that it is perhaps unfair to apply urban values to an already fragile rural economy. Thankfully, however, hunting for food is hardly commonplace in the UK these days, and to kill purely for the purposes of hanging a memento on the wall seems, in this day and age, rather barbaric and unnecessary. Surely the days of such trophy hunting should now be behind us.

Let me close with a verse from Robert Burns, which was penned as far back as 1789. He was a farmer, and he saw the fate of a hare that was shot and not killed, but simply wounded. Strangely enough, the title of the poem is “On Seeing a Wounded Hare”. I will read the first verse:

“Inhuman man! curse on thy barb’rous art,
And blasted be thy murder-aiming eye;
May never pity soothe thee with a sigh,
Nor ever pleasure glad thy cruel heart!”

It concludes:

“And curse the ruffian’s aim, and mourn thy hapless fate.”

2.53 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) on securing this debate. I believe we have debated this issue previously in Westminster Hall, and she and other hon. Members—including me and the Minister, in his previous role—were much involved. I assure her of my support in its entirety for what she has said today.

I wish to say, humbly and genuinely, that I am a country sports enthusiast. The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) referred to those

[Jim Shannon]

who hunt for the pot, and on the farm that our family holds back home we have a small pheasant shoot and a small duck shoot. It is not particularly big, but it sustains our country sports enthusiasm, and it is important that we manage the habitat for which we have responsibility and the animals on that farm. For the record, hares are not likely to be shot, because legislation in Northern Ireland means they are protected. We are fortunate to have a large quantity of hares on our land, and I love to see them, especially in March when they start to box and spar with each other in the fields.

Bill Grant: To clarify, the verse was penned in 1789, when the rules might have been a tad different.

Jim Shannon: I realised when the hon. Gentleman mentioned Robert Burns that it had to be back in that time, but I thank him for his intervention.

By way of introduction, I absolutely support the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire, but I want to explain how I can be a harvester of pheasants, ducks and pigeons so that they are of use, in contrast to what the hon. Lady put forward, which is totally different. I support her 100%. Everything that is shot by me and my sons—and ultimately my granddaughter, when the time comes—we eat, and I make sure that my neighbours who enjoy fowl also have that opportunity. Indeed, in her room in Stormont, where she was First Minister, my party leader, Arlene Foster, would find on her desk pheasants or ducks to take home and prepare for her family to eat.

As for conservation, we believe the land has to be looked after, and the animals on the land have to be conserved and protected. If we are truly embedded in conservation programmes, as we probably all should be, and we have the opportunity to look after the land, farms, habitats, countryside and trees, it is important for us to control the predators. For instance, this last season, we used the Larsen trap. I, along with my son, got 45 magpies and 10 great black crows. The result of controlling those predators is clear: we now have an abundance of small bird life that we have not had on the farm for many years. Yellowhammers—the word “Yellowhammer” is used very often nowadays, although for a different reason—are back in numbers on our farm again. They were a threatened species, but we took action to make sure they came back.

I have a true story from my childhood. Back in the '60s—I suspect you and I are of the same vintage, Mr Hosie, so you can probably relate to this—we did not have very much. My cousin, who lived in Strabane in the west of the Province, used to shoot pigeons, put them in a shoebox and send them—it was truly carrier pigeon—by post to us in the east of the Province. One of my favourite birds, which I enjoyed from a very early age in Ballywalter, was pigeon. If used correctly, these things can control vermin, and that can be encouraged.

As for the canned hunting the hon. Lady referred to, it is obscene, immoral and incorrect. I say, as the person I am, and with the pursuits that I have, that I find what happened to Cecil the lion very difficult. Perhaps I am a bit naive, but I can almost picture the scene of a lion being enticed from a safe place. It perhaps had daily interaction with people. What happened was totally wrong.

We cannot ignore the fact that Australia introduced a ban in March 2015. In the face of canned hunting, it proposed a total ban on all African lion trophy imports. Nor can we ignore what other countries have done. Four months after Cecil the lion was killed, France's Environment Minister Ségolène Royal—it is a fantastic name—said that she had instructed officials to stop issuing permits for lion trophies. The Netherlands took an even bigger step and introduced the strictest ban on the importing of hunting trophies into the EU. Those are the three countries that have taken action. As the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire said, it is time this country took the same strong attitude.

I am grateful for the background information on the debate, which contains things I was not aware of, including about rhinoceroses, hippopotamuses and zebras. My goodness, who on earth would want to shoot a zebra? Is there not something wrong there? I think there is. It is a species of horse, probably—to us in the United Kingdom horses are horses and the zebra is a smaller version.

The other instance that really got to me was the polar bear. Many of us cannot relate to the polar bear sitting on the ice floe, surrounded by the coldness of the water. We wonder how it survives in the inhospitable habitat where it lives. Yet someone wants to shoot a polar bear. I just cannot understand it, and that is coming from where I am, although it is pheasants and ducks that we use, and it is about protection of wildlife.

The hon. Lady referred to the wildlife of today, and a magazine I get every week said something important about that—that the wildlife of today is

“not for us to dispose of”

as we please. It said:

“We hold it in trust for those who come after.”

That is our responsibility, as she mentioned, and it is why this debate is so important. We have a responsibility to ensure that lions, polar bears, zebras, hippopotamuses, rhinoceroses and all the others on the list are protected from extinction. Large numbers of my constituents have contacted me to oppose trophy hunting imports. I oppose them too, and feel that they are totally wrong. Those constituents want me to oppose trophy hunting, put their views on record and look to the Minister for a response.

As the hon. Lady said, things may have been different 40 years ago—and even more so in 1780. However, society has moved on, and things that were acceptable in the past are certainly not today. We must make a positive response as a society.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent point about how we need to move with the times. Does he agree that we should allocate our international aid budget in a way that reflects modern sensibilities? My constituents would like our aid budget to be used to preserve biodiversity, whether that means the sorts of animals he has referred to or other types of diversity. That is what we should use our financial firepower for. Does he agree?

Jim Shannon: I wholeheartedly agree. The hon. Gentleman has introduced a point I was going to make, so well done. I think we should do that, because there are ways to do things in conservation. I think that the Department for International Development or some

other Departments are helping rangers in some countries, at least partially. I am not sure where all the money is coming from, but they can train people in Africa to be the protectors of animals. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I know that we are doing something, but perhaps the Minister can tell us a wee bit to clarify things and add some meat to the bones.

Where there is any chance of making money, we can be pretty sure that a criminal gang is involved somewhere, and there are criminal gangs that clearly do not give—I should keep my language under control—any concern whatever in terms of what happens, as long as they can make money. So the criminal gangs, who kill indiscriminately and murder animals for their own personal gain, have to be addressed as well.

Let me make a comment about conservation. I said what I said earlier about conservation to set the scene, in a very small way, for how conservation works. In his intervention, the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) referred to conservation that we can help with, in Africa and in other parts of the world. The Minister, and indeed everyone else, will understand the importance of habitat. When it comes to addressing trophy hunting and imports, which is what this debate is about, we also have to—perhaps directly, as the hon. Gentleman suggested in his intervention—do other things, which are about habitat retention. They are about addressing the conflict in parts of Africa, where the population is exploding and where there is confrontation between the farmers, landowners and animals. Those wonderful TV programmes that Sir David Attenborough presents tell us about Africa and elsewhere, but they also tell us about the savagery of wildlife and life on the plains, where animal eats animal; that is how things are.

However, we also need to ensure that, in addressing habitat loss and conservation in Africa, we help countries to do what they do. Landowners and farmers are growing crops to feed their families, so we need to have some methodology to address that. There is enormous demand on resources—water, trees, woodland, scrubland and the land itself. Where can the land sustain farming? We need the large savannahs as a large place for the animals to roam as well. There is no doubt that lots of the problems on savannahs are very complicated. Let me ask the Minister a question, which follows on from an earlier intervention: what are we doing to help countries to retain habitat and reduce the confrontation between people and animals?

I will finish with this point. Trophy hunting imports need to be not just controlled, but stopped. The Government have said they will keep the issue constantly under review. I respectfully suggest to them, and in total support of the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire, that it is time not just to keep trophy hunting under review but to stop it.

3.7 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) on securing this debate. I agreed with everything she said, which is hardly a surprise, because I agree with most of her views on life generally.

I hope this is the last time we need to have a debate on this issue, because, by a happy coincidence, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith)

led a debate on it earlier this year—I think it was on 15 May—and he is now the Minister. I am absolutely delighted about that, and I suspect that we are pushing at an open door.

Of course, this subject is not party political, and all Members hopefully agree on it. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight) is no longer in his place, but when he and I entered Parliament the issue of animal welfare was treated very differently from the way it is today. When a show of support was organised in July for a ban on trophy hunting, I was delighted that many colleagues lined up—quite rightly—to have their photograph taken with Sir Ranulph Fiennes. That was very good to witness.

Trophy hunting is a wicked, evil practice, and anyone who indulges in it or encourages it should be absolutely ashamed of themselves. We should not mince words or be intimidated on this issue: trophy hunting is an absolutely disgusting practice. I recognise, especially from the point of view of my hon. Friend the Minister, that these words come easily. The question is: how do we stop trophy hunting? Our excellent Library briefing tells us that Australia has acted, France has acted and the Netherlands has acted. I do not know whether the Minister can tell us how successful they have been so far, but I believe that the Government want to do everything they can to stop this practice.

I was delighted to host a meeting of the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation in Manchester on Monday. The Foreign Secretary, who stood in for the Prime Minister today, made an excellent speech on this very issue, as did Dr Nick Palmer, a former Labour Member of Parliament, who is now head of Compassion in World Farming UK. We had speeches from Peter Hall, who is a director of the CAWF, and from Kike Yuen of the World Dog Alliance, and an excellent contribution from Duncan McNair of Save the Asian Elephants. It was particularly good that we had speeches from the Prime Minister's father, Mr Stanley Johnson, and from Ms Carrie Symonds. There was wide unanimity on the subject.

Conservatives' perception of the issue has been changed by one person in particular: Mrs Lorraine Platt. She set up the CAWF and, through charm, has persuaded any number of my colleagues that we need to be on the right side of the argument. She has been supported in her endeavours by Mrs Elise Dunwebber, and I congratulate them both. There is still much work to be done on the issue, but I know they are keen to work with the Government on banning trophy hunting.

In the 10 years to 2017, 290,000 trophy items were exported across the world. That is absolutely disgusting. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire spoke about lions, but as the Library briefing tells us, this is also about polar bears, giraffes, antelopes, alligators and all sorts of beautiful animals. We realise that they could kill us—they are wild animals—but, for goodness' sake, think of David Attenborough's wonderful work, not only in our country but throughout the world, to highlight the fact that these animals are facing extinction. We do not want elephants and lions to be just a story for future generations, like the dinosaurs.

In these difficult times, this is a subject that Parliament can unite on. We should help and encourage the Government to do something about it—I know that the Minister is thinking about how to reply to my hon. Friend's questions. I recognise that there is no easy

[*Sir David Amess*]

solution; 200,000 endangered animals are put at risk each year, which is an awful lot to deal with. It is so depressing that as soon as someone comes up with an idea to stop trophy hunters, these evil, wicked people get ahead of the game and find some way round the legislation.

I do not minimise the difficulty the Government face, but I simply cannot comprehend why anyone would pay up to \$72,000 to travel across the world and shoot a beautiful animal. As I have said at business questions, I have seen numerous adverts for trophy hunting, with some companies even advertising price lists by trip length—as my hon. Friend said—by animal on offer and by trophy fee. Such adverts should be completely banned from all platforms in the United Kingdom.

The Government have a responsibility to use their global influence, along with the views of our royal family, to stop this trade. We have an important role to play in bringing the world together on the issue, but it will be a real challenge because 0.76% of tourism jobs in some countries are directly linked to the trade. I was pleased by what my hon. Friends the Members for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) and for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) had to say on that point, and I hope the Government will take it on board.

In conclusion, before we are able to stop trophy hunting completely, we must recognise the need to act swiftly to ban all imports of trophies, which we must be able to do. Some 86% of British people apparently support this action, and the Government need to be alive to the fact that some of these beautiful animals will find their way into the UK because some of the customers are British citizens. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire said, we are a nation of animal lovers, so let us prove it. Let us do something about banning trophy imports. It looks as though we are going to have the Gracious Speech on 14 October, which may or may not be controversial, but would it not be good if a big chunk of legislation to deal with animal welfare were at the heart of that speech? What could be better than to pay a tribute to the debate my hon. Friend has led this afternoon and to have a proposal to ban trophy hunting imports?

3.16 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Hosie. I start by thanking the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham). We often do not agree on many policies in relation to Brexit and so on, but when we worked together on the Select Committee on International Development we agreed on fundamental issues, including helping the poorest countries in the world and animal welfare. I pay tribute to all her work in Parliament on those issues, and she will no doubt continue that work in the future.

This crucial debate is important to many of my constituents and to the public across the United Kingdom. The hon. Lady provided a detailed, passionate overview of the issue, and I agree with her words and with her asks of the Minister. We do not necessarily have to unite on a cross-party basis around some of the issues

that the public and MPs currently find so difficult, but animal welfare is a unifying issue for MPs and for people in each of the nations of the United Kingdom. I am therefore pleased that we are having this important debate today, and I hope that the Government will address the issue in the Queen's Speech.

I thank the other Members who have contributed today. The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) described trophy hunting as barbaric and unnecessary and went on to advance the alternatives that exist in this day and age. Indeed, he referenced the wild goat that was shot in Scotland, about which I received a full mailbag from my constituents, with many asking, "How brave is it to shoot a goat? How can that give pleasure? What exactly is the point?" It is not so much about conservation but, I dare to say, more about the ego of the person involved. My constituents were appalled by that individual and want to see movement on the issue.

The hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) is a real champion of animal welfare. We are usually lining up to have our photograph taken with pledges to support animal welfare, and I am pleased that he hosted a meeting of the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation at the Conservative conference this week. The foundation is kind enough to send me a Christmas card every year, so Lorraine Platt is doing well by boosting not only animal welfare issues in the Conservative party but cross-party efforts to bring everybody on board, so I pay tribute to her.

Westminster Hall would not be the same if the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) were not sitting in his place right behind me. He outlined eloquently the difference between hunting for food and trophy hunting, and stated plainly that trophy hunting is not acceptable today; we need to move with the times. In my constituency and others across the UK, young people are so enthused by doing all they can for the planet, through addressing environmental issues and conservation. They are saying to MPs in this House, "Get on with it; do this work." In this day and age, it is those issues that are top of their priority list.

Alex Chalk: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that young people are interested in the planet. When DFID was set up in 1997, it was principally focused on people, rather than the planet. Does she agree that the time has come to recalibrate our approach on deploying our international aid so that it truly focuses on and prioritises preserving the planet?

Dr Cameron: As the hon. Gentleman may be aware, DFID has a presence in my constituency, and I am so very proud of the work that it does to eradicate poverty the world over. I believe that conservation is commensurate with the sustainable development goals, because it is not only about animal welfare; it is about helping the communities located where those endangered species are. It is about making sure that those communities have another source of income; that people and animals can cohabit. We must do everything possible on both issues, and I will be interested to hear from the Minister how the two can be married together. We must ensure that aid goes to the poorest and that no one is left behind. I have a particular passion for helping disabled children into school in developing countries, but I do

not see a contradiction in helping the poorest communities and working on conservation and, in the main, I do not believe that colleagues across the House would either.

In November 2018 the Minister lodged early-day motion 1829, which was signed by 166 MPs cross-party, including myself. It asked the Government to commit to halting imports of hunting trophies as a matter of urgency. I am very pleased that the Minister is in his place today, and not just because of that issue. He also did a lot of cross-party work with the all-party parliamentary dog advisory welfare group on Lucy's law, which will now become law not just in England, but in Wales and Scotland. We are extremely pleased about that.

As has been said, 86% of the public support a ban on trophy hunting. I pay tribute to the Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting, Born Free and Stop Ivory for placing these issues at the forefront of our minds, so that we can see what is happening. I had a look at the statistics. Although progress is being made on elephant populations and larger cat populations—not enough, but some progress—people are now reverting to hunting bears, cranes, antelopes, rhinoceroses and, would you believe it, crocodiles. Perhaps they have watched too many “Crocodile Dundee” films. Other species are up 29.2% as well; I am not sure what species those are, and it would be interesting to find out more, particularly whether any of those species are at risk.

Many trophy hunters use the rationale that they kill the old, the weak or the sick, and that they are therefore helping conservation. That is rarely proven by the egotistical photographs that are put up online, with the hunter standing next to the biggest, the rarest and the largest animals with the biggest horns. It is much more about ego than any effort towards conservation.

A current loophole allows hunters from the UK to import trophies of animals, many so rare that they have been declared extinct in the wild. For example, puffins are often hunted and the trophies brought to the UK, despite the UK Government's efforts to save the species. Online websites are easily found offering these grisly puffin hunters trips costing around £3,000 to Iceland, where they have the chance to kill a bag of puffins and can boast of shooting up to 100 at a time. The species is classified as endangered in the 2018 “State of the World's Birds” report, but is not listed for protection by CITES, the body that regulates the international animal trade. British people are bringing home puffin carcasses in their hundreds and the puffin is at risk of becoming extinct, with uncontrolled hunting a leading cause.

I was proud to lead for the Scottish National party on the Bill that became the Ivory Act 2018. As a party, we welcome that historic legislation and the UK Government's progress on tackling the illegal ivory trade and trophy hunting. Organised crime is often behind the individuals involved in that trade, as it offers big money, so we need to tackle it at the root. I was pleased—actually, emotionally quite overcome—to visit Sheldrick Wildlife Trust the day before the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire, I believe, with the International Development Committee. We were able to spend time with orphaned elephants there. Now, I have quite short legs, but the little elephants only came up to my waist, which shows how small they were. Some, only a few days or a few weeks old, were being bottle-fed, because the hunters were after their parents and left the little baby elephants behind, unable to survive on their own. This fantastic project goes out

and saves them from otherwise certain death in the wild, but still, they will not have had the life they should have had. They should live with their herd, not be raised in those circumstances.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I missed the beginning of the hon. Lady's account. Could she clarify whether the victims—the parents of those elephants—were poached or hunted for trophies? There is a huge difference.

Dr Cameron: I did not get the details of what had happened to all the parents. I imagine it was a mixture of the two, but mainly poaching, because organised crime is behind a lot of that activity. However, trophy hunting does not help when saving the species.

I believe that the Department for International Development could support this work, and there is no contradiction in that. It would help some of the most rural and impoverished communities. I would like some money to go toward training local people as wardens, giving them the opportunity of jobs and livelihoods. Finally, will the Minister reinforce and re-endorse his own early-day motion calling for a ban on trophy hunting imports as a matter of urgency?

3.28 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) on initiating this very good debate, in which good points have been made by a number of speakers. It is a shame that it clashes with Second Reading of the Domestic Abuse Bill, because I know many of my hon. Friends wanted to speak in this debate. I imagine that, had they been here, they would have said much the same as has been said by others in the debate, but the Minister would have heard it from a few more voices.

I welcome the Minister to his place. It may not be fashionable—or productive for my future career—to say this, but I am excited about the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) becoming a Minister. His championing from the Back Benches of causes and views that I believe many Members share has been really powerful. At the risk of injecting a partisan flavour into the debate, I have to say that sometimes we have heard the soundbite from Ministers but not seen the action that goes with it. I am certain that the hon. Gentleman will not fall for any press release camouflage on inaction. This is an area where there is a real opportunity to stop the long-grassing of policies where there is clear cross-party support, and to get on with it. I hope that when he gets to his feet in a moment, he will say exactly the same things.

We have heard some good contributions. The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) mentioned a few but I will add a few more. The phrase of the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight), that trophy hunting is “nauseating and revolting”, cut through and adequately described what is going on. The hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) rightly said that a ban on trophy hunting is backed by 86% of the British public. The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) spoke passionately about the fact that it is not something that only happens abroad. We should recognise

[*Luke Pollard*]

that and ensure that any ban takes adequate notice of that, so that it covers not just imports but exports of trophies from UK wildlife.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) used “yellowhammer” correctly—it is good to hear the yellowhammer bird getting due attention after its name has been borrowed for so many things. We all share the complete puzzlement implied by his question, “Who on earth would want to shoot a zebra?” I agree with the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), who was clear when he said it was a wicked, evil practice. We should not mince our words about people who go and shoot.

I am glad that it is not just parliamentarians who have encouraged this debate; people have used their fame and celebrity to endorse it too. Ricky Gervais does not mince his words on social media when it comes to this subject. I especially like his tweet from a few years ago, which says:

“The trophies I’m proudest of are the memories of all those times I didn’t kill a beautiful, majestic, endangered species for no reason.”

Although he may choose more powerful language to describe some of the people who are engaged in trophy hunting, his leadership on social media has highlighted a cruel and inhumane practice to many people who might not otherwise have appreciated its barbarity.

Ricky Gervais and the Minister are not alone, however, and have been in good company in championing the cause. Joanna Lumley correctly said that trophy hunting is “cruel, immoral...and unjustifiable”. Bill Bailey said:

“I can’t get my head round why anyone would want to kill a beautiful creature for fun. With the dwindling numbers of species, it’s time to halt this cruel and unnecessary practice.”

He is right, as are the speeches that we have heard today.

I will ask the Minister a few questions to try to understand the detail of the proposed ban. He has been clear that we should ban trophy hunting, but Ministers in the past have not been clear about what that ban comprises in detail, as the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire hinted in her opening speech. The thread of Ministers to date was that the Government’s proposed ban would affect just threatened species, by taking that international classification and banning the imports of trophies in relation to them. I would like us to go much further. Labour’s position is that the ban should be for every species above least concern. That would effectively capture many more species, not just the most endangered.

Looking around the room, I see that many hon. Members served on the Committee for the Ivory Act 2018 to support the introduction of a ban on elephant ivory. Since that ban has come into place, as expected, and as mentioned in Committee, we have seen the trade move from elephant ivory to other ivory-bearing species, such as the rhino, which has experienced additional hunting since the ban on elephant ivory came in. We knew that at the time and we must not make the same mistake with the trophy hunting ban by banning it for the most endangered and allowing it to slip down to those that are just below the most endangered. The Minister will be well aware of that and, hopefully, with his power, he can make sure that it does not happen.

We need to recognise that trophy hunting, as well as being cruel and unjustifiable, can act as a cover for illegal poaching, which was the sentiment of the intervention of the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin). The proposed ban that we would like the Government to adopt would cover all species above least concern on the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources red list, which would include species classed as vulnerable, endangered, critically endangered and extinct in the wild.

Sustainable alternatives to trophy hunting, such as eco-tourism and photographic safaris, are generating revenues that cover the real costs of conservation and effective anti-poaching work, as well as providing well-paying permanent jobs for local people. Shooting a lion such as Cecil can generate a one-off trophy fee of around \$15,000. There is no evidence that that goes toward conservation, no evidence that it goes toward the local community, and no evidence that it goes toward the protection of other animals. Nature tourism, on the other hand, can generate money from the protection and valuing of those wild animals.

There is an opportunity, which has been mentioned a few times, through Brexit to come together. What Brexit has done for DEFRA debates is to open space in the Government’s legislative agenda for issues that might not otherwise have got the airtime they deserved. If we think about what has been passed by this House in recent months, on a cross-party basis, with the Brexit malaise and chaos going on around us, we will realise that many of the same faces in this Chamber have been working together on banning wild animals in circuses, banning the trade in elephant ivory and tightening up regulations across the board.

That work might not have attracted the attention of many people outside Parliament, and certainly it has not troubled some of our friends in the media, but it has been worthwhile. We should continue that spirit, whatever is happening with Brexit or outside, because there is something here that could make a real difference to the species involved.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is speaking very eloquently about the issue and the potential opportunities of eco-tourism. He will know that last year in Scotland, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) has mentioned, the shooting of a wild goat on Islay caused a huge upset among people in Scotland and much further afield. What is most upsetting is that tourism companies are promoting Scotland as a place to come and trophy-shoot. Surely we should be clamping down on that. Companies are not just offering places in Africa as destinations; that is also happening here in the UK.

Luke Pollard: The hon. Lady makes a very sound point, on a common theme with the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess), who voiced a concern about what powers the Government have over the advertising of those tourism products. I spent five years working for the Association of British Travel Agents, and in that role I supported the animal welfare guidelines that encouraged ABTA members to ensure that animals are used sustainably and without endangering them, their habitats or their handlers. There are opportunities

to ensure that those principles, which are good and strong, are spread across not only ABTA members, but the entire tourism industry. I am sure that the Minister is familiar with those guidelines; if he is not, I encourage him to look at them next time he needs some bedtime reading, because there is some real strength there and some real opportunities to do the right thing. The market does not correct all ills, and in this case there is a role for real moral leadership from the Government.

I hope that the Minister will be as strong and forthright in his new role as he has been in campaigning to date. I was pleased to see a letter that he co-signed in *The Guardian* in April with a series of high-profile supporters, which said:

“Banning the import of hunting trophies will send a clear message to the international community that there is no place for trophy hunting in this day and age.”

We must be clear that the continuation of that colonial and neo-colonial practice of rich people descending on communities, for whom that extra money can have a positive impact on their lives, to do something that is abhorrent, is something that we should not accept any more.

The Minister was in good company in signing that letter. It was signed not only by the Prime Minister's father and his partner, but by Michael Palin, Captain Kirk—William Shatner, that is—Matt Lucas, Will Travers of Born Free, by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), for West Lancashire (Rosie Cooper), for Kensington (Emma Dent Coad), for Stroud (Dr Drew) and for Makerfield (Yvonne Fovargue), and many others besides.

As my final remark, I encourage the Minister not to allow his passion for these topics to be diluted by the sense, which there sometimes is within Government, that animal welfare legislation can be cut up and parcelled in different parts, as happened with the Ivory Act. The Ivory Act should have been a comprehensive ban on ivory—I believe that is something the Minister himself supported from the Back Benches—but it was allowed to be parcelled up into smaller bits. I hope that the new Administration will move away from that parcelling up of animal welfare opportunities.

There is a real opportunity here for people who may be bitterly divided on Brexit and other matters to come together, on a cross-party basis, around animal welfare. I encourage the Minister to be as bold as he can be, because in these times animals do not have a voice, and every animal matters. We must ensure that we are their voice. The Minister has the opportunity to be a bull in a china shop on the previous behaviour of the right soundbite but the wrong action, and to ensure that we have the comprehensive trophy hunting ban that we deserve, which animals both in the wild and in the canned lion industry that the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire spoke about can really benefit from.

3.39 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Zac Goldsmith): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) on securing this debate. Over the past years we have stood side by side in so many

debates on issues relevant to this one that I have lost track of how many we have shared. She has been a nature champion for all the time I have known her—indeed, this room is full of nature champions, and I wish there were a few more. It has been a joy to hear the contributions, including interventions, from all Members present.

My hon. Friend will know that this subject is close to my heart. Indeed, the last time I took part in a debate on this issue in Parliament—I believe she also took part—was on a motion tabled in my name, some time earlier this year. Last Saturday I was pleased to announce that the Government are launching a consultation on restricting, or banning, the import and export of hunting trophies.

Many questions have been raised, some of which I will struggle to answer because they relate to the details of the consultation. Hon. Members will understand that I must be slightly guarded and cannot go into too many details about a Government consultation, because I could end up jeopardising or compromising the process. Broadly speaking, however, we are not looking for any long grass. This is a serious consultation, and we intend to resolve the issue once and for all and not to waste any time. I will drive it through as fast as I possibly can, but in a proper manner.

I cannot answer the question about the threshold, were we to end up with the ban that we are talking about. My early-day motion broadly reflects the position laid out by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), which relates to not just CITES I and II, but the list from the International Union for Conservation of Nature. However, those details will have to come out in the consultation, and it would be wrong for me to pre-empt it.

I am grateful for and flattered by the remarks made about my appointment. I am an animal welfare and conservation advocate, and I was worried, before being asked to be a Minister, that I might have to go through a lobotomy and cast aside all my passions for such issues. That does not seem to have been the case—yet—so I am able to pursue issues that matter to me and to Members across the House. Over the next few weeks, I look forward to reading the feedback on this debate from people across the spectrum, but I know from correspondence I have already seen that some people will push back heavily against the proposal for a possible ban.

On a personal level, hon. Members know I believe that shooting a beautiful and endangered animal for fun is, to quote the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), obscene, and it is something I could never understand. Most people with whom I have discussed the issue are similarly sickened when they see images of so-called celebrity hunters smirking over the corpse of a lion, giraffe, rhino or elephant. It is something that most people regard as grotesque, and poll after poll shows that to be the view of the British people. There have been a range of polls, but they have consistently shown that between 75% and 90% of people are in favour of a ban on imports of hunting trophies.

To demonstrate quite how non-partisan this issue is, I was shocked and amazed last Saturday to read an editorial in the *Daily Mirror*—I have appeared in it a few times as a politician, and I have always put on my tin hat and hidden away for a few hours afterwards. This recent editorial, however, praised both me and the

[Zac Goldsmith]

Conservative Government for initiating this process, because the issue goes way beyond the left or right of politics today. I thank the *Daily Mirror* for having pushed the issue up the agenda. It has run an incredibly impressive campaign, as have *The Daily Telegraph* and a number of key campaigners, such as Eduardo Gonçalves, who runs the Campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting.

Trophy hunting is not just a niche issue or a symbolic part of the conservation story. A 2016 report by the International Fund for Animal Welfare estimates that around 1.7 million hunting trophies crossed borders globally between 2004 and 2014, and at least 200,000 of those came from species that are threatened. Some of those species face a horribly uncertain future, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire in relation to lion numbers. There could be only 15,000 lions, 415,000 African elephants—there were 3 million elephants a century ago—and 5,000 black rhinos left in the wild.

As I said from the Back Benches a few months ago, we must nevertheless separate the moral arguments from the scientific ones. The moral arguments do matter, and for many people the idea of shooting a giraffe for fun or with the idea that it might help protect the giraffe seems utterly perverse, but the issue is subject to a live debate between experts and even some conservation organisations.

Bill Wiggin: Many people who live in the Forest of Dean wake up in the morning to find that wild boar have completely destroyed their garden, and they then ring the Forestry Commission—in the Minister's Department—which culls those animals. Is that right?

Zac Goldsmith: It is certainly right that wild boar are culled. There is a live discussion about whether there should be a protected season for wild boar, given that they are now prevalent throughout the country. I am not sure that my hon. Friend's point is directly relevant to the issue of the positive contribution of trophy hunting to either the conservation or the denudation of wild species.

Bill Wiggin: It is very easy to attach a huge amount of emotion to animals that are attractive and beautiful, as the Minister described, but they are still managed, and the ability to manage populations is the difficult part. The Government have to take responsibility. I felt he was perhaps straying into pretending that it does not happen.

Zac Goldsmith: My hon. Friend pre-empts the point I was about to make. We have to separate the ethical arguments from the scientific ones. If the scientific evidence can show that trophy hunting contributes to conservation, we will be having a different debate. Although I cannot pre-empt the consultation, we will be flooded with evidence that will tell us one way or the other. I acknowledge that some conservation groups make the case for trophy hunting. I have seen the documents and been bombarded with letters, as we will no doubt be throughout the consultation. Some of the arguments that I have heard are—I think this term entered the English dictionary only recently—whataboutery. A number

of different organisations tell us that trophy hunting is an issue but that it is not as bad as habitat loss or illegal poaching. Obviously, habitat loss is the big problem facing species across the world, and we have heard about the illegal wildlife trade decimating communities and bringing species to the brink of extinction, but whether or not that is true, it is not an argument for or against trophy hunting. It is an entirely separate issue.

The central argument that has been put forward in favour of trophy hunting is that these magnificent animals, through being hunted, generate money that is then ploughed into conservation. I have not seen much evidence of the funds being used to support local communities or to invest in conservation. It is not much use if the main argument of the conservation groups is based on generalising the best of the best practice—no doubt there are some best practice examples—throughout the world; if so, their argument is flimsy at best. We will see during the consultation whether there are more examples of best practice than perhaps I have implied.

There are other issues to examine. Unlike wildlife tourism, trophy hunting contributes a tiny proportion of revenue for African countries. There is a question whether we should instead focus our efforts on promoting the former. I will come to that point in answer to another question, which was raised by the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron). There is also the issue of cruelty, with reports that half the animals killed in the course of trophy hunting are not killed instantaneously but are wounded. Cecil the lion lived for another 19 hours, I believe—no doubt in hideous pain—after first being shot.

We must find out the impact of trophy hunting on the gene pool. If hunters prize the biggest and the best of the rarest, the most endangered and the most valuable species, does that not logically mean that the gene pool is inevitably going to be weakened over time? These are issues that, again, we are going to have to address.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire mentioned the issue of canned hunting. I forget which hon. Member described it as an obscenity, but it is. As far as I can see, these lions are bred for one purpose only and they are shot in such a manner that anyone would be able to finish them off, no matter how talented they are with a gun. It is no different from putting goldfish in a bowl and just shooting them. It is an extraordinarily grim practice. In answer to my hon. Friend's question about whether the consultation will include measures to tackle canned hunting, I would say that it is one and the same. That will be explored in the consultation, and I hope the outcome will fully take into account the points she made.

The UK cannot ban trophy hunting overseas. We are not at liberty to do so, but we can ban the import of hunting trophies. Over the five years from 2013 to 2017, we estimate that up to 1,500 trophies were imported into the UK, with up to one third of those from the most endangered species. Perversely, elephant parts are the favourite import for British trophy hunters. I say that is perverse because we are the world leader now in stepping up our efforts to protect elephants around the world, not least through the ivory legislation that has already been commended today and much more besides. This consultation is critical, and it is going to have to provide answers to those very difficult questions.

I want to talk briefly about animal welfare and conservation more broadly. People in this country do care—very much—about the issue. As the animal welfare Minister, I clearly do too. I am proud of the progress this Government have already made. We introduced the ivory legislation I just mentioned. We introduced legislation to ban the use of wild animals in travelling circuses. We have legislated to ensure that CCTV is required in every slaughterhouse. Along with this consultation on the importance of hunting trophies, we are also consulting on mandatory cat microchipping, we are issuing a call for evidence on banning the keeping of pet primates and we are bringing forward proposals for consideration on ending the live export of animals.

I was proud that the UK played a defining role at the recent CITES COP, working under the radar, barely noticed by the rest of the country, to bring an end to the appalling practice of capturing wild elephants to be sold for captivity around the world. Without our negotiating team from DEFRA taking part in that debate, the motion would not have passed and it would still be possible for countries to capture wild elephants and pack them off to grim zoos in China and elsewhere. If they were here, I would pay tribute to them. In their absence, I will do so, all the same.

I am delighted that the Prime Minister announced at the United Nations that we are going to radically step up our contribution to tackling the wider environmental and climate crisis—and it is a crisis, no matter how you choose to interpret it. We know from scientists that a 1.5° C rise in temperatures is going to be utterly devastating to humanity and nature. We heard just a few months ago, in what is the most comprehensive ever assessment of the state of the natural world, the report from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, that 1 million species face extinction, many of them within decades. We have heard that, since 1970, the populations of the world's wild animals have declined by 60%—a staggering figure. We learned from the World Resources Institute that, last year, we lost the equivalent of 27 football pitches' worth of forest every single minute. Incidentally, we also learned from the World Economic Forum that, by 2050, our oceans will have more plastic in them than fish, if measured by weight.

We recognise the scale of the challenge. We are determined as a Government to provide the leadership that is needed globally and to do our bit at home. I was at the General Assembly of the United Nations when the Prime Minister made his announcement that we are going to double our climate funding. I was there when he made the important point about the crucial role of biodiversity in nature in tackling climate change. That directly addresses the point raised by a number of hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Strangford, my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) and no doubt others as well. The Prime Minister emphasised that much of that uplift in climate funding will be spent on nature-based solutions to climate change. We know that if we invest in protecting, saving and restoring forests, we protect the livelihoods of those hundreds of millions of people who depend on them for their livelihoods. We protect the harbour for 80% of the world's biodiversity, and we also tackle climate change, given that deforestation is the second-biggest cause of emissions.

The same is true of our oceans. About 1 billion people depend on oceans for their main source of protein. Some 200 million depend on oceans for their livelihoods and on there being fish for them to catch. However, oceans are also a gigantic carbon sink, so the case for investing in nature-based solutions as a means of tackling climate change and helping to stop the extinction crisis, and also as a means of alleviating and preventing base poverty, is absolute and unarguable. I am thrilled that we are moving in that direction, and I do not sense any opposition from any party in this place to that shift. So that is where we need to go, and that is where I am thrilled to say we are going.

As a start to that package—these are just the things that have been announced in the past few weeks in relation to biodiversity—the Prime Minister announced a new £220 million fund. That includes a dramatic uplift to the Darwin initiative, which I am sure Members are aware of. That world-renowned programme has brought individual species back from the brink of extinction. We will see a major uplift in the illegal wildlife trade challenge fund, which is relatively new, but is already yielding incredible results, particularly on the continent of Africa, but elsewhere as well. It helps train local people to tackle poaching and create alternative livelihoods in areas most at risk, and it is having a significant and measurable impact.

We are creating a new fund. It does not have a proper name yet, but we are calling it the biodiverse landscape fund. It is a £100 million fund—a world first. It will tackle the drivers of biodiversity loss in large biodiversity hotspots around the world, focusing particularly on trans-frontier initiatives such as KAZA in southern Africa, which is a programme that five countries have signed up to to create wildlife corridors connecting their countries, their national parks and more. It is all based on helping local communities to create alternative livelihoods so that the viability of local economies is based and dependent on the health of the local environment and on flourishing biodiversity.

That is just a start. We are doing a lot, and I am thrilled that the UK has been given an opportunity to host the COP in 2020. We keep hearing about 2020 as a superyear for nature. It is absolutely the Government's ambition to play a part so that 2020 will be the superyear for nature. We will host COP, and by the end of the year, in December, we aim to have aligned as many big countries in the world as possible with our ambition to step up our contribution to tackling climate change, to focus much more on nature-based solutions and to help turn the tide on this catastrophic extinction crisis, which is now beyond any doubt at all—it is happening right now on our watch.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire for bringing attention to this hugely important issue and for all the work she does as a parliamentary nature champion. I thank other hon. Members for their contributions too. We will crack on. We will get this done. We are not looking for the long grass. We will nail this issue as quickly as we possibly can.

3.58 pm

Mrs Latham: I thank the Minister and all hon. and right hon. Members for contributing to this debate. It must be terribly hard for the Minister to be the poacher

[Mrs Latham]

turned gamekeeper. He has a difficult decision, having now to stick with what he is told and what he has to do, but I hope that his passion will cut through some of the civil service speak and that he will get on and do it, because we are only temporary custodians of the wildlife and the environment of this planet. We really need to act if we want our grandchildren, their children and their children after that to be able to see these magnificent animals. We can play only a small part, but we can do a lot to persuade other countries to cease their activities. A ban on wildlife trophy imports into this country sends a hugely significant message that we care and want to change things. I commend this motion to the Minister and everyone else.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered trophy hunting imports.

Leasehold and Commonhold Reform

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered progress on leasehold and commonhold reform.

This debate is an opportunity for the Government to explain what progress has been made on this issue, describe what is in their mind at the moment, and give us some hope that there will be even more improvements in future.

Before I start in detail, I want to thank colleagues who have worked really hard on the issue. I welcome the fact that the Labour party has developed proposals of its own, and I know that the Liberal Democrats have done the same. In particular, I thank and praise the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), who I think has done more on this issue than any other Member of Parliament. I also thank the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), who has joined in and helped to make the scandal of leasehold homes in the north-west so relevant.

I also pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey), who was deeply involved in the early stages of the campaign by the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership. That charity's campaign, both for the ordinary leaseholders of flats and houses and in the retirement field, has done so much to make it possible for the work of MPs to be well directed and well supported. With Louise O'Riordan, it acts as the secretariat for the all-party parliamentary group on leasehold and commonhold reform, and I think we can all say that we have made progress together.

I say to those in the Government field and in the Government's Leasehold Advisory Service, or LEASE, that we often agree that problems exist. We agree more often now than we did five years ago, when a succession of temporary Housing Ministers could not see that there is a problem, which partly was because the Department did not have many officials working on the issue of leaseholds and commonholds. The attempt by Parliament and the Government to bring in commonhold failed because the responsibility for it was split with the Ministry of Justice, which had no resources whatsoever. As a result, nothing happened. When we put forward the case for uniting commonhold with leasehold, I understand that the predecessor Department to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said that it would take responsibility if it received the resources, but there were no resources.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I and other Labour Members are grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his generous comments, and I congratulate him on securing the debate. He does not have any support from other Government Members at the moment, whereas Labour Members are mob-handed in Westminster Hall today. However, I can assure him that we are here as his fan club and support structure, because it is the prominent role that he has played—leading the all-party parliamentary group, as co-chair—that has ensured that we have been able to press the Government on the issue. To the

Government's credit, they have made a number of commitments on leasehold during the past five years, and we are very keen to hear the Minister's response to this debate.

Sir Peter Bottomley: That is the sort of remark I can survive, and I am grateful for it.

I will say, as I try to in each of the debates on the issue, that I am a leaseholder of a small flat in my constituency, and with the other five leaseholders we bought the freehold. We had a good freeholder, good managing agents and we have had no problem whatsoever, and we know how the system can work. In effect, we are commonhold now, but we were originally freehold. Ground rents were low and we did not have the problem of ground rents doubling every 10 years.

We also did not have the kind of crooks, such as Martin Paine, who came in and gave informal leases, which really made a mess of people's lives. We did not suffer from the Tchenguiz interests, which were responsible—both in the retirement field and in other fields—for some of the worst excesses. Frankly, the public authorities, such as the fraud people, the economic crimes people, the police and the Competition and Markets Authority people failed, and the Tchenguiz-controlled business got away scot free, when the people in that business should have been sent to jail and fined millions of pounds. The millions of pounds would have made up for the losses of the ordinary leaseholders who were failed by them.

I also pay tribute to Martin Boyd and Sebastian O'Kelly, chief executive and trustee of the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership, who have done so much, and they have now joined members of the National Leasehold Campaign and Bob Bessell, the former director of social services in Warwickshire, who in his retirement built 1,600 retirement homes without a single ground rent.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for coming down on a fast train from Manchester, where she has given distinguished service over the past two days. I ask her to review whether it is sensible, necessary or right to allow ground rents in retirement properties. I look on the Churchill Group as the son of McCarthy and Stone, which was, with Peveril, at the foundation of some of the problems that hit previous generations. To any Treasury civil servant who reads the report of this debate, I would say that if we get leasehold and commonhold right, the value of homes will go up, not down, and the income to the Treasury will go up.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): My area has quite a few new leasehold housing estates, some of which have now been there for a number of years. The residents are being hit with a double whammy. They have all the costs associated with leasehold and they also have service management fees, which are absolutely enormous and growing. More and more people are reporting to me that they cannot sell their properties because they get partway through the process and the buyer looks at the cost and says, "No way."

Sir Peter Bottomley: We are not able to cover everything in a half-hour debate, but that is one of the issues to which I think the House of Commons needs to return. We ought to have a full-day debate, preferably in

Government time and on the Floor of the House, so that many other Members can speak and be a voice for their constituents.

As an example for those who do not read *Private Eye* on the day it comes out, there is a story about Rothsay Life, which apparently has £1.5 billion of loans. It can revalue the interest over 30 years and take it almost as instant profit. That is the kind of thing that leads people to say, "I am going to be greedy and get away with things as long as I can."

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick). We are very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for all the work that he has put into the campaign, which is growing stronger by the day. Some of the voluntary schemes that developers have entered into with leaseholders have a sting in the tail, with additional clauses carrying on afterwards. Does he agree that that example shows that it is important to get something on a statutory footing as soon as possible?

Sir Peter Bottomley: The whole House will agree with the hon. Gentleman. Incidentally, we got the Competition and Markets Authority to hold an investigation into leasehold and—this is one of my tributes to the Government—I want to say how grateful we all are for the matters that have been sent across to the Law Commission, with the aim of getting practical and fair proposals that can be enacted.

One such important issue is lease extensions. There are more than 1 million leases, mainly of flats, that are coming to the 80-year limit where they cannot be mortgaged and where the marriage value starts coming in. At the moment, it is very difficult to find a cheap, easy and fair way of getting an extension on a lease. As and when we come to the elimination of new ground rents, we should find a way of putting a sunset clause on old ground rents, and give an incentive to freeholders to come forward with ways of getting some capital value now, rather than none later on. They have had the dawn of their money, and there needs to be some kind of sharing of the dusk that stops the money rolling in. We need to find a way of saying to them, "Let's agree a simple chart; if you take 10 years of existing ground rent, don't start saying you will take a doubling, and a doubling again after that."

I interrupt myself to say that there is one announcement from the last couple of days that is potentially very dangerous to leaseholders, which is the proposal that people can put two more storeys on top of a block without planning permission. If the block is owned by an outside freeholder, that will ruin the chance of enfranchisement. If it is going to happen, all the value should go to the leaseholders, not the freeholder. In fact, it might provide an incentive for the leaseholders to buy the freehold and then agree among themselves how to deal with building on, and having a bigger community. As I said, I own a lease and part of a freehold of a block in Worthing. I am also contracted to buy a leasehold flat that is being built at the moment, which might be built in three years' time. If anyone thinks that I have an interest in this issue, I do—if I get any benefit from it, I will give it to a good cause.

[Sir Peter Bottomley]

To go back to LEASE, MPs have had difficulty with its two previous chairs. The first, Deep Sagar, showed no understanding at all that LEASE should not be helping rapacious freeholders or clever managing agents to screw money out of leaseholders. He moved on, but I must say incidentally to the civil service appointments people that they should count how many public appointments he has had—I think he has had more than the number of years I have had in the House of Commons, which is 45. The second chair was Roger Southam, whom I took on trust when he was appointed. Others said that he was not trustworthy. It turned out that I was wrong and they were right.

I hope that when a permanent chair is chosen for LEASE—it now has an interim chair—the stakeholders will be consulted on the process and, if possible, given a chance to comment on who might be on the shortlist. If they do not want to trust me, perhaps they could ask the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse or someone else to bring an impartial view. LEASE has been led for many years by Anthony Essien. I have no complaint about him; I have treated him with respect on every occasion, and vice versa.

LEASE has been changing: it is now unequivocally on the side of leaseholders, thanks to the intervention of Gavin Barwell, who was the first Housing Minister to get a grip on what was needed—he provided leadership in the Department, and I am glad that the Department has responded. LEASE's website now has more than 100 categories under which people can interact and get some advice. The problem is that LEASE could not give all the advice on practical things.

For example, on the Grenfell Tower cladding issue, when the Government rightly said that no social tenant should have to carry the cost of re-cladding, the private tenants were left stuck, either in public or private blocks. The advice that the campaigning charity Leasehold Knowledge Partnership gave was right, while the advice that LEASE gave—to go to court—was wrong, because the tribunals had to reach the unfair conclusion that the leaseholder was stuck with the cost.

I pay great tribute to the then Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire), who got the Government to agree—perhaps against the advice of some civil servants—to carry the cost. He solved a problem that would otherwise have hit many small people.

There are other issues that I could cover at some length. I pay tribute to the National Leasehold Campaign, and to Katie Kendrick and Jo Darbyshire; to Victoria Derbyshire's programme on BBC 2, which gave the issue prominence at a time when it mattered; to Patrick Collinson of *The Guardian*; to whoever advises Stobes at *Private Eye* on leasehold issues; and to others.

I declare this in public: if any of these big property interests threaten defamation proceedings against any of the leasehold campaigners, I will say on the Floor of the House of Commons exactly what can be said about them, in spades—I won't hold back. Up to now I have been pretty restrained, but I want people to know this: do not bully those who campaign for justice. We are all on the side of the small voice. By all means have discussion, and by all means have disagreement, but do

not think that you can get away with lawyers' letters of the kind that get prominence every now and again in Stobes's legal pages.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for all the work that he has put in over many years; many of us have come in on the back of it. Does he welcome the decision in the Persimmon case in north Wales last month and recognise that other leaseholders are in a similar position of not having had enough information when they bought out their lease? I have a situation with Barratt Homes in my constituency, where leaseholders are now looking to get the county council to take on a similar case under trading standards. Would it not be far more efficient for the Government to send out a clear message to property companies in this case that they really need to do the right thing by leaseholders who have been dishonestly sold to? That would save them from all those actions and relieve the pressure on county councils and leaseholders.

Sir Peter Bottomley: The whole House will agree. Perhaps it would help if the Ministry considered having a roundtable to go through some of these issues—it would not have to be secret, but it could be informally private. We were fortunate, in part, with Pete Redfern of Taylor Wimpey, when we discovered that the then chair of LEASE had written totally defective documents that put it as though Roger Southam could control blocks that should never have been anywhere near his control. That got resolved. Taylor Wimpey said it would set aside £130 million to put right some of the things it now recognises it should not have done—it has not done enough, but at least it recognises the issue and has made a start.

I think the trading standards case in Wales is a way forward. Responsible shareholders in each of the building firms should be saying, "With social responsibility in corporate governance, what are you going to do about it?" That applies to Barratt as to the other firms. As for Persimmon, I hope that it will say that this is not just a judgment relevant to Wales, where in fact it kept away from judgment by making a voluntary payment, but applies to England as well.

Put simply, we need to abolish new leaseholds in any but the most extreme circumstances; we need to find a way to convert to commonhold; and we need to make commonhold so well known that when people try to register, it is recognised by Help to Buy and by the Land Registry—it is now recognised by both, but it was not previously. Advice should be taken from the all-party group and our secretariat, the Leasehold Knowledge Partnership. When there is friction, let us try to resolve it in a normal way. I end with this offer: I hope that the chief executive of LEASE will accept an invitation to bring all his staff to a drinks party here in the House of Commons, where the all-party group and those who give day-to-day advice to leaseholders can come together and get past any problems that may be apparent at the moment.

4.16 pm

The Minister for Housing (Ms Esther McVey): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) on securing today's debate on the progress of leasehold and commonhold reform.

He is a determined and formidable campaigner. I am also grateful to the Opposition Members who, with my hon. Friend, have been making solid progress on this important matter. With more than 4 million leasehold properties in the UK, we need to ensure that the system is working correctly, and that where it is not—where we see unfairness and exploitation—the market is held to account and changed.

Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): During a recent Backbench Business Committee debate on the Floor of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and others raised the problem of people who had bought new properties in the north-west with leasehold arrangements that, to be frank, are a rip-off. At that point, the body language of the Minister—great champion of free enterprise that she is—conveyed her recognition that we had a case. Will she agree to meet a small delegation to discuss what can be done? The developers involved, in particular Redrow in my constituency, are completely unwilling to discuss the rights and decencies due to our residents.

Ms McVey: I will indeed meet the right hon. Gentleman and a delegation of fellow MPs. I did not realise he was such a good reader of body language, but he is quite right. The cases raised are not right, the system is not working right and those who agree with the market can see that it is not working right for the market either. Such cases should not be happening.

Let me be clear: the Government are committed to improving consumer fairness for leaseholders, and we have a programme of work under way to make sure that changes are made. Some of that work has already happened, including setting out how the ban on leasehold for new homes will work and stating our intention to reduce to zero ground rents on new leases, if we have them at all.

Mark Tami: The Minister talks about going forward, which is great, but we must go back too. We cannot leave behind the people who have been sold a pup. People tell us how they were advised to use Taylor Wimpey's own lawyers and how it was never pointed out to them that the properties were leasehold. Even now, some people do not realise that they have a leasehold property.

Ms McVey: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point; I will come to it later in my speech. No doubt, he realises that with leaseholds dating back a long time, there are legalities to unpick, but we are working on understanding how to do that.

I am pleased to see that the leasehold house ban has had an immediate effect on the market. In 2017, when we first made the announcement, 10% of new-build houses in England were sold as leasehold; today, that figure is down to 2%, which is significant progress, but we obviously want to make more. We will still legislate to ensure that, in future, apart from in exceptional circumstances, all new houses will be sold on a freehold basis.

Developers will no longer be able to use leases on houses for financial gain—a practice that has become the norm in some parts of the country, as we have heard again today. That will make certain that the right tenure is used on the right properties, which will make it fairer

for all. The reforms will remove the incentives for developers and freeholders to use leaseholds to make unjustified profits at the expense of leaseholders.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): To echo the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) about going back, do the Government see that as a responsibility and could they find a way to intervene? We have identical houses on the same estate: they were sold in the first phase as leasehold but are being sold in the second phase as freehold at the same price, yet the owners of the first-phase houses have been told that they must pay £3,750 to Persimmon, Redrow or whoever to convert to freehold. There is no market and there is no choice in that—is it not wrong?

Ms McVey: Everybody here can agree that is wrong, but it is about the steps that we will have to take to get the situation under control. We are looking at help for existing leaseholders, many of whom face, as the hon. Gentleman says, onerous fees and charges, including the doubling of ground rent in some cases. The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee and many existing leaseholders want the Government to legislate to amend those. We are deeply concerned about the difficulties that people are having with those charges, but we clearly have to look at how to unpick those contracts, which are set in law.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the Minister for her generosity in giving way and to the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) for securing the debate.

One thing I would beg the Minister for is a simple right-to-buy formula, perhaps based on the number of years remaining—a multiple of the ground rent, in some way—that could be applied nationwide. I know there will be a lot of complexities in that, but is it something she is looking at in those plans? It would be great to hear if she were.

Ms McVey: We are indeed looking at a much simpler model that people can understand and make sense of, and at how to make it easier, smoother and quicker to do.

We have also made sure that there is a voluntary way for the sector to come together to solve the problems of its own creation. The industry pledge is an important first step. It has been signed by more than 60 leading developers, freeholders and managing agents. We will work with them and keep a vigilant eye on how it is working. Through that pledge, freeholders have committed to identifying any lease that doubles more frequently than every 20 years and contacting the relevant leaseholders to offer to amend their lease where necessary. I acknowledge those developers that have signed the pledge not to insert such clauses into future leases and welcome that. The pledge is an important first step, but we need to keep our eye on it. We will continue to monitor how effective it is in supporting leaseholders and we will take further action where necessary.

Matt Western: The Minister is being generous in giving way. It is interesting to hear that there is a voluntary assembly of the various housebuilders and

[*Matt Western*]

developers. Surely, however, there is an opportunity for a paid-for body, funded by all those builders, to come together and arbitrate on behalf of the leaseholders and come to a sensible cost for them to pay for the conversion to freehold. Would not an independent body funded by the builders be a better solution?

Ms McVey: All the ideas that have come forward are being looked at to figure out what the way forward will be. That may well be something that ends up happening. At the moment, I cannot say, but we will look at every idea that comes forward.

The Government are looking to standardise the enfranchisement process and have asked the Law Commission to review the current arrangements. That is to support existing leaseholders and, as mentioned, it includes making buying a freehold or extending a lease easier, quicker and as cost-effective as possible. The Law Commission is analysing responses to its consultation paper on leasehold enfranchisement reform, “Leasehold home ownership: buying your freehold or extending your lease”. This autumn, it will report back to Government on the options for reducing the price of that, and on all other aspects of the enfranchisement regime early next year. I look forward to receiving its recommendations.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): If there is evidence of mis-selling and collusion between solicitors and developers, what action can the Government take?

Ms McVey: I shall come to that later, but the hon. Gentleman will know as well as I do, I hope, that that is looked at and where it can be proved that something wrong and unlawful has been done, it will be taken up and checked.

Obviously still more needs to be done. Our recent publications show the other plans we have for leasehold reform. They include our responses to the technical consultation on implementing reforms to the leasehold market, and to the Select Committee, most of whose recommendations we were able to accept in full or in part. We have also committed to regulating managing agents, and to improving the transparency and fairness of service charges. Too often, people feel ripped off by fees and charges, sometimes not even being told what they are paying for. We have committed to introducing a single mandatory and legally enforceable code of practice to set standards across the sector. We will also require agents to be qualified to practice.

Last October, we established an independent working group, chaired by Lord Best, to look at how standards can be raised across the property sector, and to consider how fees such as service charges should be presented to

consumers. The working group published its final reports to the Government in July. We are considering its recommendations and will announce the next steps in due course.

Sir Peter Bottomley: The whole House is grateful to my right hon. Friend. There may not be time to get through all the things that the Government are doing and looking forward to doing, so would she consider making a written statement to lay things out and make them available to all, not just those who are here for the debate?

One thing that may not be dealt with straightaway is looking at the regulations on recognised tenants’ associations—in effect, recognising leaseholders, which I know is a tricky issue. The Government wrote to me saying that they would consult the property tribunal about how this was working. I do not ask for an instant response, but that is one of the issues that should go forward.

The Minister’s response to the Select Committee report is very good. The report was one of the best I have seen in all my time in the House, and the Government are responding to it well.

Ms McVey: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We should and will lay the matter down as a written statement. Everyone, across the House, appreciates that there is bad practice. Where bad practice happens, in whatever form, it should be taken to task.

It is unacceptable that some freehold homeowners are unable to challenge excessive fees for the maintenance of their estates. We are going to legislate so that residential freeholders will be given the right to challenge the reasonableness of such fees. They will also be able to apply to the tribunal to appoint a new manager. That will help to increase the transparency, accountability and reasonableness of the fees.

Many leaseholders have raised concerns because they believe they were mis-sold their properties—the leasehold tenure was not properly explained to them, and the onerous terms were not made clear. Some were told that they could buy the freehold for a certain price after a couple of years, only to find out that it had been sold on to an investor in that time and that either the price had gone up considerably or they could not buy it. I welcome the Competition and Markets Authority’s current investigation of the issue.

I appreciate that I am running out of time, but I will indeed meet with my colleagues. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West for bringing this important matter to Westminster Hall. It is something that all colleagues want to get right. Abuses will not be accepted by any of us.

Question put and agreed to.

Child Maintenance Service: Payment Recovery from Absent Parents

4.30 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the performance of the Child Maintenance Service in recovering payments from absent parents.

I would hope that everyone agrees that parents should continue to take financial responsibility for their children after the break-up of a relationship. We must understand that relationship break-up can often be a disturbing and distressing time for everybody, often leaving behind a great deal of bad feeling. It is not easy in such circumstances to come to an arrangement that is fair on both partners and, most of all, fair on the children. The criticisms that I will be directing today at the Child Maintenance Service, and its predecessor the Child Support Agency, should not be taken as an indication that I do not appreciate the difficult circumstances in which it has to operate.

Many absent parents do their best to care for their children, and I do not want to give the impression that everybody whose relationship has broken up is trying to avoid their responsibilities. Sadly, however, some people see the break-up of a relationship as an opportunity to abandon all responsibilities for their children. The Child Maintenance Service owes it to those children and to the resident parent to ensure that the absent parent complies with their legal and moral responsibilities. We are not talking about forcing somebody to pay to give their children a life of luxury. Indeed, we are often talking about forcing somebody to pay money that they can well afford in order to keep their own children out of poverty. The Child Maintenance Service is sometimes not good enough at getting money from people who can afford it, and we sometimes see it pursuing people for payments that they quite clearly cannot afford.

I am grateful to several organisations that have provided me with background information not only for this debate, but to support my caseworkers in dealing with a significant number of requests for help from constituents. Fife Gingerbread does an enormous amount of good work in my constituency and elsewhere in Fife. My caseworkers also find the Child Poverty Action Group's child support handbook indispensable, and that will be the same in every constituency across these islands.

Several individuals have also shared their experiences with me. I do not have time to go into any of them in great detail, and some of cannot be aired in public for reasons of confidentiality. In addition, some of the issues that have been raised—serious though they are—do not really fall within the remit of this debate because they relate, for example, to the regulations around exactly how somebody's income is determined, which causes a great deal of anger, sometimes among the paying parents and sometimes for the receiving parents. I make that point because it will not be possible to go into most of these cases in any kind of detail in the time available. I have also been approached by several colleagues who want to speak in the debate or to intervene, so I want to give time for that as well.

I see too many cases in which it is obvious that a parent is determined to avoid their responsibilities and that they can get away with it—sometimes for years at a time—which is just not good enough. It is far too easy,

for example, to hide income from the Child Maintenance Service, which too often leaves it to the resident parent to produce the evidence that their ex-partner is effectively committing fraud. That is bad enough at the best of times, but if the resident parent has been the victim of domestic abuse or financially coercive and controlling behaviour, it is wholly unacceptable to make them responsible for ensuring that the other parent of their children complies with their legal responsibilities.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech on an issue that I have raised in the past. Several constituents who are the resident parent have not received any money for years, and a common theme or trend seems to be that the paying parent claims to have given up paid work or become self-employed in order to hide their income. That totally thwarts the whole purpose of the Child Maintenance Service. Does my hon. Friend agree that the CMS must pull out all the stops to find a way to prevent that from happening, maintain its charter commitment and ensure that the child is at the heart of everything?

Peter Grant: Absolutely. I do not think we will ever have a set of regulations that everyone agrees with. If a relationship between two people has completely broken down, the one who is paying will think they are paying too much, and the one who is receiving payment will think they are not getting enough. Surely, if the rules are based on someone's income, however, it should be no easier for them to hide their income from their children than it is to hide it from the Inland Revenue.

I have assisted constituents affected by HMRC loan charge, as well as a constituent who was pursued to a ridiculous degree for a relatively small debt that they turned out not to owe to HMRC. Many resident parents in my constituency would like a fraction of that diligence to be used by the CMS when it chases down money that is owed not to the Government but to children who often desperately need it.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. Does he agree that more must be done to reconcile reported earnings with the lifestyle of the absent father or mother? I have seen parents in my constituency who give their child £10.50 a week, yet they drive a brand-new BMW, have the newest of gear and have that kind of lifestyle. An absent father must be allowed to live, but it should be difficult for them to disregard their financial obligations. We must make that more difficult.

Peter Grant: I agree with that entirely.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. I have a constituent who is owed a substantial sum by an absent father, who lives very comfortably and flies in and out of the UK with no apparent difficulty. The only answer my constituent gets is that the service cannot touch him because it cannot establish a UK address for him. Does my hon. Friend agree that such cases need more than just ministerial hand-wringing, and that concrete action to seize passports or assets could be in order?

Peter Grant: Absolutely, and I will come on to some of the new powers that have recently been given to the Child Maintenance Service. Although those powers are draconian, there will be instances when they have to be used. Deliberately concealing income from people who you know want only to provide for your children should be a criminal offence. It is not a matter for the civil courts or for civil adjudication. If someone falsifies their tax returns, they go to jail, so if they falsify returns provided to assess their financial liability for their own kids, they should also go to jail.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I have a constituent who has not received payment for years. Their former partner has moved home and jobs, and keeps changing bank account. They also disposed of two properties, yet that money is untraceable. Surely people should not be able to open new bank accounts if they owe all that money.

Peter Grant: Again, I entirely agree. I have had female constituents who use one name in their family and one in their professional work. They have difficulty opening two bank accounts, so it seems strange that others are able to get away with opening bank accounts all over the place.

Last year the powers available to the Child Maintenance Service were extended. I found it concerning to read the evidence submitted to the Work and Pensions Committee in 2016, because it seemed that the Department for Work and Pensions did not understand the difference between collection powers and enforcement powers. The DWP can implement collection powers immediately through the Child Maintenance Service—it does not need anybody's permission—but enforcement powers are more severe and need the consent of the courts. If those who write the evidence for a parliamentary Select Committee are vague about the distinction between those two powers, it is no wonder that parents and children who are waiting for their money sometimes get confused about what the powers are.

Some powers that the Child Maintenance Service has should not be allowed as a form of debt enforcement, and even in certain cases I do not think that imprisoning someone for not paying their dues is acceptable. It should be an imprisonable offence if somebody falsifies information, but not if they refuse to pay money that has been established as owed. I certainly would not want any seizing of property, warrant sale or auction to happen in Scotland. One of the first private Members' Bills put through the Scottish Parliament was to outlaw what I believe to be a barbaric practice. In a civilised country, there are other ways to carry out debt collection, without such draconian and barbaric actions. For example, we could restrict someone's ability to open new bank accounts.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Peter Grant: I need to make a bit of progress. If I have time later, I will give way to the hon. Lady. I am grateful for her interest in the debate.

Something that has been a major concern for many of my constituents recently is the Child Maintenance Service's decision to write off debts that somebody has been owed for a significant time. Sometimes that is a

relatively small amount of money, but it can open up all the old wounds again if the parent who is owed that money suddenly gets a letter from the CMS after 10 years, having heard nothing from it, as happened to one of my constituents recently.

Another constituent has been asked to agree to writing off a debt of £18,000 that she is owed for the children she has raised on her own. Her children are now grown up, and people could argue that they do not need the money, but the person who owes the money certainly does not need it. I do not think that is acceptable, any more than it would be acceptable for the HMRC to decide not to bother chasing somebody who owed £18,000 of tax. In the case I have referred to, the Child Maintenance Service knows where the absent parent is. It knows where he lives, it knows where he works and it knows his bank account details, so there is no excuse whatsoever not to require him to enter into some kind of arrangement to pay his children the money he owes.

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): On that specific point, they will have been contacted. If that information is available and they would like that £18,000 debt to be pursued, it would be, and it would be a priority.

Peter Grant: Interestingly enough, when I contacted the Child Maintenance Service about that specific case, it promised to give us a fuller response by 3 October, so it has about 20 minutes left. If we finish a wee bit early, the Minister might be able to get on to his colleagues and ensure that they honour that. Of course, it may be that they have responded during the time that I have been on my feet.

Far too often, the parent who has the main responsibility for looking after the children physically is left to fight battle after battle with the CMS to get the money that is theirs and their children's by right. Often, they feel as if the CMS is not working with them, but is almost acting as an obstacle to them. Far too often, when I look through the cases that have come in to my office since I was elected, the final point is that the parent has just given up and feels it is not worth chasing things up. Very often, they can no longer stand the stress of being forced to continue to contact somebody who, quite frankly, they never want to hear from again because of the way that person treated them while they were together. It is not only a tragedy, but a scandal, if somebody is forced to give up the fight for what they are legally entitled to simply because a Government agency has not supported them enough in the process.

Ruth George: I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this important debate. Like him, my caseworkers and I have found it incredibly frustrating to try to get through to the CMS, both in cases where there is a claimant making a claim and where the CMS holds wrong information on a defendant. Just trying to get the CMS to look at that is very difficult. Does he agree that the fact that universal credit now takes account of maintenance income, whether or not it is received, will make recipients who are due that money even poorer if they do not receive it, and that that is a double whammy for them and often for their children as well? It just adds to the injustice of the situation.

Peter Grant: The hon. Lady makes a valid point. Those of us who are old enough to remember it would do well to recall that the original version of the Child Support Agency was set up not to help the children, but as a way of getting somebody else to pay the children's maintenance costs to save the DWP or its predecessor a wee bit of money. That legacy can be seen sometimes in the fact that the CMS, through the DWP, is simply not as enthusiastic about pursuing money that is owed to other people as it would be if it were pursuing money owed to itself.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Peter Grant: I think I can give way once more, and then I will have to move on.

Stephen Timms: I was looking through my records this afternoon, and I saw that I wrote to the Child Support Agency on behalf of one of my constituents on 30 September 1999. She finally received a first, partial payment on 1 August 2018. It took 19 years. Is the hon. Gentleman as unsurprised as I am that people, as he says, just give up?

Peter Grant: I just wish that I could wait 19 years before paying the bills that come into my constituency office with more regularity. I would love to think that the example the right hon. Gentleman raises was unique, but I do not think it is. What is the point of a child maintenance system that does not pay anything to the child until they are 18 or 19 and have left school, and possibly left home and gone to university? The children need the money when they are two, three and four years old, not when they are in their 20s. In a case I mentioned earlier, the children were literally grown up and had left home. Some were married, some were at university. As a point of principle, the parent was determined to carry on fighting, but he knows perfectly well that the money will not make any difference to his children. They have had the experience of being brought up when money was desperately tight.

A completely incomprehensible aspect to the write-off scheme is that the process the Child Maintenance Service has to go through before it can write off historical arrears depends, reasonably enough, on the level and value of the arrears, but that, by its own admission,

“significant policy, operational and IT issues beset the 1993 and 2003 schemes which contributed to the build-up of considerable arrears of unpaid maintenance”.

In another document, it admitted that it cannot always be sure how much the arrears are. How can it be fair for the CMS to say that it can write off an amount of arrears because it is small enough within the scheme that it does not need the receiving parent's permission, and at the same time to say, “We don't really know how much the arrears are, because our record-keeping system was so appalling in the past”?

A great deal more could be said, but I know that colleagues want to speak as well, so I will bring my comments to a close. First, however, I want to add something that was not in my original speech. I decided to do that when I realised that, while we are having this

debate, our colleagues in the main Chamber will, hopefully, be agreeing to the Second Reading of the Domestic Abuse Bill.

I cannot go into much detail about some of the cases I have had, because people are still under threat from ex-partners, but I hope the Minister can explain how someone whose partner has been convicted repeatedly of assault can hide their income from the Child Maintenance Service for more than three years after the CMS has been alerted to where the money was, where it was going and how it was being hidden. It was hidden in such a way that, if I had the same authorisation to visit premises and to make inquiries as the CMS and HMRC, I could have found it, as any of us could, within 20 minutes. It was not an elaborate offshore scheme; it was a very simple accounting practice that HMRC and the Child Maintenance Service know about.

How can it be that someone who has been and still is a victim of coercive financial control is told that it is entirely up to her to find evidence that her ex-partner is committing fraud against her and probably against HMRC as well? How can that be acceptable? Why is the Child Maintenance Service not working more closely with HMRC, so that when they get information that points clearly to a large-scale criminal evasion of tax by somebody whose address and place of work is a matter of public record, they can take action? How can it take three years for them even to begin an investigation? When the Minister sums up, I hope he can answer that question, as well as responding to the other comments I have made.

Several hon. Members rose—

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Before I call Mr Kerr, I remind Members that I will call the Front-Bench spokespersons at 10 past 5. Three Members have indicated in writing that they wish to speak, and I will call Mr Madders and Mr Pollard after Mr Kerr. If you divvy the time up among yourselves, we might be able to get more Members in.

4.48 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) on bringing this subject back to Westminster Hall. I shall be brief.

It is important to remind ourselves that even though we live in a world of three-letter acronyms—we talk about the CMS and the CSA—at the centre of all our thoughts and considerations in this debate is the welfare of the child and of children. Nothing ought to be more precious to us than the welfare of our children. I have no doubt that the staff at the CMS are sensitive, conscientious and aware of the impact of what they do. I pay tribute to them, because they deal day in and day out with adults, many of whom are in distress or are emotional and sometimes very angry. Behind each case is a child or children, often bewildered and dealing with complexities they are often too young to process.

I have some questions for the Minister, for whom I have immense regard—I think he knows that. I have asked these questions before because they are the issues that surface in my constituency casework and they have to do with the powers of the CMS. By the way, contrary to what the hon. Member for Glenrothes says, I wholly support the powers granted to the CMS last December

[Stephen Kerr]

to track down these reluctant, absent parents, but I ask the Minister, why is it so reluctant to use them? That is how it appears to my caseworkers and me. Why does the CMS seem not to be prepared to exercise to their full extent its powers to investigate cases, especially when it is clear-cut that something is seriously amiss?

I am thinking of a case, which I will anonymise, where a non-resident parent is a clever accountant and is clearly hiding his income: you can tell that by the lifestyle he is able to maintain. It is clear what is happening. Earnings are being hidden away, squirreled away, disguised, but nothing happens. In another case, the MP contact agreed that an investigation was urgently needed, but, subsequently, someone somewhere else in the CMS flatly turned that down. Those are just two examples, but there are so many others.

Why the reluctance to press ahead? Is that reluctance to use powers based on how resource-intensive this is? The CMS has the powers, but does it have the resources it needs to enforce them? Based on my constituents' experience, I raise a question about how the CMS works internally. Does it have the right internal systems to support the work it does and to manage its casework? I have no doubt it is a heavy case load for every single one of the people managing their clients. However, looking from the outside in, it is hard not to conclude that the systems are not functional, or that the system users are not working to a standard.

Why does there appear to be so little in the way of cohesive or comprehensive notes or records in my constituents' cases? They will phone up and they might speak to the same person—that is an improvement. Sometimes they speak to different people, and when that happens, they have to rehearse their situation over and over again. That is deeply upsetting and distressing. It seems a very basic question to ask a Minister, but is there a standard for making notes? Is there a standard for creating follow-up items and action points? Is the system quality-checked? Are the users of the system being assisted to maintain a high standard?

Then there are the letters my constituents receive when they are in the complaints process. They will often receive generic letters with phrases in them where sometimes the meaning is just not clear. That can create confusion and upset. My senior caseworker Rachel Nunn, to whom I pay tribute, and I have tried to help our constituents decipher these letters. However, they are so general—not specific enough, not personalised enough—and are confusing because they are not sufficiently personalised. Consequently, they create anxiety and stress for parents, and the last thing those parents need is more stress.

Thank you for affording me the time to make these brief comments, Mr Owen. I end with a simple home truth: there is a human cost to the breakdown of relationships. Yes, adults pay a price: an emotional price, a mental price, a wellbeing price. However, those who often—sadly and invariably—suffer the most are children. Frankly, I am aghast at how mean-spirited some adults can be when it comes to the welfare of their own children. That is why I support the new powers granted by the Government to the CMS and why I implore the Minister and the CMS to use those powers. When the Minister rises to his feet, I hope he will address at least some of the issues raised in my remarks.

Several hon. Members rose—

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. If Members take about three minutes each, we will get everybody in.

4.54 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Thank you for calling me, Mr Owen. It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair.

All Members here will recognise that this issue is an important matter that comes up in surgeries week after week. We know that the maintenance service is vital to ensure children do not enter poverty. One lone parent in four is vulnerable to poverty, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, so it is critical that those payments are delivered on time. Simply, when the system fails, it fails the children we are trying to protect.

It saddens me that progress in improving the payments seems to be slow. I met the Minister earlier this year and I was impressed by his commitment and dedication to improving things, but we still come across issues all too frequently. Cases of non-payment are commonplace. Non-payment problems seem to arise particularly when parents switch from the collect-and-pay service to direct pay. There needs to be greater recognition of the long history of the parent's paying record, rather than the small period when they are on direct pay. Too often, matters deteriorate again when they switch back to direct payments, which can make things worse for everyone, because arrears—sometimes of several thousand pounds—begin to accrue, which makes it even harder for commitments to be honoured.

I understand that a third of paying parents were non-compliant in the first quarter of this year, which demonstrates that my constituents' experiences are not isolated. The level of arrears appears to be creeping up; more than £275 million of arrears was recorded in the first quarter. That suggests that some of the measures that the Government have introduced need further refinement.

In particular, there seems to be a lack of effective enforcement. My constituents tell me that the CMS appears more concerned with meeting the priorities of the paying parent than those of the receiving parent. That is probably an incorrect perception, but it is how they feel. There is also sometimes a feeling that some payment is better than no payment at all and that a hands-off approach with the parent seems to arise, which leads to greater arrears accruing.

All too often, my constituents experience unreasonably long delays in dealing with complaints, which not only cause emotional and financial stress, but leave parents without the support they are entitled to. Those payments matter. It is vital that, whatever challenges the CMS faces, it is effective in supporting children. Every organisation makes mistakes and I am not here to harangue it for those mistakes, but too often it seems that, even when an error has been identified, the culture of the organisation is too defensive, there is little candour and it takes too long to put things right.

4.57 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) on securing the debate, because it is time

that we set out the concerns of our constituents—far too many of them. I have a real concern that the CMS is not fit for purpose. I say that because there are too few staff chasing too much demand, too many mistakes being made, and too many parents and too many children—as the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) said—not getting the support they deserve because of failings in the way the organisation works.

I wish to raise an issue that has not been discussed in detail, which is the Government's changes to the way that historical debts are chased. I recognise that last year, the Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2018 were passed to enable the CMS to write off debts accrued when it was the CSA. There is a logic behind that in the adequate use of resources, but it means that there are far too many families in Plymouth and across the country who are legitimately owed money but who are having those debts written off. That is being done in a way that creates genuine heartbreak for the parents because of the lack of support for the children involved.

The Government have stated:

"If there is a reasonable chance of collection we will make reasonable attempts to collect the outstanding debt",

but they are yet to articulate what "reasonable" means. I would be grateful if the Minister set out what the Department means by "reasonable attempts", because far too many parents feel that there is no attempt to reclaim and go after those historical debts.

Consequently, it seems that if people avoid paying historical debts for long enough, they can simply get away with not paying at all. That is a deeply concerning sentiment that I have heard time and again in my surgeries. One constituent who visited me was owed £9,378.08 by her ex-husband. She was told that approximately £4,500 of that would be written off because it was accrued under the old CSA rules. After she got in touch with my office, we intervened so that did not happen. When the CMS actually investigated, it discovered that her ex-husband had more than enough money in his account to pay for the arrears, so the decision to write them off should not have been made in the first place, yet it was.

Another person who lives in my patch came to me with a similar issue: £13,359 was written off. In this case, it seemed that the absent parent was deliberately changing bank accounts and hiding income. The CMS said that the debt was a direct result of his determination to avoid meeting his responsibilities, yet my constituent was told that there was no right of appeal against the debt being written off. She is never going to see the £13,000 she is owed.

I have spoken to children involved. The money is not just cash; it represents a connection with a parent and a value for an individual. Children who are affected in these cases have a value and a worth; the historical debts hanging over them from parents who do not pay have no consequence on their value. Those children deserve to be loved, cared for and supported responsibly.

5 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) on securing this important debate. It is important that the adults on both sides recognise that the money that is reclaimed through the CMS is not for the parents; it is for the child or the children. The breakdown of a relationship

can be incredibly difficult; it can be rather tempestuous and emotions can run high. However, it should always be remembered that the money is not going to the other parent who is taking principal responsibility for the care of the child; it is for the child's benefit.

There have been long-standing problems with the transfer from the CSA to the CMS. People have been chased for debt that does not exist. My office has had to contact the CMS about money that has already been paid. The CMS is wasting its time and energies chasing debts that it should not be, and it should undertake its responsibilities to investigate seriously what individuals say to them.

On non-payments, constituents raise the issue of having no communication at all from the CMS and, again, it takes the involvement of my office to get any kind of resolution. It is striking that we do get a resolution, which makes me very aware that there is something going wrong in the system.

I also want to touch on reductions in salary. It seems from the examples we have heard that if someone has the financial flexibility, clout and wherewithal, they are able to hide their money. They are able to hide their funds, and it becomes incredibly difficult. If they are self-employed, they can put all the money into a company—the company can be in the name of a new spouse, for example—in order to pay for household bills and to live a more comfortable lifestyle and not necessarily pay what is owed.

The situation is different for those who are on lower salaries, who are taking their responsibilities seriously and who want to pay for their children, in the event that they are ill and they lose money. Because they are paid on a weekly basis, their salary has to go down by 25% for them to get any kind of reduction in the amount of child maintenance they are paying.

I have had people come to see me in tears because their illness has meant that they have been unable to work or they have had a serious reduction in their salary, and they have a new life and a new family who they have to pay rent for, and then they are unable to pay the money to the CMS. They are put into debt and financial hardship and then, when they are earning again, 40% of their salary is taken off them. It leaves them in a dire situation, wondering why they are bothering to work when they could be in the benefits system. I do not think that we should have a Government-sponsored system that encourages people to look to the benefits system as a way out.

5.4 pm

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) on securing the debate. I would like to say a little more about the case I referred to in an earlier intervention.

By the time of the letter I wrote on behalf of my constituent, Mrs A, on 30 September 1999, the father, Mr A, had been assessed as being due to pay just over £100 per week towards child maintenance. He never paid. He claimed to be on a very low income. He claimed that he had absurdly high housing costs. At one stage, confronted with incontrovertible evidence that he was working, he claimed to be doing so free of charge. He is actually a prosperous and busy builder, who owns his own large home.

[Stephen Timms]

I was more or less continuously in touch with the Child Support Agency, its successors and Ministers for 19 years on my constituent's behalf. There was a short period when she was distracted because of the ill health and later the death of her mother. However, she showed extraordinary ingenuity and determination in compiling evidence of Mr A's true circumstances. Without that evidence, I do not think that he would ever have been forced to pay at all. He was absolutely determined not to pay. He spent a fortune in legal costs. If only that money had gone to his child, things would have been very different. He made three small contributions in 2003, amounting to just over £1,000, and that was after he had lost three tribunals in succession and appealed against the decision each time. But other than those three small payments, he refused to pay any money.

By December 2013 it had been established that Mr A owed £54,000: £15,000 was due to Mrs A; and £39,000 was due to the Government, to reimburse benefits that should not have been paid. It then took another five years for that demand to be enforced. My constituent finally received the £15,000 on 1 August 2018, 19 years after she had first approached me. The system completely failed to deliver the support that she and her son were entitled to throughout his entire childhood. As a result, he grew up in much more straitened circumstances than he should have.

The point that I put to the Minister is that surely the Government must act to ensure that an absent parent can no longer use legal chicanery to avoid their responsibilities for 20 years.

5.7 pm

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Owen, for allowing me to take part in this debate. I will discuss both sides of the arguments that go on in this area. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), on occasion I am on the side of people who have to defend a claim to pay child maintenance. The Child Maintenance Service is the worst organisation that my office and I have to deal with, in that we see bills for payment that come from it that pay no regard to reality or income. It can put people who were previously healthy into situations where they are so stressed and so upset with the whole situation that it literally makes them ill.

Getting any sort of response from the Child Maintenance Service is almost impossible. It seems that people actually need their Member of Parliament to intervene on their behalf in order to get a response from the CMS. That is not good for MPs and our staff, and it is not good for people out there who need the child maintenance.

Having spoken to a friend in the Chamber who represents a very poor area of east London, I know that she has no child maintenance cases. We believe that is because the system is so complicated and so unresponsive that people simply do not come forward to claim the child maintenance that they are due. That is not good for them and it is certainly not good for their children.

I know that the Minister will be well aware of the situation concerning universal credit and the fact that parents with care are now deemed to be in receipt of child maintenance even if they are not actually receiving it.

Justin Tomlinson: To be absolutely clear, child maintenance does not impact on the amount of benefits the receiving parent will get, whether it is paid or not paid. It did under the old system of the Child Support Agency, but it does not under the new system.

Ruth George: That is very good to hear, although it is certainly very different from how the regulations for universal credit were set out at the time. If those regulations are changing, that is good.

However, it remains the case that women who are due to receive child maintenance are not getting the support from the CMS that they need, and it is all too easy for men in general to evade their responsibilities by hiding their money and income, and it then takes years for people to be able to claim that, and for children to receive the support they need, as has been highlighted here today.

The Minister's team have listened to many cases from my constituency surgeries. We have yet to see decisive action taken against those defendants; I hope that it will be, but we really should not have to meet senior civil servants in the Department in order to get any action taken.

5.10 pm

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): As always, Mr Owen, it is a pleasure to see you in the Chair. I just wish that we had more time to debate this hugely important topic. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) on securing the debate and on his powerful and thoughtful opening speech; he spoke for many of us, and for many of those who have been badly let down by the Child Maintenance Service. All MPs deal day in, day out with a steady stream of child maintenance cases in which a parent can and does avoid paying, simply because the current system is not robust enough.

Earlier this year a constituent from Argyll and Bute contacted me about a case that had begun in the days of the Child Support Agency, which highlights the failure of the system. Back in 2015 the father of Fiona's children declared through Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs that his gross annual income was just over £7,500, on which basis he was ordered to pay £20 a week to support his children. Knowing full well that that was not the case, Fiona appealed. Sure enough, the investigation that followed discovered that his true earnings were £200,000. The amount that he had to pay was increased accordingly, yet four years down the line, in a letter to my office dated May 2019, the CMS admitted that Fiona's former partner was still in arrears to the tune of £68,000. That is unacceptable.

Fiona's case is just one example—albeit perhaps an extreme one—of the cases that we deal with daily in which a former partner simply refuses to pay out. We have been contacted by a constituent who believes that the CMS is working on former calculated earnings; by a dad whose former partner refuses to pay out despite a CMS ruling; and by a young mother who feels that she has been sent from pillar to post, between the CMS and the Ministry of Defence, while trying to get regular payments for her eight-year-old daughter from her ex-partner in the Royal Navy. I could go on—there are numerous examples—but the fact of the matter is that

the system simply is not robust enough; it is too open to abuse if one partner or the other is determined enough to avoid their parental responsibilities.

Children living in single-parent families are twice as likely to fall into poverty as children living with two parents, which makes regular maintenance payments even more important for securing their future and protecting them from falling into poverty. Charging single parents to access their right to support for their children is therefore completely wrong and unacceptable. It is grossly unfair that a receiving parent is charged £20 per application fee and a 4% deduction of maintenance when the CMS collects the payment, given that the CMS's involvement is almost exclusively down to the fact that the payee is non-compliant with the rules. Why should children suffer at the end of that system?

There is ample evidence from stakeholder groups to show that the CMS's charges have deterred many people from using the system. Indeed, a recent survey by the Department for Work and Pensions found that 40% of receiving parents on direct pay said that they found the application fee difficult to afford. That figure rises above 50% among those on very low incomes.

Will the Minister explain why we have a system wherein the people who need the money most—those parents whose children are recognised as most at risk of falling into poverty—are being made to pay to get something to which they are fully entitled? Is it not high time the Government heeded the call of so many people in and outside this House to remove all the hurdles that stand between single parents and the money to which they are entitled, to protect their children from poverty regardless of their situation? The primary role of the Child Maintenance Service should be to ensure that those children whose parents, for whatever reason, are no longer together, are not in any way disadvantaged because of it.

5.15 pm

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I congratulate the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) on bringing the debate to Westminster Hall today, as well as the 13 Members who have contributed. When I spoke in this place a few months ago, I made the point that child maintenance does not exist in isolation. It provides essential help with the costs of raising a child—food, clothing and travel expenses. It can make a huge difference, as hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber have pointed out, to the welfare of the child and their start in life, which is crucial. Whatever the administrative challenges, and whatever the technicalities of the child maintenance system, it is important to remember that children are centre stage, as the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) eloquently argued.

It is crucial that children—it is often the most vulnerable—should have access to the financial support that every one of them deserves. It is equally crucial that the system should function in their favour when that support is withheld without good reason. Research shows that child maintenance alone lifts a fifth of low-income one-parent families out of poverty. We must remember that lone-parent families are particularly vulnerable to poverty. One in four lone parents is in persistent poverty—twice as many as in any other group,

according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The inadequacy of social security arguably makes child maintenance even more vital as a source of income for struggling single parents. However, as we have heard from across the Chamber, it is fair to say that there is a considerable distance to go to ensure that the current system of child maintenance achieves its aim.

A recent report from the charity Gingerbread has shown major problems with the payment of child maintenance through the direct pay system, for example. The Government could and should take action to assess the accuracy of the concerns. The current situation, whereby the DWP does not even track whether payments have been made, means that it cannot report on compliance in two thirds of cases. On collect and pay, Gingerbread has consistently argued that there is no evidence that charges encourage collaboration between parents. In the second quarter of 2019, 33% of paying parents in the collect-and-pay service built up arrears owing to non-compliance. The DWP's own figures reveal that that is nearly £19 million. Furthermore, there remain continuing problems such as those highlighted today with inconsistent casework handling and follow-up—no follow-up at all in many cases—as well as poor and non-existent communication.

In my own constituency case load, as with other hon. Members, concerns have been raised time and again, and constituents believe that they will never get any money because it is tucked away through creative accounting. Like many in the Chamber, I firmly believe that collecting unpaid child maintenance should be a priority for any Government, and that the considerable toolbox of enforcement measures—many, in all fairness, the result of the 2018 review—should be applied more consistently. There has been a significant fall in enforcement activity by the DWP to recover payments that are, by definition, owed to children. According to Gingerbread:

“The hands-off approach, compounded by poor administration, places the burden of responsibility for pushing for Direct Pay enforcement onto receiving parents”.

Where direct pay arrangements break down and arrears accumulate, the CMS can assist by moving the arrangement on to collect and pay, but to use the service paying parents are charged 20% of the child maintenance plus a £20 registration fee, and receiving parents pay 4%. That introduces additional costs for already financially stretched households. Even on collect and pay, only 67% are paying something—I stress that word “something”—towards what they owe. Indeed, some of the testimonials that have been heard in the Chamber today make it abundantly clear that the current system needs to be more robust, and that the leadership of the DWP should listen and take more robust action. This is not simply a question of processes and systems; relationships and emotions are at the heart of how this approach affects those who use it.

Having listened to the debate, I have a number of questions to ask the Minister. Will he introduce monitoring of direct pay compliance, so we can have a clear picture of its effectiveness? Will he commit to introducing improved and more transparent service standards around enforcement and late payments? Will he review the effectiveness of collect-and-pay charges for receiving parents and look at the provisions that relate to the Domestic Abuse Bill around coercive relationships?

5.20 pm

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) for calling this debate. On the basis of all the contributions, it is clear that this is one issue that unites those in all parts of the House, and that we want to do the very best for those receiving parents who have taken on the primary responsibility of the childcare and are having to battle to get the support that they rightly should be getting.

Let us remember that the CMS is a service of last resort. We would all hope that, wherever possible, parents can make amicable arrangements that do not necessarily need our involvement and have no impact on the children. Where that cannot be the case, however, because either one parent is or both parents are in dispute about what their responsibilities should be, it is absolutely the case that the CMS is there to provide support.

I want to make it very clear that all the cases raised show why this is such an important area, where we have brought forward significant new regulations and powers. I will go through some of those processes, but I repeat: a lot of the cases raised are legacy cases that would initially have been dealt with under the old rules and show why we have brought forward the rules I am going to talk about. There is still much more to do, and we are working very closely with stakeholders, including organisations such as Gingerbread, and on the other side those such as Families Need Fathers, which can provide constructive and helpful feedback. It is about getting balance between both sides.

There are around 700,000 cases a year. We record 2,500 complaints a year, which is less than 0.5%, but we still want to go further. We are absolutely focused on improving the customer experience. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr), who I know has been proactive in this area. I must stress that I am not actually the Minister responsible for child maintenance, although I used to be; I have a great deal of interest in this area both as a constituency MP who raises cases and having served in a different role in DWP. Everything will be passed on to the relevant Minister. I would like my hon. Friend to meet the operations team, because some concerning operational issues were raised.

Customer experiences are shared with the senior management team. We work with stakeholders, and we also work with key organisations such as Womens Aid, which have done a huge amount to improve our ability to identify either victims or potential victims of domestic abuse, so we can tailor the service accordingly.

The initial contact with the service is with child maintenance options. That is not automatic; people must have a conversation, which will explain all the options available to them. Many people do not wish to use the process; they just want to have an amicable arrangement but would like some guidance on a starting point for those discussions. We can provide that information and signpost to other organisations, and that can open the gateway to looking at options such as direct payment or click and collect.

Deidre Brock: I note the Minister's offer to the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) to meet the operations team. Is that offer open to all of us who have participated in this debate?

Justin Tomlinson: That is a fair point. I am sure the team would be very happy to meet those who are particularly interested in the operations side.

On direct payment, there are cases where we have advised what the financial contribution should be, and the parents set out to try and do that without using us. A number of people have highlighted how that can break down. The problem is then that the debts mount up, and the bigger the debts, the bigger the problem it is to get that fixed. So, we have rightly tried to be more proactive. Not only is there the annual review, but we now text the receiving parents proactively to ask whether there are any issues, and if there are issues, we ask that they should contact us immediately so we can either escalate ultimately to enforcement or move them on to the click-and-pay service. In the last quarter of last year, 9,000 people moved from direct pay to collect and pay. We are nudging that proactive level of support as quickly as possible.

The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury), talked of 33% not being collected on collect and pay. The 67% was the last published figure, in June 2019, which is up from 62% in the previous year, and the improvement has been long-standing. The amount unpaid in June 2019 was £18.5 million, down from £22 million. That is £18.5 million too much, but we are heading in the right direction, through a combination of better training of our frontline staff, so that they can explain the options and potential punishments to both the receiving parent and the paying parent; better enforcement, which I am coming to; and the regulations that we passed to strengthen our ability to investigate and enforce.

Hon. Members have rightly raised areas where enforcement has not been quick enough. The right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) set out the exact reasons that we needed the two separate sets of regulations that were brought in over the last 12 months, which we did after listening to the cases, learning the lessons and seeing what was missing and what stopped us taking the action we all support. That is underlined by the fact that action must be taken much more quickly. The sooner we act, the easier it is to remedy.

We are also now benefiting from the ability to access more real-time information from HMRC and the strengthening of our ability with deduction orders, where we take money directly from people's salaries. We are also reminding employers. Quite often, employees will say to an employer who is their friend, "My other half is being unreasonable. It would be really helpful if you helped me fudge this." We are now using legal powers to remind employers that they will be liable and, unsurprisingly, those collections have gone up to 48,000 in the last quarter, collecting about £26 million, compared with the same quarter last year when there were 31,300 collections, collecting £19 million. We are also proactively highlighting success stories in the media, which doesn't half focus people's minds.

The most significant change is the introduction of the financial investigations unit. In the past, when lifestyle queries were raised, we relied on HMRC to investigate.

HMRC had finite resources; if a premier league footballer was clearly defrauding it of a huge amount of tax, it was very quick to go and look at that, but, for many of the cases highlighted, while it was a significant amount of money to those children, it might not have been enough for HMRC to prioritise it.

The financial investigations unit, which is solely ours, does not look at the value of the money, because the money is as important to every single parent regardless, and it will chase each case. These are highly-trained ex-police officers and tax inspectors with fiscal investigation experience and they focus on doing a deep dive, using evidence, in these sorts of case. We initially recruited 30 in 2017 and it went up to 50 in 2018 and 80 in 2019. They are making a significant difference; about 4,000 cases are being investigated at the moment, and those numbers will increase as we gain evidence. That is a double win, because we will share that evidence with HMRC, which can chase any tax avoidance that has gone through.

The new regulations that we passed to help here include the ability to seize people's passports. In the past, we went after drivers' licences, but when people went to court, they would say, not unreasonably, "Well, you can take my driving licence, but I then won't be able to earn, and I won't be able to pay any more money." But the possibility of losing their summer holiday doesn't half focus the mind. Having sent out more than 1,000 warning letters, there is high engagement at that point.

We now have powers to access joint and business accounts, because that is a clever trick of solely employed people for hiding money. We can also look at assets, so when self-employed people are transferring what would

be wages into assets, we can now take a nominal 8% of those assets. It is now easier to access information from pension providers, and we will be doing more joint work with HMRC. I gently remind some colleagues who have been calling for those extra powers to vote for them next time, because some hon. Members voted against. We must put the receiving parents first.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I am grateful to the Minister, who has been a great deputy here today on behalf of his Department. Before I call Mr Peter Grant to wind up, I thank all hon. Members for their self-discipline and restraint about time, which has allowed us to get in all speakers, as well as a number of interventions.

5.29 pm

Peter Grant: I realise that I must be very brief, so I thank everybody who has contributed to today's debate. A couple of points: first, people do not need a clever accountant to hide their money; they only need an accountant who knows how to set up a private limited company, and it then takes years to find it. Secondly, we do not need to be Sherlock Holmes to find these scams; we only need a Facebook account, and then we can see the luxury yachts, the holidays, the umpteen fancy houses and so on. If somebody on benefits was boasting about their wealth to that extent, the DWP would have them very quickly. That is the speed at which we should be chasing down money from other people as well—

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Wednesday 2 October 2019

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

Leaving the EU: Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay): The United Kingdom is leaving the European Union on 31 October 2019. We want to leave with a deal. One of the most important elements of this deal will be the agreement of a new Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland in place of the previous protocol (known as the backstop) which this Government are committed to replacing.

The Prime Minister wrote to Donald Tusk on 19 August 2019 setting out the UK's views on the backstop, as well as this Government's desired final destination for a long-term relationship with the EU.

Since then, the Government have pursued discussions with the European Union on alternatives to the backstop enthusiastically and constructively, and we have made good progress.

The Government are now putting forward a formal proposal to the European Commission, setting out the changes we are seeking to the withdrawal agreement. This represents a clear offer from the UK which we will ask the EU to engage with, enabling us to move towards a deal.

First, this proposal is based above all on our commitment to find solutions which are compatible with the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, the fundamental basis for governance in Northern Ireland.

Second, this proposal confirms our commitment to long-standing areas of UK-Ireland collaboration, including those provided for in the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, but also others, in some cases predating the European Union: the common travel area; the rights of all those living in Northern Ireland; and north-south co-operation.

Third, this proposal provides for the potential creation of an all-island regulatory zone on the island of Ireland, covering all goods including agrifood and eliminating all regulatory checks for trade in goods between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Fourth, and unlike the backstop, this regulatory zone must depend on the consent of those affected by it. This is essential to the acceptability of arrangements under which part of the UK accepts the rules of a different political entity; it is fundamental to democracy. The Government therefore propose that the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly should have the opportunity to endorse these arrangements before they enter into force, that is, during the transition period, and every four years afterwards. If consent is not secured, the arrangements will lapse. The same should apply to the single electricity market, which raises the same principles.

Fifth, this proposal ensures that Northern Ireland will be fully part of the UK customs territory, not the EU customs territory, after the end of the transition

period. It has always been a fundamental point for this Government that the UK will leave the EU customs union at the end of the transition period, since control of trade policy is fundamental to this country's future prosperity.

This is entirely compatible with maintaining an open border in Northern Ireland. Goods trade between Northern Ireland and Ireland makes up a little over 1% of UK-EU total trade in goods. Any risks arising will be manageable in both the EU single market and the UK market, particularly as all third country imports will continue to be controlled by the EU and UK customs authorities. We are proposing that all customs processes needed to ensure compliance with the UK and EU customs regimes should take place on a decentralised basis, with paperwork conducted electronically as goods move between the two countries, and with the very small number of physical checks needed conducted at traders' premises or other points on the supply chain. All this must be coupled with a firm commitment, by both parties, never to conduct checks at the border in future.

Finally, in order to support Northern Ireland through this transition, and in collaboration with others with an interest, this Government proposes a new deal for Northern Ireland, with appropriate commitments to help boost economic growth and Northern Ireland's competitiveness, and to support infrastructure projects, particularly with a cross-border focus.

Taken together, these proposals respect the decision taken by the people of the UK to leave the EU, while dealing pragmatically with that decision's consequences in Northern Ireland and in Ireland. In particular:

They provide for continued regulatory alignment across the whole island of Ireland after the end of the transition period, for as long as the people of Northern Ireland agree to that.

They mean that EU rules cannot be maintained indefinitely if they are not wanted, correcting a key defect of the backstop arrangements.

They provide for a meaningful Brexit in which UK trade policy is fully under UK control from the start.

They ensure that the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland will remain open, enabling the huge gains of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement to be protected.

The Government believe that these proposals can provide the basis for rapid negotiations towards a final withdrawal agreement. In parallel, we will be negotiating a revised political declaration which reflects this Government's ultimate goal of a future relationship with the EU that has a comprehensive free trade agreement at its heart. Together, these will allow us to reach agreement with the EU under article 50, and leave the EU with a deal that both respects the referendum result and provides a strong platform for our future relationship.

I will be depositing a copy of the following papers in the Libraries of both Houses:

Letter from the Prime Minister to Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission and;

Explanatory note on UK proposals for an amended Protocol on Ireland-Northern Ireland.

These will also be made available on gov.uk.

[HCWS1845]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime and Policing

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): One of my key priorities as Home Secretary is ensuring that the police have the resources, tools and powers they need to keep themselves and the public safe.

The Prime Minister and I have launched a national campaign to recruit 20,000 additional officers and police funding has increased by over £1 billion this year, including money from council tax and to tackle serious violence. The following packages will further progress these efforts.

Safer Streets

Today I am notifying the House of a new £25 million safer streets fund to tackle burglary, theft and other offences in areas of the country disproportionately affected by these crimes.

Police and crime commissioners across England and Wales will be able to bid to the safer streets fund for investment in evidence-based crime prevention measures such as improved home security, street lighting and alley gating. Alley gating is associated with a 43% reduction in burglary, improved street lighting is found to reduce property crime by 17% and CCTV can reduce vehicle crime by 26%. Funding will be available to areas in 2020-21. These interventions can either remove opportunities to commit crime or act as a deterrent by increasing the chances an offender is caught.

County Lines

I am also announcing a package of measures to deliver a significant uplift in activity to tackle county lines. County lines has a devastating impact and involves a form of drug dealing associated with serious violence and exploitation of vulnerable young people and adults. It involves gangs and organised criminal networks exporting illegal drugs to and from different locations in the country, using dedicated mobile phone lines, accommodation and exploitation of vulnerable people to conduct criminal activity.

It is important that we go further in tackling the criminals involved. The significant new action will help disrupt and dismantle the county lines model. The new measures are as follows:

Expanding the National County Lines Co-ordination Centre: there will be targeted investment in the National County Lines Co-ordination Centre to increase its activity, capability and capacity at a regional and national level to disrupt county lines. This will include placing more officers and staff into the centre and providing additional strategic resource to regional organised crime units. The National County Lines Co-ordination Centre brings together a multi-agency team of experts from the National Crime Agency (NCA), police officers and regional organised crime units to tackle the issue of county lines through sharing intelligence, working with partners across Government and taking concerted action.

Increased disruption on rail networks: rail networks remain a key method of transportation for county lines gangs. There will be a British Transport police team that works exclusively on county lines and will be based at a number of railway stations across England to disrupt and intercept county lines drug trafficking.

Investment in technology to disrupt county lines operations: the road network is used to transport offenders, victims, drugs, cash and weapons. Enhanced data analysis using

automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) will enable police to proactively target vehicles suspected of being used in county lines activity.

Increasing support services for county lines victims: county lines gangs operate their business through exploiting young people and vulnerable adults. The Government will develop an expanded national specialist support service to help young people and their families exit their involvement in county lines.

Working with money service bureaux to tackle illicit finance: county lines is a cash-driven activity. The Government will intensify operations to identify opportunities to take action against money service bureaux, enabling increased cash seizures and arrests for money laundering.

Taken as a whole, this package represents additional investment of up to £5 million in 2019-20 and up to £15 million in 2020-21.

Tasers

The Government will provide £10 million funding to deliver a significant increase in the number of officers carrying Tasers. Recent high-profile attacks and increasing levels of violence have led to growing concerns around officer protection and prompted growing calls to equip more officers with conducted energy devices (CEDs). CEDs provide officers with a critical tactic in the face of the most violent and challenging circumstances.

This funding shows a real commitment by Government to ensuring police officers have the resources, powers and tools they need to keep themselves and the public safe. Ring-fenced funding could mean over 10,000 more police officers in England and Wales will be able to carry the device. This fund will help support chief officers to buy the necessary number of CEDs they require, and ensure frontline officers are better protected.

The number of CED-trained officers in each police force remains an operational matter and is determined by chief officers in line with their assessment of the threats and risks in their force. The decision on whether to apply for this additional funding to uplift their CED capability will therefore ultimately be for chief officers and carrying CEDs will remain a voluntary decision for individual officers. All officers who are selected to use CEDs will need to complete the comprehensive training process.

[HCWS1846]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Aid Update

The Secretary of State for International Development (Alok Sharma): Today I announced a new focus on ending preventable deaths of mothers, new-born babies and children, working with the international community.

Every 11 seconds, somewhere in the world, a pregnant woman or new-born baby dies. Last year 5.3 million children under 5 died. More than 9 in 10 of all maternal deaths occur in the world's poorest countries. The true tragedy of these stark figures is that in most cases, with the right care, these deaths are preventable.

The reality for many women in the developing world, is they do not have access to the vital rights, medicines and services that make such a difference to expecting mothers in the UK. Of course, these tragedies are not limited to the developing world. Families in the UK

also suffer the heartbreak of losing a child or a mother, but while their pain is of course no less bearable it is, thankfully, far less common. Since 2010 in the UK there has been a 19% reduction in stillbirths and an 8% reduction in maternal mortality.

Internationally, UK aid has supported developing countries to reduce maternal deaths. Nepal has seen the maternal mortality ratio decrease by over 50% since 1996. In Bangladesh that figure has fallen by 68% since 1990. Sustained improvements in the health system as well as innovations have driven this success. This includes using expertise from the UK Royal College of Midwives to develop a professional cadre of midwives who can provide services in hard to reach rural areas of Bangladesh.

However, while we have made progress, that progress is not felt all round the world. Two-thirds of deaths still occur in sub-Saharan Africa. Recent figures published by the UN show that we are off track to meet global targets of a world where every pregnancy is wanted, where every childbirth is safe and where every child lives a healthy life. This is clearly not acceptable. Where women and children are dying from preventable causes in the developing world, we must act.

As International Development Secretary, I will ramp up the UK's efforts to end preventable deaths of mothers, new-born babies and children in the developing world by 2030. Through UK aid, we will work with international partners to boost our support for developing countries to make progress towards universal health coverage, with everyone able to affordably access the quality health services that they need, and with a health system they can be proud of, as proud as we are of our lifesaving NHS.

We will focus on the most vulnerable women, including FGM survivors who are significantly more at risk of

complications during childbirth, as everyone in the world deserves access to the healthcare they need to live a healthy life.

We will also make sure women's sexual and reproductive health and rights are at the heart of that. On 23 September, at the United Nations general assembly, I announced a £600 million reproductive health supplies programme, as part of the UK's commitment to universal health coverage, and as a champion of sexual and reproductive health and rights. This will give 20 million women and girls access to family planning and prevent 5 million unintended pregnancies each year up to 2025. Women and girls must have control over their bodies, and access to services they need. This Government are committed to defending and promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights and will continue to fight against the attempted global rollback on women's rights.

An estimated 19.9 million children did not receive the vaccines needed during their first year of life, putting them at serious risk of potentially fatal diseases such as measles and meningitis, which is why we are hosting the replenishment of Gavi, the vaccines alliance, next year. Since 2000, UK aid to Gavi has helped vaccinate over 760 million children, saving 13 million lives and protecting a generation against some of the world's deadliest diseases. As hosts of its replenishment next year, we are committed to working with our global partners to deliver Gavi's new strategy that will vaccinate a further 300 million children in the world's poorest countries by 2025. We will invest more in vaccines and research so that developing countries benefit from the very best of British and international scientific expertise.

The senseless injustice of preventable deaths must end.

[HCWS1844]

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