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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 22 January 2020

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office was asked—

Infrastructure Investment

1. **Dr Ben Spencer** (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help ensure value for money in public sector infrastructure investment.

2. **Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help ensure value for money in public sector infrastructure investment. [900324]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Jeremy Quin): This Government are working to level up economic and social infrastructure, with an additional £100 billion investment commitment. We will ensure that all citizens across the UK benefit. The Cabinet Office works closely with Her Majesty's Treasury through the Infrastructure and Projects Authority. This helps to ensure that taxpayers get good value for money. The IPA evaluates and assures major projects from their initial stages through to completion.

Dr Spencer: May I first congratulate the Minister on his appointment? He should be aware of the detrimental impact on Runnymede and Weybridge from our over-stretched road network, particularly the A320 and M25. What are the Government doing to target investment at the modern infrastructure that all our communities and businesses need?

Jeremy Quin: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words and congratulate him on his election to this place. I can reassure him that the Government are committed to investing across our regions and nations, including the south-east. A business case has been submitted for the A320 north corridor; it is at an early stage, and the Department for Transport is working closely with the local authority to develop the scheme. Between 2015 and 2020 the Government will have spent nearly £18 billion on England's strategic roads. On the M25 this is delivering additional capacity, including through junction enhancements.

Jerome Mayhew: I too welcome the Minister to his place. He should be aware that Broadland needs the construction of the western link road, the missing link in Norwich's answer to the M25. What steps is he taking to ensure that public money is spent efficiently so that all communities represented in this House get the infrastructure they deserve?

Jeremy Quin: I thank my hon. Friend for what I believe is his first question in this place, and for his kind words. This is not just a concern of his Broadland constituents; by the sound of it, it is a concern shared by his constituency neighbour and my neighbour here on the Treasury Front Bench, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith). I understand that a business case for the link has been submitted and that officials from the Department for Transport are engaging with the local authority. My hon. Friend the Member for Broadland (Jerome Mayhew) is absolutely right that the IPA, through direct support, and independent assurance reviews and leading a network of project delivery professionals, helps drive cost-effectiveness across Government.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): One of the biggest projects that the Government have to deliver is the restoration and renewal of this Palace, which is one of the most loved buildings in the world. If we are to do that, we need skills that currently are not available in the workforce. Does the Minister agree that this presents a major opportunity to ensure that in every constituency in the land young people are being trained in those skills so that everybody has an investment in this building?

Jeremy Quin: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. This is a great opportunity to ensure that we upskill our workforce. We are very proud of the fabric of this building, and very proud of what it symbolises for our country, and it will be great if we can make certain that we are engaging people across the United Kingdom in the work that needs to be done.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Yesterday it was established that the majority of supply chain contracts for the offshore wind farm Neart Na Gaoithe are going abroad. When are the UK Government going to incentivise the auction process so that bidders who use local supply companies such as BiFab and CS Wind in Scotland are awarded the contracts, creating further green jobs?

Jeremy Quin: Throughout Government we are determined to ensure that we have the simplest possible process for procurement, and the Government Contracts Finder has made certain that we have more transparent procurement, which helps SMEs, among others. The hon. Gentleman raises a good point, but I will have to look into the specifics.

Civil Service Reform

3. **Rosie Cooper** (West Lancashire) (Lab): What plans the Government have to reform the civil service. [900325]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Oliver Dowden): This new Government are committed to delivering on Brexit and seizing on the

exciting opportunities presented by our new manifesto, but in order to do this we need to build on the successful reforms of the civil service since 2010, going further and faster to ensure that it has the new skills, such as in data analytics, better training, greater accountability and the right pay and incentives to transform the United Kingdom.

Rosie Cooper: The Institute for Government estimates that the number of civil servants based in London is growing, with two thirds now working in the capital. How does the Minister reconcile that with the Prime Minister's statements about moving Whitehall Departments to the north of England and making Government more relevant to people in the north, for example my constituents in West Lancashire?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Lady raises a very important point about the need to move Government activity out of London. That is why, for example, we have created a default whereby when new agencies are created, they must be located outside London and the south-east. I know that the Prime Minister is determined to go further and faster with that agenda.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I welcome the manifesto commitment to offer guaranteed interviews for veterans—people for whom public service is so hugely important—in the public sector. Will the Minister confirm that the Government will be taking that forward with real energy as they consider wider reform?

Oliver Dowden: As ever, my hon. Friend raises an important point. People who have served in our armed forces can also make an enormous contribution to wider life, including in the civil service. That is why I am determined that we deliver on that manifesto commitment, and I have already instructed officials to make that happen.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. This is the first time I have asked a question with you in the Chair, so congratulations.

The Government are right to press forward with looking carefully at how we can modernise the civil service, whose independence and professionalism, as I am sure we all agree, are essential to good governance. On current trends, it looks as though the Government are going to spend £50 million in this Parliament on political appointees. Is that a wise decision? Three of them earn as much as the Prime Minister, more or less, and one of them thinks it is okay to advertise on his blog for “weirdos and misfits” to apply for the civil service. Meanwhile, 40% of professional civil servants in the Department for Exiting the European Union have left in the last year—it is a shambles.

As Minister for the civil service, will the right hon. Gentleman give the House an assurance now that he will protect civil service professional standards, even though that may mean that from time to time he comes into conflict with politically inspired chaos from No.10 Downing Street?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Gentleman has raised a large number of points. First of all, I can of course reassure him that the independence and integrity of the civil service will be upheld. I notice that he has taken an

interest in Dom Cummings' blog; he is very welcome to register his interest in applying for such a role. However, the point that the hon. Gentleman was making is important: if we are to have a good civil service for the 21st century, it is essential that we harness all the talents of this nation. That includes, for example, people with data analytics skills and a diversity of talent.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I know that my right hon. Friend agrees with me that this is a Government for the entire UK—one of Scotland's two Governments, in fact. In the spirit of civil service reform, what thought has he given to moving more civil service jobs out of London—to the north-east of Scotland, for example?

Oliver Dowden: As ever, my hon. Friend raises an important point, and I look forward to joining him this Friday in the north-east of Scotland. I am sure that we will discuss exactly those sorts of opportunities. Recently, I saw a large new hub being created in Edinburgh so that we can bring together Government services for Scotland in one place.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Every Government should get the civil service that they deserve, and this oddball bunch of hard Brexiteers are possibly entitled to their army of weirdos and misfits. Given that Dominic Cummings practically runs this Government, let us celebrate this Government of all the wackos!

It is also rumoured that the Minister's right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is to be made de facto Deputy Prime Minister. How does he fit into this talent pool agenda? Is he entirely sure that he has the approval of Mr Cummings?

Oliver Dowden: I can think of no one whom I would rather work alongside in delivering reform of the civil service than my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who has done so much to reform education and justice. I am sure that he will help do exactly the same in relation to the civil service.

Election Candidates: Protection

4. **Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to (a) support and (b) protect people standing in elections. [900326]

12. **Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to (a) support and (b) protect people standing in elections. [900335]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): Everyone should be able to participate in politics without fear. The increasing level of abuse directed at those in public life is a worrying trend, which stops talented people standing for public service and puts voters off politics. We in Government work across a range of Departments and other bodies to ensure a thorough response to incidents and deliver the best security advice and support. We are also committed to introducing a new electoral offence of intimidating a candidate or campaigner in the run-up to an election.

Sally-Ann Hart: I thank the Minister for that response, and I welcome her back from maternity leave; it is a pleasure to see her back in her place. Does she agree that at times during the last election the commentary and actions of others were misleading, inaccurate and vicious, and that there should be no place for that in our politics, regardless of political persuasion? What steps does she think we should take to ensure that, as leaders in our communities across parties, we conduct our engagement together in an open, respectful and honest way?

Chloe Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind words and welcome her to her place, along with all new Members. She is absolutely right to set the tone that we should aim to strike in the Chamber and in our work for our constituents. Robust political debate is fundamental, but threats and other forms of abuse are not acceptable. I extend to her the invitation that I have recently circulated to hon. Members, to talk to me about any aspect of the elections that they have recently experienced after this session at 1 o'clock, when I shall be delighted to hear more.

Sir David Amess: Now that we have a Government elected with a majority, can we please address the situation whereby people can post online abuse without having to have their names and addresses published?

Chloe Smith: First, I think that companies need to tackle such abusive behaviour and take responsibility for that on their services. That could include taking steps to limit the use or abuse of anonymity. The Government are also taking forward measures to put digital imprints on online political material. That will be a way to help voters to see who is saying what and hold them to account.

Mr Speaker: I call Mike Amesbury.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): According to the international fact-checking agency, First Draft News, almost 90% of ads posted on Facebook by the Minister's party in the first few days of December were misleading. Does she agree with the Information Commissioner—

Mr Speaker: Order—Question No. 5, and then we will come back to you.

Political Advertising

5. **Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the level of accuracy of political advertising in the 2019 general election. [900327]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): Thank you very much for that helpful clarification, Mr Speaker.

We do not assess or regulate political arguments, which can be rebutted as part of normal debate. In a free democracy it is for voters to decide on the value of those political arguments, but we think that our regulation should empower voters to do so and be modernised. That is why we are taking forward the digital imprints regime, which I just referred to.

Mike Amesbury: Thank you, Mr Speaker—I will go again. According to the international fact-checking agency First Draft News, almost 90% of the ads posted on

Facebook by the Tory party in the general election were misleading. Does the Minister agree with the Information Commissioner that the current electoral laws on digital campaigning are not fit for purpose?

Chloe Smith: I welcome the hon. Gentleman back to his place and back to Question No. 5. I think I dealt with the point about regulation in my response, but I am afraid I have to add that the report that he refers to is entirely discredited. I think he misses the point in another way as well: we trust voters to make their decisions on political arguments, and in the biggest decision of all voters chose the Conservatives to take matters forward.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I am sure that the Minister would agree that the UK should lead with best practice when it comes to political campaigning. If she is confident that the Tory party adverts were beyond reproach during the general election, why will she not ask the Electoral Commission to conduct an independent review of political advertising?

Chloe Smith: I welcome the hon. Lady to her place on the Opposition Front Bench; this is the first time that I have engaged in questions with her. I think that, in her question, she misunderstands the fundamental nature of independence. I am not in a position, and neither is any Minister, to direct the Electoral Commission, and nor should we be. Moreover, she entirely misses the point; the voters took their choice on the validity of the arguments put at the general election, and her side's were not good enough.

Leaving the EU: Departmental Preparedness

6. **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure the preparedness of Government Departments for the UK leaving the EU on 31 January 2020. [900328]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Michael Gove): I welcome you to the Chair, Mr Speaker.

In 10 days the United Kingdom will once more be an independent nation and ready to assert our international role with renewed confidence. Departments across Government are undertaking all the necessary work to embrace these new opportunities, and we will continue to do so during the implementation period, which ends on 31 December.

Robert Halfon: One of the most important things we can do as we approach independence day is to have a highly skilled workforce. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that, when businesses and organisations bid for Government contracts, apprentices make up a high proportion of their workforce?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend is right that one of the many benefits of leaving the EU is the chance to overhaul Government procurement to make it more efficient, more responsive and more flexible, and to ensure that British talent takes its place at the forefront of wealth creation, and at the heart of that must be more young British apprentices. This will develop the skills we need to succeed in the 21st century.

14. [900337] **John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): Those fine words will mean nothing if the contracts do not go to British companies, so will the Government take the opportunity at last to give priority to British firms and get local authorities and other public bodies to do the same? Let's give business to British firms employing British workers.

Michael Gove: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for making the case that was made so eloquently by Vote Leave in 2016. There is more joy in heaven over one Member for Warley who repenteth than over many others who still take a different view. He is absolutely right; one of the many benefits of Brexit is that we can buy British and put British firms, British workers and the whole United Kingdom first.

Office for Veterans' Affairs

7. **Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): What steps the Office for Veterans' Affairs is taking to (a) support and (b) care for veterans. [900329]

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Johnny Mercer): No previous Government have been more committed to our armed forces, as shown by our creation of the new Office for Veterans' Affairs. The Government are championing veterans and will ensure that the UK is the best place in the world to be a veteran. Today we are publishing our response to the consultation on the strategy for our veterans. This is the first stage of a step change in the nation's relationship with her military and veterans community.

Jason McCartney: As a Royal Air Force veteran and president of the Huddersfield branch of the Royal Air Forces Association, I am delighted that the Government are cracking on in delivering the veterans' railcard, which will leave more money in the pockets of those who have made a unique commitment to our country. Can the Minister confirm details of when the railcard will be available and confirm that discounted rail travel will also be available to veterans' families?

Johnny Mercer: I thank my hon. Friend for all the support he gives to veterans in the House. The veterans' railcard will be available by Armistice Day this year, and the support will extend to families so that they can enjoy the advantages of discounted travel as well.

Constituency Boundary Review

8. **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): Whether he has plans to bring forward legislative proposals to implement the recommendations of the 2018 review of parliamentary constituency boundaries. [900330]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): As we set out in our manifesto, the Government will ensure that we have updated and equal parliamentary boundaries, making sure that every vote has equal value. We continue to monitor closely the current legal proceedings in relation to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland's final report. The final reports of the four boundary commissions and the 2018 boundary review were submitted to the Government and laid before Parliament in September 2018. We will provide further details in due course.

Liz Twist: Do the Government intend to legislate for the proposals in the previous review, or will they be conducting a new review with new parameters?

Chloe Smith: As I said, we will bring forward details in due course, and I can assure the hon. Member that those will follow our manifesto commitment to equal boundaries and equal vote values. I sincerely hope that her party believes in the same thing.

Topical Questions

T1. [900338] **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Michael Gove): The year 2020 will be one of growth and opportunity for our entire United Kingdom. The year has started positively with the restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland, and I pay particular tribute to all the parties involved. I am delighted to say that the Prime Minister has ruled out a divisive rerun of the Scottish independence referendum and has encouraged our colleagues in the Scottish Government to concentrate on the day job and ensure that they improve health and education for the citizens of Scotland. I am glad that the political division and uncertainty that a referendum would cause have been ruled out, and I look forward to meeting Ministers from the devolved Administrations in Cardiff next week to see how we can work together in the interests of all.

Margaret Ferrier: Can the Minister take the necessary steps to confirm Heather Anderson as the new MEP for Scotland following the election of my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith) to this House, and can he confirm that the UK Government will not allow the voters of Scotland to be under-represented in their European Parliament when it votes on the withdrawal agreement that they have overwhelmingly rejected?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady has made a fair point, and it gives me an opportunity to congratulate the new hon. Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith), who served with distinction in the European Parliament. We will, of course, do everything we can to ensure that there is appropriate representation for every part of the United Kingdom for the remaining 10 days of our membership.

T3. [900340] **Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend set out for the benefit of the House the work being done across Government and co-ordinated by his Department to ensure that farming communities like mine in North Devon climb, soar and succeed as a result of Brexit?

Michael Gove: It was one of the joys of my previous job as Environment Secretary to visit farmers in North Devon. There is some of the finest produce in the United Kingdom, and as we leave the European Union there will be an opportunity for us, on a global stage, to ensure that that Devonian produce reaches all the customers that it deserves to reach.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): What plans have the Government to bring the House of Lords into the 21st century? If, as I suspect, the answer

is none, may I remind the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster that it was the House of Lancaster that won the Wars of the Roses, and may I suggest, if the Government are looking to relocate their lordships, that we have a fine mediaeval castle in the city of Lancaster which has recently been vacated by the Ministry of Justice?

Michael Gove: I yield to no one in my admiration for the Duchy of Lancaster. I recognise that as the Government decide where agencies of both Government and Parliament should go we should think fondly of the north-west as well as Yorkshire and the north-east, but I cannot help saying to the hon. Lady that when she talks about fratricidal conflict in mediaeval times, when people were putting each other to the sword, she reminds me of nothing so much as the deputy leadership contest of the Labour party.

T4. [900341] **Giles Watling** (Clacton) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker, and may I say how lovely it is to see you in your place?

The Government's aim of creating a level economic playing field between the north and the south is laudable and much needed, but can the Minister assure me that, in the rush to create this much-needed equality, we will not overlook deprived coastal areas in the south, such as some in the Clacton constituency which have been overlooked so often in the past?

The Minister for the Northern Powerhouse and Local Growth (Jake Berry): The reason that, in just 10 days' time, we on this side of the House are getting Brexit done is so that we can drive growth across our United Kingdom. From Clacton to Caithness, from Holyhead to Hull, we will be investing millions of pounds in communities, not least £2.5 million in the coastal community of Clackers.

T2. [900339] **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I wonder whether the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster shares my concern about the lack of transparency in campaigns, and about rumours of wrongdoing in previous campaigns. Will he be responding to the recommendations of our all-party parliamentary group on electoral campaigning transparency, which include regulating the ability of campaigns to target voters on the basis of personal data, and streamlining national versus local spending with a per-seat cap on total spending?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I will be taking a look at that report, and I shall be happy to talk to the hon. Lady further.

T5. [900342] **Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): As office costs are substantially cheaper in Stoke-on-Trent than in London, and it is only an hour and a half away on the train, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be the perfect place for the relocation of civil servants?

The Minister without Portfolio (James Cleverly): First, let me thank my hon. Friend for being such a passionate and effective advocate for the city of Stoke-on-Trent. Let me also welcome my hon. Friends the Members for

Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) and for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon), who have joined him on these Benches.

The Government have made it clear that the civil service needs to be less London-centric if it is to attract the best talent and do the best possible job. The Cabinet Office has established the Places for Growth programme to drive the necessary planning and preparation in Departments for the relocation of roles, including senior grades, out of London and into the regions in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker, and congratulations again.

More than 1,000 voters have lost the chance to have their say in local elections because of the identification requirements that have been highlighted over the past two years. That figure is 30 times higher than the total number of allegations made about polling station fraud in the whole of England in 2018 and 2019. Does the Minister agree with Professor Toby James from the University of East Anglia that there is no evidence to justify the introduction of voter ID requirements? I say that because the hon. Lady said earlier that we must trust voters when they make their decisions.

Chloe Smith: I welcome the hon. Lady to her seat. On this question, the evidence is on our side, the experience is on our side from pilots and Northern Ireland and, what is more, the British people are on our side as this was a core part of our manifesto. The Labour party needs to ask why it is not on the right side of this question.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [900308] **Bim Afolami** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 22 January.

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Bim Afolami: I welcome the announcement from the Government this week that tougher sentences, an end to early release and a complete review of the management of convicted terrorists are among a range of measures designed to strengthen this country's response to terrorism—a promise made by this Prime Minister and a promise delivered. *[Interruption.]* Does he agree that we need to do everything we can, whatever it takes, to stop sickening terrorist attacks taking place?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the threat that we face. That is why this Government are putting more resources into catching terrorists, and it is why we have announced a major shift in the UK's approach to the sentencing and management of terrorist offenders. This Government will do all that we can to keep our people safe.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Next Monday, we will be commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day. It is a time for us all to reflect on the horrors of the past and to remind ourselves of the evils of Nazism, genocide, antisemitism and, indeed, all forms of racism, which we must always be implacably determined to root out wherever it appears.

This Saturday, hundreds of millions of people will be celebrating Chinese new year around the world, and I am sure that the Prime Minister will join me in welcoming the year of the rat and inviting all Chinese people to have a great time.

If a worker earning just over £12,500 a year receives a £300 bonus, how much of that bonus does the Prime Minister think that worker should be allowed to keep?

The Prime Minister: Let me join the right hon. Gentleman in what he has said about the importance of Holocaust Memorial Day and of stamping out the resurgence of antisemitism in our country. On his point about the low-paid, I think perhaps the best answer I can give him is to remind him that just this week this Government increased the living wage by the biggest-ever amount so that people on the living wage will be receiving an extra £1,000 a year. If he wants further elucidation on his point, perhaps he could ask a better question.

Jeremy Corbyn: Greggs is currently giving 25,000 workers a £300 bonus, but some of those workers who are on universal credit will be allowed to keep only £75 of that £300. If the Prime Minister can answer my question and show me that that is just and fair, I will buy him a vegan roll from Greggs myself. The first aim of universal credit, which is set to affect 6 million people, was to make work pay, but when low-paid workers cannot even keep their own bonuses, it is clear that the Government are punishing, not supporting, people. Will the Prime Minister do something to ensure that workers at companies such as Greggs who are on low pay will be allowed to keep their bonuses?

The Prime Minister: Under this Government, people on low pay will be able to keep more of the money that they earn. It is this Government who are cutting national insurance contributions for everybody in the country, and it is this Government who were increasing the living wage. It was the right hon. Gentleman who voted against tax cuts for the low-paid to the tune of £7,800.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Prime Minister himself fought with unbelievable levels of energy to protect the bankers' bonus. Why can he not do something about the low-paid on very low wages who need to be allowed to keep their bonuses? The Resolution Foundation report published yesterday highlighted the serious distress caused by the dysfunctional nature of the universal credit system. One claimant says, "Sometimes you are starving", another said, "It was...horrendous", and another said:

"It was very hard for me because I'm not very good at computers."

Does the Prime Minister think that universal credit is meeting its second aim of making the social security system simpler?

The Prime Minister: Yes, indeed; we are making the social security system simpler because we have massively reduced unemployment. On the right hon. Gentleman's specific point about Greggs, as far as I can understand

the situation, Greggs is producing record figures—£7 million extra. One person, I believe, has complained about the bonus system that the right hon. Gentleman remarks upon, but that is in the context of unparalleled growth in employment, with 359,000 more jobs in this country this year than last year and the International Monetary Fund now confirming that the UK economy will grow faster than the eurozone. When is he going to stop talking Britain down and start recognising the extraordinary achievements of the UK economy?

Jeremy Corbyn: The real issue is that many people in work are also in poverty and have to access universal credit, with almost 1 million on zero-hours contracts and more people rough sleeping than ever before. Those are the issues that ought to be concerning the Prime Minister. The third aim of universal credit, it was claimed, was to reduce poverty, but we know that it is having the opposite effect. Under this Government, 65 million meals were handed out by the Trussell Trust food banks over the past five years. The five-week delay for new claimants is leaving people without enough money to cover basic needs. Why is the Prime Minister not taking action to end this punitive and vicious five-week wait for benefits?

The Prime Minister: Universal credit has in fact succeeded in getting 200,000 people into jobs. Contrary to what the right hon. Gentleman says, the number of people in poverty has diminished by 400,000 under this Government and wages have been increasing solidly for the last 22 months. Labour is supposed to have had a period of reflection since the last election—it is supposed to have been reflecting on the result of the general election. Labour has decided, as far as I understand it, that what it wants is even more Corbynism—a four-day week, increases in taxes on working people and uncontrolled immigration from everywhere. I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer that the British people gave to him four weeks ago.

Jeremy Corbyn: Wouldn't it be truly wonderful if the Prime Minister answered a question about universal credit? He has dodged every question on it. The reality is that about half the people going on to universal credit are worse off as a result. The same is true of the very cruel and callous two-child limit under universal credit, which caps benefits for larger families. There are half a million more children living in poverty than there were in 2010 and the number of children in deprivation has soared in the last few years. Why does the Prime Minister just not have the guts to admit that there is a link between poverty and the two-child limit?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman cannot accuse me of failing to answer the question when I have answered it very clearly a couple of times. There are 400,000 fewer people in poverty and there has been a substantial reduction in child poverty. He does not like the answers. The reality is that there is a massive increase in employment and growth in this economy. I really think it is time that the Labour party changed its tune, although I have some good news for the leader of the Labour party. He was voted by Labour members as the most popular Labour leader since records began. I want him to know that those sentiments are warmly shared by many on this side of the House.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Labour party will never abandon the poor of this country. The levels of child poverty are a national scandal. The Prime Minister seems unable, incapable or unwilling to answer that question.

Universal credit had three aims. It was meant to make work pay, but low-paid workers are not even allowed to keep their bonuses. It was meant to be simple, but it has created mind-numbing complexity. It was meant to reduce poverty, but it is driving people to food banks. As we have seen today, the Prime Minister is not able to answer questions on it. The fact is that this Government have baked in austerity for tens of millions of people. When will he finally accept that the universal credit system is broken, damaging and dangerous to people's living standards, and that it should go?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman wants to do nothing else except keep people in the welfare trap and stop helping people out of welfare and into work. I think he should pay tribute to all the people who, by their own hard work, have found fantastic jobs over the last year. He should pay tribute to the growth in employment in the UK economy.

Quite frankly, it is this Government who are getting on with delivering on the priorities of the British people: 40 new hospitals, 50,000 more nurses and 20,000 more police officers. The Labour party is still split from top to toe about whether to stay in the EU or to remain run by the EU. It still cannot make up its mind, and he still cannot make up his mind. We deliver on the people's priorities.

Q2. [900309] **Ben Bradley** (Mansfield) (Con): I welcome Ofsted's annual report on our schools. It was released this week and shows great progress, not least that 86% of schools are now rated good or outstanding. With every school in Mansfield set to benefit from a funding increase later this year, the Government can be proud of the progress they are making. However, there is more to do, not least dealing with the 14% of schools that still do not reach that standard, many of which are based in areas that experience all sorts of other inequalities, too. What more can my right hon. Friend do to support and intervene in those schools to level up our education system and make sure that every child can access a good education, regardless of their postcode?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the passion he brings to this debate and to this subject. He is entirely right that Ofsted's most recent report shows that standards for the kids he and I care about are rising, with 86% of schools now rated good or outstanding. Of course there is more to do, which is why we are investing £40 billion more, but I am regretfully obliged to compare the performance of the schools to which he draws attention with the schools in Scotland where, through no fault of the pupils, performance in maths and science is at a record low.

Perhaps the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), who is about to rise to his feet like a rocketing pheasant, will explain why his party is still so obsessed with breaking up our Union rather than delivering for the children and the pupils of Scotland.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I associate myself with the remarks about Holocaust Memorial Day on Monday. We should always stand up against antisemitism and any form of racism.

Last night, the Lords voted to reinstate the Sewel convention that the devolved Governments must give consent to legislation that affects them. Devolution is under attack from this Tory Government. Powers are being grabbed back to Westminster, and there is no respect for the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, their Governments or their decisions. Yesterday, the Welsh Assembly became the third devolved Parliament to refuse consent for the Tory Brexit Bill. Why are the UK Government ignoring the principle of consent for our national Governments?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that it is no part or implication of the Sewel convention to break up the oldest and most successful political union in the world.

Ian Blackford: I am afraid that the Prime Minister ignores the Smith Commission, which recognises that it is up to the people of Scotland to determine their future. The Prime Minister just does not get it; this is an unprecedented attack. Scotland said no, and we meant it. Not only does he not have the legislative mandate for his Bill, but he does not—[*Interruption.*] As those on the Government Benches bray, it is clear that this place simply does not accept the reality that the Scottish Parliament speaks for the people of Scotland. The devolution settlement must be respected. Prime Minister, all three devolved Parliaments—and even the House of Lords—have called on you to end your Government's attack on devolution. Will the Prime Minister stop the attack on our Parliaments?

The Prime Minister: I agreed for a second with the right hon. Gentleman, because he said that Scotland said no and it meant it. He was right: the people of Scotland said no to independence in 2014 and they meant it. They meant it because they were told it was once in a lifetime, both by Alex Salmond and his protégé Nicola Sturgeon, and indeed by the right hon. Gentleman; they were told it was a once-in-a-generation event. The people of Scotland did this because they know full well that £9 billion net comes from the UK to Scotland and that 60% of Scotland's trade is with the rest of the UK, and they can see the vast investments in manufacturing that come from the UK to Scotland, be it in Rosyth—£1.5 billion in building fantastic ships—or at Govan, where there are fantastic investments in manufacturing. We support manufacturing in Scotland; the Scottish National party Members support nothing except manufacturing grievances, and they know it.

Q3. [900310] **Mark Eastwood** (Dewsbury) (Con): After being inundated with complaints from the people of Dewsbury and Mirfield, does the Prime Minister agree with me that the Northern rail service is no longer fit for purpose?

The Prime Minister: I can confirm to my hon. Friend that we have indeed started a process that could result in either stripping Northern of its franchise or issuing it with a very different form of contract.

Q4. [900311] **Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): Both myself and the Northern Powerhouse Minister are concerned that power cables over the Tyne are a real barrier to businesses securing work for large renewable

energy structures. Will the Prime Minister, through his good offices, undertake to support the National Grid's energy transmissions bid to Ofgem for the permanent removal of the cables and to unlock the potential of the Tyne?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is right to raise this issue with me. Of course it is right that these decisions are independently made by Ofgem, but I appreciate the problem that she raises and we will do whatever we can to ensure that it is sorted out as fast as possible.

Q6. [900313] **Miss Sarah Dines** (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that the quarries of the Peak district provide a huge proportion of the national building and mineral needs of this great nation. We would be delighted to see him in the Derbyshire Dales, so that he can see at first hand the men and women who work at the quarry face, who will be at the heart of the post-Brexit economy, and look at the need for my local Ashbourne bypass—this is necessary to deliver Brexit to the people. Does not this support for these hard-working people show who the real Conservatives are and that this party is the party of the working man?

Mr Speaker: Order. May I just say that Prime Minister's questions is going to run on because of this and that we must have short questions? I will work with Members, but Members have to work with the Chair.

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank my hon. Friend very much for what she has said. I will certainly do whatever I can to see her in the Derbyshire Dales as fast as possible and to get to the bottom of what we can do to support the bypass at Ashbourne. She is right: we speak for working people. I thought it was sad and surprising that the president of the Durham miners' gala should say the other day that Conservative MPs are not welcome. I hope that the Leader of the Opposition will dissociate himself strongly from those remarks.

Q5. [900312] **Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): This week, the Cater Street surgery in Kempston was placed in special measures. Such is the extent of the GP crisis in our country that the surgery has had to rely on locums and was found to have a three-month backlog of new-patient files. Will the Prime Minister urgently increase the funding for primary care services, for the safety, health and wellbeing of the 4,000 of my constituents who are patients at the surgery?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman raises an excellent point. As he knows, we are hiring not only another 50,000 nurses but 6,000 more GPs to deal with the very problem that he raises.

Q8. [900315] **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Cheltenham's Renewable Design Company supplies low-carbon heating systems, such as ground-source heat pumps. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need a successor to the non-domestic renewable heat incentive so that the roll-out can accelerate and we can send a message, in this year of COP26, that global Britain will be a force for a greener planet?

The Prime Minister: Absolutely. I congratulate my hon. Friend on everything he is doing in Cheltenham to encourage renewable heat supplies, including ground-source heating. I can confirm that we are indeed looking for successor arrangements to the renewable heat incentive.

Q7. [900314] **Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Brexiteers will be cheered by the fact that a possible trade deal with America might raise GDP by 0.2% and one with New Zealand and Australia might raise it by 0.02%, but they should be sobered by the fact that such trade deals, if achieved, would claw back only one 30th of what the Prime Minister's own Government say leaving the single market and customs union will cost. Given that Cabinet Ministers are now breezily talking about divergence from our biggest trading partner—the 27-country trading bloc—will the Prime Minister commission and publish impact assessments so that it is clear to all in pharmaceuticals, aerospace, car manufacture, ceramics and food and drink just what these breezy gambling deals might cost?

The Prime Minister: I might take the hon. Gentleman more seriously if he would deal with the fact that 60% of Scotland's trade is with the rest of the United Kingdom. His proposals for a break-up of the United Kingdom would necessitate a border at Berwick. He is proposing that the pensioners of Scotland should have their assets now denominated in a new currency whose name the SNP cannot even specify.

Q10. [900317] **Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): The need to prevent the build-up of green algae in the Solent means that local authorities such as Test Valley Borough Council cannot grant planning permission for children's homes and care facilities and to small self-builders. There is a blockage in the system; I urge my right hon. Friend to get out his plunger and make sure that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Natural England and the Environment Agency all work together to protect our waterways, to make sure that housing commitments can be met.

The Prime Minister: We will make sure that the ministerial Dyno-Rod is employed to sort out the blockage that my right hon. Friend is experiencing. It is important that we deal simultaneously with nitrate neutrality and satisfy our environmental needs while ensuring that her community gets the housing that it needs. I think there is a way forward and I would be happy to take it up with her.

Q9. [900316] **Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): Rail users in Halifax and across the north are suffering every week because of the Government's failure truly to invest in rail infrastructure over the past decade. The north now needs both HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail to make a real start in tackling the north-south divide. Will the Prime Minister commit to publishing the already late Oakervee report this week, and to delivering both these projects in full, to deliver a rail service that is fit for purpose for my constituents and for the north?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady raises an important issue. We are already investing a record £48 billion in rail services, excluding HS2. It is right that we should

look at the value that this country could get from a scheme as costly as HS2, with estimates now rising to £100 billion. I assure the hon. Lady that the Oakervee report will indeed be published in full in due course.

Q13. [900320] **Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con): Misery is a polite word to explain the daily commuting experience of those using the Calder Valley train line. It is not just about cancelled, late or even broken-down trains; it is about infrastructure. Will my right hon. Friend sit down with me and the trains Minister to see how heads can be knocked together finally to clear the bottleneck in the £3.9 billion trans-Pennine upgrade, which is at a standstill?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a good point, following on from the question from the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch). We are indeed committed to improving the trans-Pennine route and will be investing very considerable sums to ensure that that is done.

Q11. [900318] **Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): A damning inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission concluded that Wandsworth Council's special educational needs and disability provision is weak and requires significant improvement. There is a backlog of 170 outstanding education and healthcare plan assessments, and when an assessment has been carried out, as in the case of my young constituent with autism, he is being forced to wait months before that plan is implemented. It is scandalous that these children are not getting a decent education, so does the Prime Minister agree that every child with a special educational need or disability should have the right to a good education, and will he address the funding shortfall in SEND provision?

The Prime Minister: I remind the hon. Lady that this Government are putting another £780 million into SEND provision. We are encouraging the creation of more SEND schools across the country. She mentions Ofsted, which is, of course, a paradox, as Ofsted is the best guarantor and protector of children of all abilities, and the manifesto to which the Labour party is still committed proposes to abolish Ofsted.

Q14. [900321] **James Sunderland** (Bracknell) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that the Bracknell constituency is the proud home of more than 150 internationally focused companies. Will he please reassure the House that what is being done to develop new post-Brexit worldwide trade deals is for the benefit of everyone in Bracknell, Crowthorne, Finchampstead, Sandhurst and, of course, right across the UK?

The Prime Minister: From the 31st of this month, we will begin the process of negotiating free trade agreements not just with the EU, but with friends and partners around the world, so Bracknell will be at the epicentre of global free trade.

Q12. [900319] **Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Prime Minister has said that he wants to be known as a Brexit Hezza, and so, on that basis, will he commit to giving the Humber docklands

the sustained support that Michael Heseltine gave to the London docklands to transform it from the 1980s onwards?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady raises a very important point. That is among the schemes that we are certainly looking at and, as you know, Mr Speaker, we are looking also at the potential for free ports around the country, which can deliver a great deal of benefit to coastal communities.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): Solihull is next to Britain's second biggest city, yet many of my constituents—myself included—struggle to get adequate broadband, which is something that is repeated across the House. Does the Prime Minister agree that this is a matter that needs intense parliamentary scrutiny, and will he commit to put the Government's shoulders to the wheel to get providers to improve our country's broadband?

The Prime Minister: Together with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, I chaired a meeting only a couple of days ago with all the broadband providers. It would be fair to say that we collectively wielded the knout over their heads, because I agree with my hon. Friend that we need to make progress. We will make progress and we will deliver gigabit broadband, with £5 billion going into that programme over the next five years.

Q15. [900322] **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): Last week, the Prime Minister did not know anything about a plan to dump radioactive waste in my Stockton North constituency, but I hope that he remembers what I told him a few weeks ago in my request for a new hospital—that men in his constituency live 14 years longer than those in mine. Just when is he going to end the scandal that means that Teesside men have the same life expectancy as those in Ethiopia, and to tackle the health inequalities in our area?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman's point is absolutely valid. The discrepancy in life expectancy in this country is a disgrace. None the less, it is coming down, and it will come down. Life expectancy overall is at an all-time high. On his specific issue of the disposal of nuclear waste, I understand that my hon. Friend the Environment Minister has written to him on the matter.

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): You may have noticed, Mr Speaker, that it has been a long time since I was a teenager. [HON. MEMBERS: "Never!"] My memory has faded over the years, yet I still remember the embarrassment and shame that I felt each month when I had my period: we could not afford sanitary products, and I was forced to use toilet paper or, when we did not have that, newspaper. Will the Prime Minister acknowledge the work of Amika George, founder of the Free Periods campaign group, which means that no young women of school age in this country should ever have to feel the shame that I felt and remember all those years ago?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the campaign that she is waging on this issue, and I am delighted to tell her that free period products are to be made available to all schools and colleges in England so we can ensure that no young person's education is disrupted by their period. I would like to pay particular tribute to the work of Amika George, who has done so much to bring about change. I remind the House that it

is when we get Brexit done, which we will—and which the Opposition would still block—that we will be able to cut VAT on sanitary products and make period products cheaper for everybody in the country.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): As we approach the moment when we will leave the European Union, the Prime Minister will be aware of concerns in

Northern Ireland. We welcome his assurance that there will continue to be unfettered access for Northern Ireland businesses to the UK single market, but does that commitment also apply to goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: Emphatically it does.

Prevent Programme

12.31 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to make a statement on the Home Office's oversight of the police in their operation of the Prevent programme.

The Minister for Security (Brandon Lewis): Counter-terrorism policing in this country is operationally independent, and that is an important principle. The operational independence of our police from Government is integral to our democracy. The Home Office does, however, carry out oversight of the police on behalf of the Home Secretary.

We are clear that the right to peaceful protest is a cornerstone of our just society and an indispensable channel of political and social expression. Counter Terrorism Policing South East has, for example, stated categorically that it does not classify Extinction Rebellion as an extremist organisation, and that the inclusion of Extinction Rebellion in its guidance to frontline officers was an error of judgment. The police have recalled the guidance and are reviewing it.

I want to reiterate that Extinction Rebellion is in no way considered an extremist group under the 2015 definition of extremism; the Home Secretary has been clear on that point. The police have also made it clear that they regret any offence caused by the inclusion of the Ukrainian tryzub symbol in their internal educational document. That document was produced to help frontline officers and staff recognise and understand a wide range of signs and symbols that they may come across while on duty. As the police have said, the document explicitly states that many of the symbols are not of counter-terrorism interest. Unfortunately, far-right groups do have a history of misappropriating national symbols as part of their identity, and that was the reasoning behind the inclusion of several symbols. We recognise that the tryzub—Ukraine's state coat of arms—carries constitutional importance as well as both historical and cultural significance for the people of Ukraine, and we sincerely regret any offence caused to the Ukrainian nation or its people.

Ms Abbott: The Minister will be aware that guidance issued by the counter-terrorism police on extremist ideologies as part of the Prevent programme did include Extinction Rebellion. He is telling the House now that it was an error of judgment; the Opposition argue that it was a very serious error of judgment. Can he tell the House whether he agrees with Sir Peter Fahy, the head of Prevent from 2010 to 2015, who said that Extinction Rebellion

"is about lawful protest and disruption to get publicity...very different from terrorist acts"?

We also understand that in the guidance document, there is mention of organisations such as Greenpeace, the "Stop the badger cull" campaign, the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign, and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and of vegan activists. Can the House be provided with a list of the organisations mentioned in the counter-terrorism police guidance? What is the basis for the inclusion of groups such as vegan activists? Will the Secretary of State accept that in a democracy there

is a fundamental right to disagreement and non-violent campaigning, and that interfering with or denying that right—even through an error of judgment—is a fundamental breach of the democratic contract between the Government and the governed?

Finally, there is supposed to be a review of Prevent, which we understand will report back in August. Can the Minister tell me who the leader of the Prevent review is, now that Lord Carlile has stepped down? Can the Minister also assure the House that the review will indeed report back in August?

Brandon Lewis: The right hon. Lady outlined the importance of protest groups and their ability to raise the profile of the issue they are protesting about. We absolutely agree with that. As I said, we are very clear that the right to peaceful protest is a cornerstone of our just society, and an indispensable channel of political and social expression. The police have recalled the guidance and are reviewing it, and both we and the police have said that protest groups are not extremist groups, and that membership of a protest organisation is not—nor should it ever be—an indicator that an individual is vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. It is important that protest groups have that space. We believe in, defend and fight for freedom of speech, and will continue to do so.

The statutory deadline for the review to be completed and its findings shared remains 12 August 2020. The next steps are being considered right now and will be announced in due course.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): There is no doubt that this is a difficult area, but the Home Office always used to see its job as the protection both of life and of our way of life. Unfortunately, in the almost impossible task of preventing every act of violence and of terrorism, the Home Office has sometimes slipped somewhat into thought police mode. Will the Minister remind all the agencies that we all subscribe to the French saying, "I may detest what you believe, but I will defend to the death your right to say it"?

Brandon Lewis: As ever, my right hon. Friend makes a very important point, and he has confirmed my point. I hope that everyone across the House believes in freedom of speech, and in people's right to that freedom; we need to defend that right. I assure him that the Home Secretary and I meet counter-terrorism police and our agencies weekly, and we will raise this issue with them in our very next meeting.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I congratulate the shadow Home Secretary on securing this urgent question.

The suggestion that campaigning for peace, and for environmental and human rights, should be regarded as an extremist activity is ludicrous, but it is also a threat to civil liberties. Freedom of speech is essential in a democracy, and it is under attack like never before in our society. I want to be assured that the Government will condemn all attacks on freedom of speech, and will also support freedom of assembly.

Last year we saw a striking contrast between the way in which protests outside this House by Extinction Rebellion were policed, and the way other protests were.

[Joanna Cherry]

Extinction Rebellion was kept very far back from Parliament; others—including some leave protesters—were allowed right up close to Parliament, and to shout in the face of female MPs without any interference. Will the Minister look into that?

Scotland takes a very different approach to the Prevent strategy, placing it in the context of Safer Communities, and relying on the traditionally stronger relationships between the community and police in Scotland. Will the Minister consider adopting that approach in England? Does he see that doing so might prevent the sort of problems we saw with this mistake last week, and make the Prevent strategy more effective in England?

Brandon Lewis: To give some context, Counter Terrorism Policing creates a range of guidance documents for use across the whole of policing, not just by counter-terrorism officers or Prevent practitioners. It produces these documents to help frontline officers and other colleagues make informed decisions, including about protecting crowded places at times of protest—something that Figen Murray has done amazing work on.

The signs and symbols document that became the subject of the *Guardian* article was produced to help the police and close partners identify and understand signs and symbols that they may come across in their day-to-day working lives, so that they know the difference between the symbols for the many groups they may come across. But these things have to be done correctly and in the right context. The police themselves have recognised that this was an error of judgment, and they have withdrawn the document and are reviewing it.

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend appreciate the enormous distress and offence that this has caused across Ukraine? Does he share my view that this symbol needs to be removed from the police guidance? Will he also take this opportunity to reiterate that this country remains a very strong friend and supporter of Ukraine?

Brandon Lewis: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe and the Americas has spoken to his opposite number in Ukraine today. I am likely to see one of my opposite numbers in Zagreb over the next couple of days, and I will express the huge regret felt by the Government about the fact that this happened. We have a very valuable and positive relationship with our friends and partners in Ukraine. We look to see that continue and strengthen as we look outward as a global country while we leave the European Union.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): The only factor that is radicalising people with these concerns is their legitimate and understandable worry that we are not addressing climate change quickly enough. Will the Minister respond to the question from my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary about who is now leading this programme, as he did not manage to address that? Does he share my concern that the Prevent programme and anti-terrorist strategy has had its credibility damaged by this action, and that he will need to work to restore its credibility?

Brandon Lewis: The Prevent programme is fundamentally about safeguarding and supporting vulnerable individuals to stop them becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. The hon. Gentleman should be acutely aware of the context. Extinction Rebellion should not have been in the document in the first place. The police have outlined that that was an error of judgment; they have withdrawn the document, and they are reviewing it. The Prevent review will go ahead, and we will make further announcements about its chairmanship and progress before the review reports fully in August.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): I start by expressing my steadfast support for the Government of Ukraine, with whom I have worked to counter violent extremism and threats from those who cause discontent and division in our country. Violent extremism is a scourge, and Prevent helps to keep us safe. What information can my right hon. Friend share with me regarding the plan for when someone has been convicted of a serious terrorist offence, gone to prison and come out? What support will there be to ensure that they do not become re-radicalised and go on to commit more crimes, and to ensure that we keep our people safe?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend, who has huge experience in this field, makes a very important point. Yesterday the Government announced moves and measures to ensure that people who commit the most heinous crimes, including terrorism, will see longer, more severe sentences, and victims can have confidence in that. It is also right that we continue to do everything we can to ensure that people who commit an offence are able to reform and move forward. There are lessons to learn. The Prevent review is looking at the lessons to be learned from what happened at Fishmongers' Hall. My hon. Friend is right: we need to continue to work in this area to ensure that we keep our society safe.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The police might say that this was an error of judgment, but it is also part of a pattern. Footage of my arrest for peaceful protest against fracking was used in Prevent training sessions back in 2015. In 2016, the Home Office said that support for anti-fracking was not an indicator of vulnerability to extremism, but years later, evidence shows that four police forces were still identifying anti-fracking as a perceived extremist risk, so can the Minister tell me why we should now trust his Department on this subject? What is it doing differently? In particular, what reassurance can he give us that he will advise the police to ensure that any policing in the run-up to, and at, COP26 is within the law and appropriate?

Brandon Lewis: First, as I said earlier, the police in this country have independence, and it is important that we protect and respect that. They have said that this was an error of judgment. They have withdrawn the document and are reviewing it. The guidance documents that Counter Terrorism Policing produces are used across policing and by partners to deal with groups, including at public events in public venues. The hon. Lady refers to COP26, which is coming up soon and is a tremendous opportunity for this country to outline what we do. I have absolute confidence that our police will do as they always do at these events, which is to do our country very proud.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): I was glad to hear the Minister make a clear distinction between the rights to free speech and to peaceful protest, which are absolutely part of this country's values, and terrorist activities. The two should be kept firmly apart, and the latter prevented. Can he be more specific about the use of probation, which will clearly be an important part of counter-terrorist activity in the wake of London Bridge?

Brandon Lewis: As my right hon. Friend rightly outlines, probation is an important part of this, and can play an important role in rehabilitation work. We have lessons to learn from the tragedy of Fishmongers' Hall, and the system is looking at those. Yesterday, the Government announced changes that we will make to prison sentences, to ensure that we do everything we can to keep people safe and keep those who commit these crimes in prison for longer. We are always looking to learn, and to improve, so that when people come out of prison, they are properly reformed and safe to be in society.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Counter-terror police across the country do great and incredibly important work to keep us safe, but that is why this guidance was such a problem: we cannot afford confidence in their work being undermined. When did the Home Office see this guidance, and has the Minister asked to see all similar guidance from all police forces across the country, to ensure that no other counter-terror groups are making the same mistake?

Brandon Lewis: As I say, the police have withdrawn the document and are reviewing it. I fully respect, and the Government respect, the independence of the police, and those guidance documents are part of their independence. The police produce those documents for their officers in the work that they do, and it is right that we respect that. The Home Secretary and I meet representatives and the leadership of counter-terrorism police and other partners on a weekly basis. We will raise this issue with them, to ensure that they are focused on the importance of getting this right. Those documents are about alerting their officers to all the types of groups and symbols that they may deal with in their day-to-day work. We need to acknowledge the regret that the police have shown over this error of judgment, and the fact that they are reviewing the document.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): When the Prevent review takes place, will the Minister ensure that particular attention is given to the intractable problem of proselytising within jails by people who have been jailed for long periods for terrorism offences? They cannot be kept in isolation throughout their long sentences, and if they are not in isolation, there is a danger of them radicalising others. Special attention needs to be given to that problem during the review.

Brandon Lewis: My right hon. Friend makes a good point about the challenges within prisons. I will certainly ensure that his comments are taken on board as we go further with the Prevent review, which we will ensure reports back by August.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): If the Government are serious about conducting a proper, independent review of Prevent, can the Minister give an

assurance that they will engage with key Muslim organisations, such as the Muslim Council of Britain, and will heed the advice of the Muslim community?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The reviewer will want to ensure that they engage with a wide range of people across all communities. Of course, Prevent works with not just the Muslim community but the far right and across our entire community. The reviewer will be independent, but we will encourage him to consult very widely.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I wish to echo the previous question. We enjoy policing by consent in this country, and I am rather uncomfortable about the fact that some religious communities feel that the Prevent programme does not subscribe to their view of the world, and in some ways discriminates against them. Will the Minister use the review to engage with the Muslim Council of Britain and others?

Brandon Lewis: As I say, the reviewer is independent and will consult widely with the groups that they see fit to. The Prevent programme, I have to say, is working and is successful. Prevent has made a significant impact. It is stopping people being drawn into terrorism. Just in 2018-19, some 101 projects were delivered in London alone to address vulnerabilities to do with education, socialisation and substance abuse. This project is working; we just want to make sure that what is good gets even better.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I welcome what has been said about the error of judgment being acknowledged by the police. However, further to what other hon. Members have said, I stress that if such an error of judgment can take place the effect is unfortunately to undermine confidence in Prevent and to raise questions about the culture within which it is operating. On the review, what steps will be taken to ensure there is not a culture that allows such an error of judgment to take place and to undermine an important operation?

Brandon Lewis: We need to be clear that the document was produced by the police for the police's use and purpose. That is separate from the wider Prevent programme, which works across a huge range of communities and organisations around country. It is very successful in safeguarding and protecting vulnerable people and, as a result, our society, which we should be lauding and very pleased with. From the police's point of view, as I have said, they have withdrawn this document and are reviewing it.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Does the Minister agree that we must never lose sight of the possibility of reform, even for the worst criminals and terrorists who have committed heinous crimes? Will he update the House on when we will start the programme of recruitment for specialist counter-terrorism probation officers, which I think will be welcomed to keep our society and our constituents safe?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. It is important that we remember that people are able to reform, and we want people to reform. Obviously, we want to get the balance right, while making sure that

[*Brandon Lewis*]

the British public are clear that the Government are on their side and that people who commit heinous crimes will serve severe, proper and long sentences, because our first priority is to keep people safe. We made the announcement about the increase in counter-terrorism funding just yesterday, and we will be updating the House on when and how it is spent, but we are keen to move quickly to ensure that we keep our country safe.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I thank the Minister for putting the record straight on Extinction Rebellion and all that? May I also give a plug for the quality of the work of my local police in delivering the Prevent programme and in supporting Members of Parliament? I have recently had some really awful death threats against me and my staff, and I have received such a level of support—not just in being effective, carrying through an investigation and arresting two people, but in phoning up and giving support day to day. I know lots of Members have received that support, and I hope it can continue, but may I thank the people who supply it to Members?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Gentleman makes a very generous but very correct statement, and I absolutely echo that. I am very fortunate and often humbled in this job on a daily basis in seeing the work that our counter-terrorism police do, in partnership with local police and indeed our agencies. I would argue that we have got the best in the world, and day after day they keep us safe.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I hope Ministers have had a look at Policy Exchange's paper titled, for better or worse, "Extremism Rebellion". Although we may defend people's right to hold views about green anarchism, eco-socialism and radical anti-capitalist environmentalism, I want to make sure that there is no tacit approval from either Dispatch Box for what the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) called "disruption"—I would say it is a deliberate policy of disruption. Will the Minister reassure me that the Government know what they are dealing with?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I suspect he is also referring back to some of the difficult situations the police had to deal with not that long ago, but he is right that it is separate. As I have said, Extinction Rebellion is not considered an extremist group under the 2015 definition of extremism, and we are clear on that.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Will the Minister show some common sense and assist the police in understanding the difference between young people being involved in Extinction Rebellion or CND and—within the Prevent programme assessment that will take place this year—looking at the real risks with the insufficient numbers of skilled probation officers looking after extremely troubled and dangerous criminals?

Brandon Lewis: I suspect the hon. Lady has not had a chance to see the document she is referring to, because it does specifically say:

"The document in question...explicitly states that many of the groups are not of counter-terrorism interest".

As I have said, however, the police have acknowledged that it was an error of judgment to have that reference in there, and they have withdrawn it. They are reviewing it, and it is something that the Home Secretary and I will be continuing to talk to them about.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Prevent is supposed to stop Islamist extremism. This morning I was alerted to the fact that a pro-Iranian regime charity known as the IHRC—the Islamic Human Rights Commission—is apparently circulating to schoolteachers via digital education services a programme for its genocide memorial day. This includes a video that compares the Nazi holocaust to Israeli actions in Gaza, and a series of book and video lists directing children to further material critical of Israel and diminishing the deaths of 6 million Jews in the holocaust. Will my right hon. Friend launch an urgent inquiry into what this organisation is doing and why these things are on digital education platforms? Will he work with the Charity Commission and the Department for Education to stop this happening again?

Brandon Lewis: My right hon. Friend has given a very stark and concerning example of the kind of issues and details that Prevent and indeed our police deal with. He is right to highlight the education sector, which in 2017-18 accounted for some 33% of referrals to Prevent, which works across extremism and not just in one particular area. I will certainly follow up with him directly on the issue he has raised to make sure that this gets proper attention.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I have been a member of Scottish CND for many years. Does the Minister agree with me that it is ludicrous, perverse and offensive that an organisation of people peacefully protesting indiscriminate murder with nuclear weapons has ended up in this document?

Brandon Lewis: The police are reviewing the document. As I said earlier, it is a guide that is there to help the police identify and understand a range of organisations they may come across. It does not in any way suggest that membership of or affiliation with non-proscribed groups would be sufficient to trigger some kind of Prevent referral, or that we would consider non-violent protest as a potential indicator for extremism. I can give her the assurance that, as I say, we protect people's right to freedom of speech and the right to protest, which I think is an important part of our society, and this document is being reviewed.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): How many officers are occupied in monitoring terrorists who have been released?

Brandon Lewis: Obviously, terrorists who have been released from prison are monitored by probation or the police themselves, depending on the structure of their release. I hope my right hon. Friend will understand that I am not in a position to comment—which I think would be a security issue—on the specific numbers and how we deal with the matter. However, it is an issue we are alert to and it is an issue on which, as I have said, there are lessons to learn from what happened at Fishmongers' Hall, and that piece of work is ongoing.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister will know that the word “Islam” is the Arabic word for peace. Does he agree that the focus of Prevent activity should be to ensure that people in the Muslim community do not misrepresent, misconstrue and corrupt the words of the Koran, as opposed to what people fear is the focus of Prevent, which is that there is too much Islam and too much Muslim ideology? Surely the focus should be that people do not corrupt the teachings in a way that brings about terror, and we should be encouraging mainstream Muslim organisations to work with us for the good of all.

Brandon Lewis: I understand the point the hon. Gentleman is making, and I think he is right to differentiate between two different issues. The heart of what the Prevent programme is about backs up his point, because the Prevent programme is fundamentally about safeguarding and supporting vulnerable individuals to stop them becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. It is not about what religion they have and how they practise their religious beliefs; as I say, it is about stopping people becoming terrorists. It is working and it is successful, as I have said, and it does make a significant impact in stopping people being drawn into terrorism in the first place.

Through the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015—bear with me for a second if you will, Mr Speaker, because the context is important here—we introduced the Prevent statutory duty. That duty requires local authorities, schools, colleges, universities, health bodies, prisons, probation and the police, as part of their day-to-day work, to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. It does have a very clear and specific purpose, which is about keeping our country, and vulnerable people, safe.

Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): Will the Minister join me in congratulating Waqar Ahmed and his team in Birmingham on all their excellent work with Prevent and on becoming national leaders in the field, which is mostly because a lot of their work is community-led and bottom-up? It is disappointing, therefore, that a number of Birmingham Labour councillors have attempted to undermine the process. Will he do everything he can in the Home Office to ensure that the police are given the powers they need to keep our streets safe?

Brandon Lewis: Absolutely. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight this issue, and the good work that we see in such communities is a huge credit to the organisation and the people he has mentioned. We are determined to make sure that the police know they have our full support in doing all the work they do to ensure they protect vulnerable people and keep our country safe. I think their independence is a key part of the structure of that. We thank them for what they do, and we thank such organisations, as my hon. Friend has so rightly represented.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Is the Minister able to state unequivocally that the Ukrainian coat of arms will now be removed from this document?

Brandon Lewis: As I said earlier, that document has been withdrawn. The police are reviewing it, but I am not going to interfere with the independence of our police. This is a document drafted by the police for the police and we respect their independence, but they have outlined that they regret this happening and have explained why it happened so I do not expect to see this kind of mistake again in future.

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con): County Durham police do excellent work in protecting people right across Bishop Auckland, Spennymoor, Shildon and Barnard Castle. Given the threatening tones I heard yesterday, unfortunately, I will be contacting them to talk about the safety of my team at the Durham miners’ gala in July. Does my right hon. Friend agree that preserving the operational independence of the police, including the counter-terror policing unit, is of the utmost importance in keeping our streets safe?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes an important point. All of us in society sometimes see things, as she has rightly outlined, and I did see the comments yesterday, which are very concerning. She is absolutely right to raise that issue with the relevant authorities, and I am happy to discuss that with her as well to make sure that it is properly taken forward. It is right that we continue to defend the independence of our police and make sure that they know that we are there to support them in the brilliant work they do in keeping us safe.

Points of Order

1.1 pm

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This morning, Jaguar Land Rover announced the loss of 500 jobs—accounting for more than 10% of the total—at the Halewood plant in my constituency as it moves from a three to a two-shift system. Given the ongoing uncertainty about Brexit and the UK's trading relationship with the EU, worse may be to come, so can you, Mr Speaker, advise me about how I can ensure that Ministers and the Prime Minister himself take this existential threat to the auto manufacturing industry in Liverpool as seriously as they should, and seek to help those losing their jobs as much as they can?

Mr Speaker: This has rightly been raised on the Floor of the House, and I would expect those on the Treasury Bench to have quickly made a note and I am sure this will be brought to the Prime Minister's attention. This will have a serious impact on the north-west and I recognise how important those jobs are. That is now on the record and I hope others will follow up on it.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Those of us who campaigned in the previous Parliament for a review of the law on assisted dying were informed informally by the Government that an inquiry might take place. In advance of my Westminster Hall debate on this subject tomorrow, may I have some guidance on which Department and which Minister in the new Government we could follow this up with?

Mr Speaker: I am sure that that will be taken on board as well. I recognise that there has been real frustration around this and I know that the hon. Lady will, through her good offices, seek help from the Table Office too. I think that would be a good way forward.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your guidance on how I might use the procedures of this House to resolve a case with the Home Office. This morning, my office received a

call from UK Visas and Immigration regarding a visitor visa application. Listed in the application is the daughter of the applicant, a constituent of mine who has the later stages of motor neurone disease. UK Visas and Immigration is refusing to deal with my office regarding the case unless we can produce a signed mandate from the applicant, who is currently in China. My office has never been asked to do this before and this in essence means that everything is being delayed and we are wasting time for a constituent who does not have long left. Can you, Mr Speaker, advise on how we can cut through the red tape in the Home Office and perhaps have a more compassionate approach to dealing with my constituent?

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of this point of order. It is not an issue for the Chair, but I recognise his frustration and he obviously quite rightly wants to take up his constituent's case and the issue of the child visa. I am sure that people will be listening to this and I hope his concern is now being heard by Ministers and will be acted on.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Do you remember that, when we were first elected, we were not allowed to read our questions? Is there not at least a possibility that were Members required to remember their questions, at least some of them would not bang on for so long, and all our time could be used more effectively?

Mr Speaker: When the right hon. Gentleman and I came in together in 1997, it was frowned upon to read a question; people had to do the question without help and assistance. We have a new Parliament with a lot of new Members learning the ropes, but hopefully people will get into the habit rather quickly of asking a question without aid.

Sir Desmond Swayne: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I hate to bang on, but it is the older ones who are the worst.

Mr Speaker: And there is your proof: just because somebody reads their question, that does not stop us taking a lot more time.

European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill

Consideration of Lords amendments.

Mr Speaker: I must draw the House's attention to the fact that financial privilege is engaged in Lords amendment 1.

Clause 7

RIGHTS RELATED TO RESIDENCE: APPLICATION DEADLINE AND TEMPORARY PROTECTION

1.5 pm

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Steve Barclay): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 1.

Mr Speaker: With this we may take Lords amendments 2 to 5, and Government motions to disagree.

Steve Barclay: Less than a fortnight has passed since we last debated the Bill in this House. Since then the House of Lords has sat for nearly 40 hours to debate more than 100 amendments. The noble Lords in the other place have asked this House to think again on five matters and I will address each in turn.

Turning first to Lords amendment 1 on citizens' rights tabled by the noble Lord Oates, I know that noble Lords share the Government's commitment to putting the rights and welfare of citizens at the heart of our withdrawal negotiations. The first part of the amendment establishes a declaratory system and the second part requires Ministers to bring forward regulations making provisions for those with declaratory rights to apply for a document evidencing their rights. This amendment would mean the successful EU settlement scheme in its current form would need to be abandoned, because there would be no need to register if people could later rely on a declaration that they were already in the UK. This would make null and void the 2.8 million applications and the 2.5 million grants of status that have already been completed. The Government would, under this amendment, also be unable to issue digital status to EU citizens without also issuing physical documents, including to those already holding a digital status under the current scheme. That would increase the risk of fraud and raises costs to Government and citizens.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): Surely the Secretary of State is aware that his own Ministers have also been stating that it might be possible for people to print off emails, for example, to provide that confirmation. There seems to be a huge number of mixed messages here. He will also be aware that many of those citizens are already being asked for that proof by employers. Surely the Government should deal with the system as it is actually being used, rather than his imagined reality of it, which is rather different.

Steve Barclay: The hon. Lady anticipates my next point, which is on the interplay between a physical document and the digital status, because, as she knows, digital status is more secure than any physical document

could ever be, and furthermore all successful applicants receive a confirmation letter and can download secure share codes which can be printed or sent to anybody an EU citizen might need to show their status to in the future. The key is the number that is there, and digital status is the most secure, but of course people can print off the email that they receive.

The vote to leave included a desire for greater control of our borders. We need to be able to differentiate between EU citizens who arrived pre-exit and have rights set out in this Bill and EU citizens who arrive after we leave, who will be treated the same as the rest of the world under the forthcoming immigration Bill. Despite the good intentions, a declaratory status does not allow for that differentiation, so I urge Members to reject this amendment.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The Secretary of State will understand that there are, of course, some people for whom the challenge of applying for status is considerable, and the Government have said they will give reasonable consideration to those who have reason not to have applied by the deadline. One group that I and other colleagues are particularly concerned about is children looked after in the care system by local authorities, which do not in many cases have either the resources or the expertise to pursue applications for those children to obtain settled status. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that they will be protected, as they would be under a declaratory system?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Lady makes a fair point, and I know that she has taken a close interest in the issue over many years. As she will be aware, we have committed £9 million to work with vulnerable groups and to help sectors, including the one to which she refers, with using the settlement scheme, and we have introduced a grace period to allow additional time if there are reasons why people need to apply late.

The fact is that the scheme has no charge and almost 3 million people have applied. It is working well, but we have an outreach programme, which includes 57 organisations and money to address the hon. Lady's point.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): The Government have previously disputed estimates from respected think-tanks that tens—probably hundreds—of thousands of European economic area nationals will fail to apply by the deadline and therefore lose their rights. Do the Government have their own estimate of the numbers? If they do not, how on earth can the Secretary of State dispute those figures?

Steve Barclay: That is in part why the Government have put a grace period in place; that reflects many previous debates in this House that included concerns raised by the hon. Gentleman and others about whether people might miss the deadline. Almost 3 million people have applied, which is a reflection of the fact that the scheme is working very effectively.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD) *rose*—

Steve Barclay: I shall make a little progress before taking further interventions.

[Steve Barclay]

I turn to their lordships' amendments 2 and 3, on the interpretation of retained European Union law. Amendment 2, tabled by Lord Beith, would remove the power to set which courts may diverge from retained Court of Justice of the European Union case law, and how. Amendment 3, tabled by Lord Mackay, would insert a mechanism whereby any court thinking that CJEU case law should be departed from may ask the Supreme Court to decide.

The other place has one of the greatest concentrations of legal talent in the world, and it is only right that the Government's intentions on such a sensitive matter should be examined by their lordships, and that challenging alternatives should be proposed. The Bill ensures that time is built in to allow consultation of the senior judiciary in all jurisdictions. It is worth repeating what my noble Friends Lords Callanan and Keen said: we will, of course, also consult the devolved Administrations.

In proposing amendment 3, the noble and learned Lord Mackay has made an interesting proposal, but the Government cannot accept this recreation of the CJEU's preliminary reference procedure.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): As a fellow lawyer, my right hon. Friend will know the importance of the doctrine of binding precedence—*stare decisis*—to our common law system. That was what the amendments sought to deal with.

Anyone looking at the Lords *Hansard* will see that we were clearly close to a compromise with Lord Mackay, in which the necessary scheme to disapply EU law would be dealt with not necessarily by the Supreme Court but by courts of appellate jurisdiction. If we do not accept this amendment as it currently stands, will the Government try again to find a compromise when the matter goes back to the Lords? This is a fundamental principle on which we ought to be able to find agreement.

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend speaks with authority and constructively about how the issue could be addressed. Let me reassure him that the Government do intend to consider and consult rigorously to ensure that CJEU case law is properly domesticated after the end of the implementation period.

Let me set out to the House, especially hon. and learned Members, that the power in clause 26 is sunset until the end of the year—the point at which courts will start interpreting retained EU law. Any change to the rules of interpretation will come in time for litigants and the courts. We will ensure that there is legal clarity at all times on the rules of interpretation.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I rise to support the proposal of my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill), to go back to the Lords for a compromise on the matter. Of all the changes incorporated in the withdrawal Act in the past month or two, this is the weakest; it opens a swathe of problems for both Government and judiciary. Lord Mackay got very close to getting it right, and we should talk to him again.

Steve Barclay: I always listen intently to the constructive points put by my right hon. Friend, my predecessor but one. I draw his attention to the fact that we are committed

to consulting the senior judiciary on our approach to this matter, which is my right hon. Friend's underlying point.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Secretary of State says that he is going to consult the devolved Administrations. However, the problem is that at present the Government speak to them without taking any cognisance of their answers. Will he give me an assurance that when he consults with the devolved Administrations on this matter, he will not only listen but actually take their advice on board?

1.15 pm

Steve Barclay: There was a meeting between Ministers and devolved Government representatives yesterday about taking on board the input of the devolved Administrations during our discussions on the next phase of negotiations. There have been instances in which my counterpart in the Scottish Government has paid tribute to one of the Ministers in the Department, for example, in the early consultation on the withdrawal agreement Bill. I appreciate that the hon. and learned Lady's position will always be to desire more consultation and for the UK Government to take further note, but we are consulting and will continue to do so.

Joanna Cherry: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way again. It is not that I desire more consultation, but that I want the British Government to take on board what the Scottish Government say—

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Effective consultation.

Joanna Cherry: Effective consultation, as the hon. Gentleman says.

As the Secretary of State will know well, the difficulty is that the Cabinet Secretary Michael Russell, the most senior Scottish Government official with whom the British Government deal, is clear: he is listened to if he is lucky, but they never take his advice on board.

Steve Barclay: To say “never” contradicts comments that Mr Russell has himself made, but the hon. and learned Lady has made her point about consultation.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Steve Barclay: I shall make a little more progress before taking further interventions. I urge Members to reject both amendments.

I turn to Lords amendment 4, tabled by the noble Lord Dubs. Although the Government humbly disagree with the amendment, we recognise his sincerity about and dedication to this issue and the constructive scrutiny that he has provided on behalf of vulnerable children. The amendment would remove the provision that amends the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to require the Government to report on their policy on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

I can only say again, as I did in our previous debates, that the Government's policy is unchanged. Delivering on it will not require legislation. The Government have a proud record on supporting the most vulnerable children. The UK has granted protection to more than 41,000 children since the start of 2010. In 2018, the UK received

more than 3,000 asylum applications from unaccompanied children, and the UK deals with 15% of all claims in the EU, making us the country with the third highest intake in Europe. Indeed, in the year ending September 2019 the intake rose to more than 3,500.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I am pleased that the policy has not changed, but why is the Secretary of State changing the legislation?

Steve Barclay: The right hon. Gentleman pre-empted the passage that I am just coming to.

As hon. Members will be aware, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary wrote to the European Commission on 22 October on this very issue. The amendment in no way affects our commitment to seek an agreement with the EU. Primary legislation cannot deliver the best outcomes for these children, as it cannot guarantee that we will reach an agreement. That is why this is ultimately a matter that must be negotiated with the EU. The Government are committed to seeking the best possible outcome in those negotiations.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Over the past three and a half years, there have been many arguments and debates about European citizens' rights and their protection. Refugee children are among the most vulnerable in the world—surely none of us, regardless of the side of the argument we were on, wants their safety or the possibility of their being reunited with their families to be undermined in any way. Why, then, are the Government so determined to take such provision out of the Bill rather than going with the amendment, which would offer a guarantee and reassure everyone in the House?

Steve Barclay: For the reasons that I have alluded to; this is an issue that the Home Secretary is addressing.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Steve Barclay: I give way to the previous Chair of the Home Affairs Committee—I am conscious that that election is still to come.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Secretary of State has still given no reason. Why take the provision out of the 2018 Act? It is in previous legislation. There are loads of things in legislation through the decades that the Government say they disagree with, but amendments are not needed because they have said they disagree, and they do not remove those things from the statute book. That is what makes us suspect that he wants to remove it, because for some reason he thinks that it will restrict what he wants to do, and in the end, therefore, he will betray the commitments that have been made to the most vulnerable children. If not, he should keep the provision in the Act.

Steve Barclay: Let me address that head-on: the reason is that the purpose of the legislation is to implement in domestic law the international agreement that we have reached. That is what the withdrawal agreement Bill is doing and that is why we do not support the amendment. What drives the right hon. Lady's concern is whether the protections will be in place for unaccompanied children. I draw her attention again to the Government's

record as one of the three best countries in the EU. The figures show that this country has the third highest intake and deals with 15% of all claims in the EU. That is the policy that the Government and the Prime Minister are committed to, and it is reflected in the Home Secretary's approach.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): At this late stage in the Secretary of State's comments, will he reflect again on Lords amendments 4 and 1? If what he says to the House is true, there is no principle at stake. If the policy and the determined will of the Government remain the same when it comes to unaccompanied child refugees, there is nothing to be lost. There was no strong defence of the Government position in the House of Lords. I urge him to consider this matter wholly and listen to voices across the House who believe that it would be better to see legislative provision than not.

Steve Barclay: I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the comments that I have made: the policy has not changed and the Government's commitment is reflected in the record, and that is why the amendment should be resisted.

Lords amendment 5 seeks to recognise the Sewel convention. The convention is already found in statute, in the Scotland Act 1998 and the Government of Wales Act 2006. However, the convention in no way limits parliamentary sovereignty. As hon. Members will recall from the Miller case, the Sewel convention is fundamentally political. It was found then not to be justiciable and to reflect it in this statute should not change that.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister has made it clear that he thinks that the Union is important, as I do, but it is unprecedented that the Senedd, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly have refused consent for the Bill. The Welsh Government have made it very clear in refusing consent that it is because the UK Government can potentially force them to accept international obligations in the future relationship, which could impact on devolved competences. When we think about such things as the NHS, that will be absolutely crucial. Will the Secretary of State be clear whether he is going to work with—as well as just meeting and ticking the box—the devolved Administrations on the future negotiations, or is he going to impose this, generating further conflict and damage to the Union?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Gentleman and I both treasure the Union and want to work to ensure that it is preserved. To address his point, we had a meeting yesterday with devolved representatives, including the Welsh Government, to hear their input in the next phase. We are committed to working with the Welsh Government, among others, as we shape that negotiation.

As was noted in the other place, the issue that I was describing is not quite what the amendment turns on. As the noble Lord Callanan said when responding to this amendment yesterday:

“What matters is that the Government continue to uphold the Sewel convention”.—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 21 January 2020; Vol. 801, c. 1074.]

We have done so in the passage of this Bill, including by ensuring that devolved Ministers will have a clear role in the functioning of the independent monitoring authority,

[Steve Barclay]

particularly in their role in nominating to its board members with specialist devolved expertise.

On 17 January I wrote to Mike Russell and Jeremy Miles, my counterparts in the Scottish and Welsh Governments, to make clear the Government's commitment to the legislative consent process and the enduring power and value of our historic partnerships. We are of course disappointed that the devolved legislatures have nevertheless not consented to the Bill.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Steve Barclay: I will take one more intervention, but the direction from the Chair is that I should allow other Members to speak in the debate and not take undue time.

Wayne David: Given the Secretary of State's reference to the letter to the Welsh Government and the Welsh Minister, how does he square the circle of wanting, on the one hand, to reinforce the principles of Sewel and so on, but on the other, wanting to amend the legislation to withdraw the commitment?

Mr Speaker: Order. I am bit bothered about time. We have quite a few Members who want to make speeches. I remind Members that they cannot just walk in and put a question to the Minister—let us all work together for one another.

Steve Barclay: I was trying to be generous in taking interventions, but I will take your direction, Mr Speaker.

We very much respect the devolved Governments' opposition to Brexit as a whole, but the legislative consent process should not be the place to show such disagreements; rather, it is for voicing concerns with parts of legislation that relate to devolved competences. The refusal of legislative consent in no way affects the Sewel convention or the Government's dedication to it. However, as recognised by both Mike Russell and Lord Sewel, these are not normal times. Given those circumstances, I urge Members to reject this amendment.

We have covered significant ground in debating this Bill. Once passed, it will stand as an historic piece of legislation. I therefore hope that the House will respectfully disagree with their lordships' amendments.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I rise on behalf of the Opposition to explain why we oppose the Government on all five of their motions to disagree with their lordships.

On EU citizens' rights, their lordships passed an amendment providing for, first, a declaratory system for gaining settled status and, secondly, for a physical document. The declaratory system would honour the previous Government's pledges to EU citizens living here before we leave the EU that they would enjoy the exact same rights as before—we are just asking this Government to honour that. It would avoid the cliff edge of time limits—the grace period still means that there is a time limit—and pressures on people who have the legal right to be here but who, for various reasons, are being asked for yet more evidence or have only been given pre-settled and not yet settled status.

The Government talk of the 2.5 million people who have been granted status, but many of those who have applied for settled status and are entitled to it have been granted only pre-settled status, which does not give that promised certainty. Many people are not aware that they need to apply, particularly those who have been here since childhood. Others may not apply in time, for many good reasons. The Secretary of State says that late applications for good reasons will be considered, but we do not really know what good reasons will count. That does not give certainty.

The Minister in the other place argued that declaratory registration is not necessary because the current scheme addresses all problems, but it does not. The arbitrary time limit and the problems and delays in securing status all risk making some people who should be lawfully resident unlawfully resident past the time limit.

The physical document—the other part of the amendment—is vital. Surely we in this Chamber all know that internet signals are not reliable. People do not all have smartphones. Other categories of non-UK citizens have a physical document, so it is not surprising that the Residential Landlords Association say that it is deeply concerned about the lack of physical proof and that landlords are not, and should not be treated as, border police. In a perverse justification of the policy, Ministers have said that providing a physical document, as this amendment proposes, would make a future Windrush-style scandal more likely. On our understanding, it is the exact opposite.

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend is making an absolutely crucial point. That is very much what we heard in evidence from experts at the Home Affairs Committee during the Windrush inquiry in the last Parliament. They talked about the importance of physical documents and the declaratory system issue.

Thangam Debbonaire: My hon. Friend makes exactly the right point. Government Members should consider that the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, the 3million and the Residential Landlords Association have all warned that there is a risk that landlords and employers will be reluctant, without that immediate physical proof that other Windrush citizens lacked, to let a home or offer a job to EU citizens.

Jamie Stone: The shadow Minister has referred to poor communications. As I have mentioned many times in this place, they are very bad indeed in my constituency. Broadband is at best indifferent. I suggest to the House therefore that many EU citizens are being disadvantaged when trying to get into the system at all because of where they live.

1.30 pm

Thangam Debbonaire: Yes, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): My hon. Friend will be aware that the Brexit Select Committee in its former incarnation recommended a physical document. Many Members will have had this experience: constituents apply for further leave; employers say, "Prove you have leave"; they are told by the Home Office, "Apply to the checking service"; lots of employers refuse to do that,

and as a result our constituents lose their jobs. Is that not precisely the kind of reason we need a physical document?

Thangam Debbonaire: My right hon. Friend is exactly right. I ask Government Members to imagine a future constituency surgery in which they are asked to explain to their constituents who are EU citizens why they have been denied a physical document or settled status or have experienced delays in getting that status changed, and have thus been refused a job or a home—because their MP refused to back this amendment. Their constituents will ask, “Why did you vote this way?” and they will need a good answer.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): The hon. Lady will have heard the Minister say that online status is more secure, but someone with leave to remain or who is here on a spouse visa gets a physical residents’ permit. If online status were more secure, the Government would have done away with that, but they have not. Is that not the point? The Minister’s point about security is no justification for opposing Lords amendment 1.

Thangam Debbonaire: That is spot on. It is why many EU citizens in my constituency say they feel singled out—because they do not have what other non-UK citizens have, which is a physical document.

I turn to the CJEU and Lords amendments 2 and 3. In clause 26, the Government signal their intention to create chaos and uncertainty in our legal system. I can do no better than quote from the noble Lord Pannick, who said he supported the amendment for the following reason:

“Clause 26 is fundamentally objectionable, because it would give the Minister a delegated power to decide which courts should be able to depart from judgments of the Court of Justice and what test those courts should apply.”

He went on:

“These are powers which step well over the important boundary between the Executive and the judiciary. They are matters which should not be decided by Ministers.”

Later he said—and he was absolutely right—that

“once they are conferred the political and legal constraints if they decide to act unreasonably are limited.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 20 January 2020; Vol. 801, c. 984.]

The Government ask us to trust that they will not go beyond existing constraints, but that is not good enough. Clause 26 would lead to different interpretations of the law in higher and lower courts, greater uncertainty and therefore more litigation. That cannot be what the Government want. Amendment 2 therefore simply deletes the entire provision.

Amendment 3 was a compromise proposed by a Conservative former Lord Chancellor, Lord Mackay—surely a man whom Government Members would want to listen to. He tried to find a compromise whereby the ministerial right to make regulations would be removed. Instead, any court could consider the possibility of departing from case law but would have to set out its reasons and refer the case to a higher court. What on earth could be the problem with that?

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Surely my hon. Friend accepts that ultimately the test of when courts can diverge from EU law should be set in this

Parliament and applied by our courts and that, if there is any question, it should be referred to the Supreme Court. That would maintain the division between Parliament and the courts.

Thangam Debbonaire: The problem is that we are allowing Ministers to set the terms and test, which is an unacceptable breach of the boundaries between the Executive and the judiciary.

The Government have had plenty of time to consider the provisions of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. If they want more time, just giving Ministers broad and sweeping powers is not the answer. They could, if they wanted, bring a short Bill before Parliament with proposed amendments that we could debate and scrutinise in the usual way. Every Government Member must understand—it seems that several possibly do, although they are no longer in their places—that if they pass the Government’s motions to disagree with amendments 2 and 3, the separation of powers will be blurred, there will be legal chaos and it will be impossible for Parliament to change. These are not powers that should be exercised through regulation. We should not risk ministerial interference in judicial processes. The Government should think again and withdraw their motions to disagree. If they do not, we will vote against them.

Thirdly, I turn to child refugees and Lords amendment 4, to leave out clause 37, which amends clause 17 of the 2018 Act and thus removes the obligation on the Government to negotiate future arrangements to protect unaccompanied child refugees. This is such a modest provision—it also reflects the Government’s own commitment—that it seems extraordinary and inexplicable that they are removing it. I have very dark and deep suspicions about why, though I want to be charitable and I am hoping there may be a good answer.

As Lord Dubs said, it is partly the scattergun of justifications that leads one to be suspicious. He was asked by Ministers to trust them, and he very generously said that as individuals he did trust them but that he did not trust them as a Government—because their predecessor Government had form on this. They promised to take 3,000 children on the Dubs scheme, as originally committed to, but took fewer than 500 in the end. The Government have boasted, as the Secretary of State has just done, about the number of children given refuge in this country, but have ignored the fact that most could not and did not come by the safe or legal routes that currently exist, even when entitled to them under the current law. They were often trafficked or took dangerous journeys in order to reach their family members, because they felt they had no other choice. We are talking about reuniting families, but removing the already restrictive access to safe and legal routes does not decrease the risk of trafficking; it increases the risk.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent statement. Does she think that the phrase “global Britain” means we stop supporting and giving sanctuary to some of the most vulnerable people in the world? [*Interruption.*]

Thangam Debbonaire: Of course not—hon. Members on the Government Benches seem to agree with my hon. Friend—but if so why remove the provision? Why not keep it in?

[Thangam Debbonaire]

The Government say there is no change of policy, but the removal of clause 17 is a change of policy. They complain that leaving the provision in will act as a pull factor, but that rather indicates that what they want is a change of policy. They tell us that this is not the right Bill for the provision and that it should be in the immigration Bill, but clause 17 is context and time-specific: it directs the Government to a negotiating objective during the very time limited period—a matter of months—that they now have to agree the future relationship. As the Secretary of State has said, we cannot bind our neighbours to our national law, so that is not a valid argument against putting any other commitment in any other law. This provision only commits the Government to a negotiating aim. They say it can be done through rules, but a negotiating aim cannot be pursued through immigration rules. So which is it—is it law, is it rules, is it an aim, or is it no change at all, as they have also claimed?

The Government have said the provision would bind their hands in negotiations but then became offended at the accusation that they were using children as a bargaining chip. Again, which is it? Are children a limit on the negotiations or not? They have also justified their argument on the grounds of the election manifesto, but the only words in that manifesto were:

“we will continue to grant asylum and support to refugees fleeing persecution”.

There is not a word in that manifesto that implies this change of policy—and it is a change of policy—on child refugees. Just saying that it is not a change does not make it so. If it is not a change of policy, why does the provision need to be removed?

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The shadow Minister brings up a hugely important area. As a former chairman of the all-party group on human trafficking and modern slavery, I consider it a very important issue. I hope the Government will commit to coming back to us, but separate from the Bill. I accept their argument that this Bill is the wrong place for this provision. It is much more important elsewhere.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point and for his partial agreement—I think—but if it is not acceptable in this Bill, why would it be acceptable in another? It is a negotiating aim, and we are told by the Secretary of State that the negotiations have already started.

To my understanding, all that has happened is that the Home Secretary has written a letter. I think that was in November. We have not yet heard what reply there has been or about any negotiations. I do not want to believe that the Government think so little of our country that they are pulling back from protection for the very small number of children that this clause originally covered. I hope that we as a country are secure enough in ourselves to be generous to those fleeing persecution. I ask Government Members to consider that this motion demonstrates a lack of compassion. The Government's reasons are contradictory and there are no justifications in the manifesto for removing this very modest, limited but necessary provision to protect some of the most vulnerable children we can imagine.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Many of my constituents have been in touch with me, including Kirsty, who told me that her granddad was forced out of Czechoslovakia as a child after world war two and came to the UK as a refugee, where he was reunited with his parents. Many of my constituents have experience of that family reunion, and they, too, do not understand why the Government would want to row back on it. Does the hon. Lady agree that the Government really must change their mind?

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. It is clearly important to put on the record again that we are talking about reuniting children with an adult relative who is here legally. We are not talking about people who have no right to be here; we are talking about protecting the requirement to negotiate that. We really, really ask the Government to think again, and if they do not, we will vote against the motion.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): May I add, very briefly, to what my hon. Friend has said about family relationships? We also want the Government to stick to the principle that this should be an adult to whom the child is related, not just a parent.

Thangam Debbonaire: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I do want the Government to stick to that commitment. For the Government to ask us simply to trust them because it will pop up in another bit of legislation is just not good enough.

Let me finally deal with Lords amendment 5, which relates to devolution. This will be the shortest part of my speech. The Sewel convention provides that when Parliament wants to legislate on a devolved matter, it will not normally do so without the relevant devolved institution being properly consulted. All we want to do is ensure that that happens. Our devolved nations need to know that Government assertions about UK sovereignty in clause 38 are properly and legally tempered by respect for the law, conventions, and practices on devolution. That seems completely reasonable to us.

Wayne David: Does my hon. Friend agree that despite what the Government are saying, the impression is being given that they wish to undermine the Sewel convention through their act of opposing this amendment?

Thangam Debbonaire: That is indeed the impression that seems to be being given. I suggest that Conservative Members, particularly those who are newly elected and represent constituencies in Scotland and Wales, should ask themselves whether this is what they told their voters back in November. Did they tell them that they would be voting against respecting devolution? Is that what they said to their constituents?

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The hon. Lady will, of course, be aware that the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Welsh Senedd and the Scottish Parliament have refused consent. What does it say about the so-called partnership of equals if the three devolved Parliaments are completely ignored by the British Government?

Thangam Debbonaire: I think what it says is that the Government will consult, but they are not listening. I think it might be suspicious that the refusal to respect the amendment comes after those devolved legislatures said that they did not consent.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The Government talk so much about democracy during election campaigns, but is it not time they accepted that listening to our devolved communities is very much part of democracy? They cannot just go out and talk about democracy and forget that.

Thangam Debbonaire: The hon. Lady is quite right. That is one of the problems that we had during the previous iteration of the Bill, and even more in the case of this one.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Thangam Debbonaire: I will give way once more, and then I must finish.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I am the first to acknowledge that the hasty publication of the original European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, including clause 11, left a scar because of the lack of consultation, but the Sewel convention remains on the statute book. It is not being deleted. We do not repeat everything important in every Act simply to re-emphasise it. That is a kind of virtue signalling that it is not necessary to include in this legislation.

Thangam Debbonaire: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the convention is already law and we should respect that, why not just accept the amendment? Clause 38, which it seeks to amend, makes the somewhat obvious statement that this Parliament is sovereign. Why does that need to be in the Bill? I should like the Secretary of State at some point to make a commitment, on the record, that the Government will not introduce legislation on devolved matters without proper consultation.

This was a bad Bill in October, and it is a worse Bill now. Amending it is not stopping Brexit; it is about the future, and our long-term relationship with our neighbours. Scrutinising and amending legislation and holding the Government to account—it seems odd that I have to remind the Government of this—is exactly what we are supposed to do in both Houses.

Again I ask Conservative Members, especially those who are newly elected, whether they really think that this is what their voters wanted. Their voters may well have voted for Brexit—the Opposition accept that—but did they vote for the Government to break trust with the country on child refugees? Did they vote for the separation of powers between the judiciary and the Executive to be blurred? Did they ask for Ministers to be given more ability to interfere with the independence of the courts? Did they really vote to treat people who have been here legally for years, who have the legal right to be here, who have families and jobs and live here, to be treated differently, as second-class citizens? Did they vote for central Government to be able to impose their will on the devolved legislatures?

1.45 pm

The Government have asked us to trust them, but, on all these matters, why should we need to rely on trust? We are lawmakers. Why should we not include this in the legislation? After all, the Prime Minister has changed his mind many times on many things. Why should we just accept this on trust? If Conservative Members think that that is what their electorate voted for, I say that they have a dim view of their own voters. This is now on them. I can absolutely promise that when these provisions unravel and the consequences emerge, Labour Members—with no pleasure or satisfaction whatsoever—will be saying to Conservative Members, “We did warn you.” We will vote against the Government today.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Very short contributions are required, as there are only 20 minutes left. For two minutes, Sir William Cash.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): I simply want to say that I concur entirely with what the Secretary of State has said, and to refer very briefly to Lords amendments 2, 3 and 5.

Let me say first that the Government’s arguments about the question of the lower courts in relation to the Supreme Court are completely valid. I think that an enormous number of complicated problems will emerge from Lord Mackay’s amendment. The use of expressions such as “is of the opinion” and “set out the reasons for that opinion” will create a quagmire of interpretation.

As for Lords amendment 5, when I had the pleasure of advising on the Canadian constitution back in about 1982, I engaged in extensive discussions with Mr Geoffrey Marshall of The Queen’s College, Oxford, who is the greatest authority on the question of conventions. I entirely agree with the Government’s position on that, in the light of my own experience of what conventions actually mean, and I have to say that I have heard a lot of hogwash this afternoon in support of the alternative view.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Christine Jardine.

Christine Jardine *rose*—

Joanna Cherry: Should not the Scottish National party’s Front-Bench spokesman have been called?

Madam Deputy Speaker: No. This is not a Second Reading debate.

Christine Jardine: My apologies. Let me just say that I fully support the statement by the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) that this is not about trying to refight the argument over Brexit; it is about what is best for the future of the country. In their manifesto just last month, the Government promised voters that the rights of European citizens would be protected. I appeal to Conservative Members to stand by that, particularly when it comes to the vulnerable children whom we have already discussed, who are separated from their families, who are refugees, and

[Christine Jardine]

whom we can reunite legally with their families in this country. Why are the Government so reluctant to put that back in the Bill and protect it by law?

May I end by saying one tiny thing about the Sewel convention? The Government say much about protecting the United Kingdom, but I would ask them to consider how often they undermine their own argument and tie the hands of those of us on the Opposition Benches who want to protect and work for the United Kingdom. I learned a long time ago that impact is intention, and regardless of the intention in respect of the Sewel convention, the impact of it is to damage our own argument. The Liberal Democrats will therefore oppose the Government, and will support all five amendments.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: The devolution question has been running ever since the publication of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill in the summer of 2016—or 2017, I cannot remember—and there has been an erosion of trust. I plead for us to try to rebuild that trust between the different bits of the United Kingdom, because they will have to exist even if at some distant future date Scotland becomes an independent country. The question is: how are we going to rub along together?

I want to add a particular point about the supremacy of EU law. There is no power grab in any of this. The powers that are being held by the United Kingdom Government are simply the powers that were being held by the European Union since the inception of devolution. Some are arguing that the repeal of the European Communities Act 1972 means that there is an implied power grab from the devolved Assemblies and that these matters are not automatically being transferred back to the Assemblies. However, these are powers that the devolved Assemblies never held. In fact, the EU has the power to make international agreements that grab more power from the devolved Assemblies without any consultation whatever, so what we have is an improvement in the situation.

I understand why these matters become inflamed, but we should try not to inflame the division that exists between us on other matters by using this issue. That is not going to improve the harmony of the relations between this Parliament and the devolved Parliaments, or between this Government—any Government—in Westminster and the devolved Governments. I appreciate why some might take a different view because they have an agenda—which I completely respect, I really do—but this is not the time, in this Bill, to start fomenting those particular issues.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The SNP group supports all five of the Lords amendments and will therefore be voting against the Government. With regard to a declaratory system, the Secretary of State keeps saying that it will make things more confusing, but it would make it a registration rather than an application. The difference is that under such a system, there would be a guarantee of acceptance, which does not exist at the moment. The Government say that between 85% and 90% of EU or EEA citizens will get settled status quite easily, but that means that between 300,000 and 450,000 people will not. We can see that the people who are struggling with this are those who have had career breaks or caring responsibilities, which is

particularly affecting women. There has been no sign of an equality impact statement on this, but there simply should be. The elderly and frail who have been here for decades have been overlooked, including people in care homes or those with dementia. It is wrong to have even the slightest threat hanging over such people who have spent their whole lives here.

The question of a physical document is also really important, as other Members have explained, with regard to dealing with landlords and employers, particularly because the internet is not always accessible. The Secretary of State said that people could download the email that they are sent that explains their status, but that email explicitly states that it is not proof of status. It does not provide such a document, even if it is printed. I am sorry, but after Windrush, EEA citizens and others do not trust the Home Office not to lose, delete or change their records.

Amendments 2 and 3, relating to clause 26, would remove the delegated power of Ministers to decide which courts and which test should be used to set aside ECJ judgments. This power steps away from the principle of precedence and raises concerns about judicial independence. The Conservatives put in their manifesto that they wanted to rebalance power between the Executive, Parliament and the courts. That starts in this Bill, and we should be very wary of it.

Amendment 4 relates to Lord Dubs' amendment to restate the Government's commitment to unaccompanied child refugees. Removing this proposal was probably the thing that most shocked MPs on both sides of the House, who felt that the Government simply could not justify it. At the end of transition, the UK will be outside the Dublin system, and transferring an application for refugee status from one country to another will disappear. The problem is in paragraph 319X of the immigration rules, which is all about the cost of a child coming and the ability to accommodate them. It pays no attention whatever to what is best for the child. That is what the Dublin system does, and the original clause simply said that the Government had to negotiate on this. There is nothing in that for the Government to object to.

Amendment 5 relates to clause 38. We are in unprecedented territory when all three devolved Parliaments have voted against giving legislative consent for this Bill. This is not just Governments; this is not just people who have the same agenda. It is the Parliaments that have voted in this way, and this Government ignore that at their peril. People now feel that, after 20 years, devolution is threatened not just by this Bill but by the former changes. Devolution is precious to people, even to the people who do not support independence, and the Government riding roughshod over it really sends a message of disrespect. The Prime Minister likes to define himself as the Minister of the Union, but he cannot maintain a relationship or a marriage through force. It has to be based on respect. If all of this leads to the crumbling of the precious Union, he will have only himself to blame.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): Given the shortness of time, I will limit my remarks to those subjects that have not been addressed at length today. On amendment 1, which deals with the declaratory system and the documents, I want to make two points as a former Immigration Minister. First, on the declaratory system, I think it is important that we should have the current system, which encourages people to establish

their status and ensure that it is clear now. The lesson that I took from Windrush was that one of the problems was that people laboured for many years under the sometimes correct but often incorrect understanding that they had a legal right to be here and all the appropriate documents, only to discover many years down the line that they did not. Encouraging European Union citizens to register and establish that certainty now is sensible, and taking the existing system—which, as the Secretary of State says, has already had 2.5 million successful grants—and effectively having to restart it would not be a good way of delivering certainty.

On amendment 4, which deals with the so-called Dubs amendment, the Government are trying to establish an important principle. I have not heard this set out particularly clearly, but the question is whether Parliament should legislate for the Government's negotiating objectives. That position was never taken by the Government in the last Parliament, but because the Government did not have a majority, that Parliament forced certain negotiating objectives on the Government. I think it is better to re-establish the traditional mechanism whereby Governments negotiate treaties and bring them to Parliament for ratification into law. That might sound like a minor point, but it is an important one to establish. The Minister in this House has made it clear, as has Lady Williams in the other place, that the Government's policy has not changed. There is now a relatively short period of time until the end of this year, and it is worth saying that the European Union has committed in three separate paragraphs of the political declaration to agreeing our future relationship by the end of this year, as well as our having made that commitment. I am therefore confident that we will have re-established the Dublin regulation in practice by the end of this year, which is why I firmly support the Government in rejecting this amendment.

Finally, the Sewel convention is already enshrined in statute. I listened carefully to what the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), who is no longer in her place, said about this. Consulting someone, listening to them and taking into account their views is not the same as doing as they say. The problem is that it seems to me that the three devolved legislatures are simply refighting the Brexit argument. In 2014, the people of Scotland decided, for a generation, that they wanted to be part of the United Kingdom, and in 2016, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. If the devolved legislatures were accepting of that decision and were trying to help the Government to deliver it in a better way, that would be one thing, but they are trying to refight the battle that they lost.

2 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Last year, I visited the camps in Calais. I met some refugee children, camped in the woods, who longed to be reunited with family members living in the UK. Those children have fled war and violence. It is only right that we uphold our moral duty and afford them the right to arrive in the UK safely. They are at risk of abuse and exploitation by traffickers. If safe routes are not provided, all this measure does is make dangerous channel crossings more likely.

Amendment 4 puts back provisions that were taken out of the previous withdrawal agreement, preserving the rights of refugee children to travel to the UK from

an EU country after Brexit. The Conservatives claim to be the party of the family, yet this policy and their actions exacerbate divisions that cause harm and distress and put these children's lives at risk. I have no faith in the Government to protect such rights in other legislation. Their track record on doing anything to support refugee children coming to the UK is appalling. Amendment 4 is in the right place; it should be in this Bill. The amendment speaks to our humanity as a country. If it is not agreed to, we will be failing in our moral duty.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I want to set this debate in the big picture. People voted for Brexit, and in December they voted to get Brexit done. It has taken us three and a bit years to reach this stage, and we will be leaving the EU in just a few days' time. Then we will have to move quickly into negotiating the long-term deal. Time and again over the past few years, I have heard EU counterparts say, "The problem with the British Government negotiators is that we don't know if they can carry Parliament with them." It is so important that we send the message to the rest of Europe that what is agreed with the EU can be passed through this Parliament. That is why it is so important that we pass the withdrawal agreement that was agreed through this Parliament. Yes, there are important matters raised by these amendments. Of course we want to support child refugees; we always have done. Of course we must make sure that EU citizens' rights—[*Interruption.*] And incidentally, we always will support child refugees. Of course we must also support EU citizens, but the right place to do that is in other legislation, not in this Bill.

Yvette Cooper: In the last Parliament, the Home Affairs Committee produced a report calling for a declaratory system and also a physical document. It is possible to have a declaratory system that protects rights, but also to ensure an incentive for people to apply and get the document. If all of us in this House were suddenly told that our rights to get healthcare, rent a house or get a job depended on the workings of a Home Office computer system, we would have no confidence in it. That is why people want to know that there is a permanent document. I urge the Secretary of State to think again, because this will go wrong, and also just to accept the Dubs amendment. Do not put at risk or cast any doubt on this country's commitment to child refugees.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I think we should be thankful that we have the opportunity to think again on these matters; I rather regret that we have so little time.

On the issue of a declaratory right, I am very open to the spirit of having a declaratory system. It would send a wonderful signal about how open we are and how welcome people are to stay, but the sheer truth of it—I say this as the former Minister responsible for domestic preparedness in the Department—is that it is way too late to be making this decision now. I am afraid the proposal shows rather an ignorance of how government systems work and of the whole business of delivering a system that can work for literally millions of people. If the proposal were accepted, we would have to abandon giving status to millions of people. It needs to be removed from the Bill, so that we can get on and deliver status for people in a system that is working.

[Mr Steve Baker]

On the Lords amendment to clause 26, the power is sunsetted to the end of the year. On the amendment from the noble Lord Dubs, this is one of those areas where we should be thankful that we are thinking again, but, bearing in mind that it is not long since we heard a general acceptance in this House of the proposition that we are all here to pursue the common good in good faith, it is deeply regrettable that some Members have sought to suggest that there would be any lack of commitment on our part to family reunion for refugee children. It is quite wrong. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) says that actions speak louder than words. We will earn the respect of the public by delivering.

2.5 pm

One hour having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments, the debate was interrupted (Programme order, 20 December 2019).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83F), That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 1.

The House divided: Ayes 338, Noes 252.

Division No. 20]

[2.5 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Brereton, Jack
Afolami, Bim	Bridgen, Andrew
Afriyie, Adam	Brine, Steve
Ahmad Khan, Imran	Bristow, Paul
Aiken, Nickie	Britcliffe, Sara
Aldous, Peter	Brokenshire, rh James
Allan, Lucy	Browne, Anthony
Amess, Sir David	Bruce, Fiona
Anderson, Lee	Buchan, Felicity
Anderson, Stuart	Burghart, Alex
Andrew, Stuart	Butler, Rob
Ansell, Caroline	Cairns, rh Alun
Argar, Edward	Carter, Andy
Atherton, Sarah	Cartlidge, James
Atkins, Victoria	Cash, Sir William
Bacon, Mr Gareth	Caulfield, Maria
Bacon, Mr Richard	Chalk, Alex
Badenoch, Kemi (<i>Proxy vote cast by Leo Docherty</i>)	Chishti, Rehman
Bailey, Shaun	Chope, Sir Christopher
Baillie, Siobhan	Churchill, Jo
Baker, Duncan	Clark, rh Greg
Baker, Mr Steve	Clarke, Mr Simon
Baldwin, Harriett	Clarke, Theo
Barclay, rh Steve	Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Baron, Mr John	Clarkson, Chris
Baynes, Simon	Cleverly, rh James
Bell, Aaron	Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Benton, Scott	Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Beresford, Sir Paul	Colburn, Elliot
Berry, rh Jake	Collins, Damian
Bhatti, Saqib	Costa, Alberto
Blackman, Bob	Courts, Robert
Blunt, Crispin	Coutinho, Claire
Bone, Mr Peter	Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Crabb, rh Stephen
Bowie, Andrew	Crosbie, Virginia
Bradley, Ben	Crouch, Tracey
Bradley, rh Karen	Daly, James
Brady, Sir Graham	Davies, David T. C.
Braverman, Suella	Davies, Gareth
	Davies, Dr James

Davies, Mims	Heaton-Harris, Chris
Davies, Philip	Henderson, Gordon
Davis, rh Mr David	Henry, Darren
Davison, Dehenna	Higginbotham, Antony
Dinenage, Caroline	Hinds, rh Damian
Dines, Miss Sarah	Hoare, Simon
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Holden, Mr Richard
Docherty, Leo	Hollinrake, Kevin
Donelan, Michelle	Hollobone, Mr Philip
Dorries, Ms Nadine	Holloway, Adam
Double, Steve	Holmes, Paul
Dowden, rh Oliver	Howell, John
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Howell, Paul
Drax, Richard	Huddleston, Nigel
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Hudson, Dr Neil
Duddridge, James	Hughes, Eddie
Duguid, David	Hunt, Jane
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Hunt, rh Jeremy
Dunne, rh Philip	Hunt, Tom
Eastwood, Mark	Jack, rh Mr Alister
Edwards, Ruth	Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Ellis, rh Michael	Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Jenkinson, Mark
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie	Johnson, rh Boris
Eustice, George	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Evans, Dr Luke	Johnson, Gareth
Evennett, rh Sir David	Johnston, David
Everitt, Ben	Jones, Andrew
Fabricant, Michael	Jones, rh Mr David
Farris, Laura	Jones, Fay
Fell, Simon	Jupp, Simon
Fletcher, Katherine	Kawczynski, Daniel
Fletcher, Mark	Kearns, Alicia
Fletcher, Nick	Keegan, Gillian
Ford, Vicky	Knight, rh Sir Greg
Foster, Kevin	Knight, Julian
Fox, rh Dr Liam	Kruger, Danny
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Frazer, Lucy	Lamont, John
Freeman, George	Largan, Robert
Freer, Mike	Latham, Mrs Pauline
Fuller, Richard	Leadsom, rh Andrea
Fysh, Mr Marcus	Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark	Levy, Ian
Gibb, rh Nick	Lewer, Andrew
Gibson, Peter	Lewis, rh Brandon
Gideon, Jo	Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Glen, John	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert	Loder, Chris
Gove, rh Michael	Logan, Mark
Graham, Richard	Longhi, Marco
Grant, Mrs Helen	Lopez, Julia (<i>Proxy vote cast by Lee Rowley</i>)
Gray, James	Lopresti, Jack
Green, Chris	Lord, Mr Jonathan
Green, rh Damian	Loughton, Tim
Griffith, Andrew	Mackinlay, Craig
Griffiths, Kate	Mackrory, Cheryllyn
Grundy, James	Maclean, Rachel
Gullis, Jonathan	Mak, Alan
Halfon, rh Robert	Malthouse, Kit
Hall, Luke	Mangnall, Anthony
Hammond, Stephen	Mann, Scott
Hancock, rh Matt	Marson, Julie
Hands, rh Greg	Mayhew, Jerome
Harper, rh Mr Mark	Maynard, Paul
Harris, Rebecca	McCartney, Jason
Harrison, Trudy	McCartney, Karl
Hart, Sally-Ann	McPartland, Stephen
Hart, rh Simon	McVey, rh Esther
Hayes, rh Sir John	Menzies, Mark
Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Merriman, Huw
Heappey, James	

Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Skidmore, rh Chris

Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg (*Proxy vote cast by John Whittingdale*)
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Ayes:
James Morris and
Mr Marcus Jones

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Bardell, Hannah

Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia

Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carden, Dan
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Peter Kyle*)
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill

Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Girvan, Paul
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, Stewart
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lockhart, Carla
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John

McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Morgan, Mr Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paisley, Ian
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie (*Proxy vote cast by Bambos Charalambous*)
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt

Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Sultana, Sarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thomson, Richard
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Jeff Smith and
Matt Western

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 1 disagreed to.

The Deputy Speaker then put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83F).

Clause 26

INTERPRETATION OF RETAINED EU LAW AND RELEVANT SEPARATION AGREEMENT LAW

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 2.—(Steve Barclay.)

The House divided: Ayes 348, Noes 246.

Division No. 21]

[2.27 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam

Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter

Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi (*Proxy vote cast by Leo Docherty*)
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen

Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca

Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyns, Mrs Andrea
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lockhart, Carla
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Lee Rowley*)
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherylyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie

Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mohindra, Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morrisey, Joy
Morton, Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Skidmore, rh Chris

Smith, Chloe
Smith, Greg (*Proxy vote cast by Mr John Whittingdale*)
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stride, rh Mel
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, rh Rishi
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Truss, rh Elizabeth

Tugendhat, Tom
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Wakeford, Christian
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallis, Dr Jamie
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Webb, Suzanne
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
James Morris and
Mr Marcus Jones

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Byrne, Ian
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas

Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crawley, Angela
Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Peter Kyle*)
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Eshalomi, Florence

Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, Stewart
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema

Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Morgan, Mr Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie (*Proxy vote cast by Bambos Charalambous*)
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie

Streeter, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thomson, Richard
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie

Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Jeff Smith and
Matt Western

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 2 disagreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 3.—(Steve Barclay.)

The House divided: Ayes 350, Noes 247.

Division No. 22]

[2.43 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi (*Proxy vote cast by Leo Docherty*)
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara

Brokenshire, rh James
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan

Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Mrs Andrea
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast
by Lee Rowley*)
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria

Milling, Amanda
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Lord, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec

Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr John Whittingdale*)
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Stuart Andrew and
Iain Stewart

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia

Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian

Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Peter Kyle*)
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, Stewart
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor

McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Morgan, Mr Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie (*Proxy vote cast by Bambos Charalambous*)
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thomson, Richard
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel
Tellers for the Noes:
Jeff Smith and
Matt Western

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 3 disagreed to.

Clause 37

ARRANGEMENTS WITH EU ABOUT UNACCOMPANIED
 CHILDREN SEEKING ASYLUM

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 4.—(Steve Barclay.)

The House divided: Ayes 342, Noes 254.

Division No. 23]

[2.59 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Amess, Sir David
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi (*Proxy vote cast by Leo Docherty*)

Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Brokenshire, rh James
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo

Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, John
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin

Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyns, Mrs Andrea
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast
by Lee Rowley*)
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mohindra, Gagan
Moore, Damien

Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, James
Morrisey, Joy
Morton, Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Greg (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr John Whittingdale*)
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stride, rh Mel
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, rh Rishi
Sunderland, James

Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie

Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:

Stuart Andrew and
 Iain Stewart

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carden, Dan
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie

Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Peter Kyle*)
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Girvan, Paul
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick

Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, Stewart
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lockhart, Carla
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim

McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Morgan, Mr Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paisley, Ian
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie (*Proxy vote cast by Bambos Charalambous*)
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewlis, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thomson, Richard
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl

Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel

Wilson, Munira
Wilson, rh Sammy
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

**Jeff Smith and
Matt Western**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 4 disagreed to.

Clause 38**REGULATIONS**

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 5.—(Steve Barclay.)

The House divided: Ayes 349, Noes 246.

Division No. 24]**[3.15 pm****AYES**

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Ahmad Khan, Imran
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi (*Proxy vote cast by Leo Docherty*)
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Brokenshire, rh James
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Burghart, Alex
Burns, rh Conor
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, Michelle

Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin

Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyins, Mrs Andrea
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lockhart, Carla
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Lee Rowley*)
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew

Mohindra, Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe

Smith, Greg (*Proxy vote cast by Mr John Whittingdale*)
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Stuart Andrew and
 Iain Stewart

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Bardell, Hannah

Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia

Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Peter Kyle*)
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry

Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, Stewart
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison

McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Morgan, Mr Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie (*Proxy vote cast by Bambos Charalambous*)
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz

Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thomson, Richard
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

Jeff Smith and
 Matt Western

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 5 disagreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83H), That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments 1 to 5;

That Steve Barclay, Paul Blomfield, Jack Brereton, Thangam Debbonaire, Mr Mark Harper, David Rutley and Dr Philippa Whitford be members of the Committee.

That Steve Barclay be the Chair of the Committee.

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—
 (*Mike Freer.*)

Question agreed to.

Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Bill

Second Reading

3.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Warman): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

With apologies to T.S. Eliot, it is obvious that the naming of Bills is a difficult matter, but this Bill's title does not do it justice. The Government are committed to delivering the infrastructure that this country needs, and the Bill is the first step on that road. To continue to channel T.S. Eliot, we know that if we do not deliver that infrastructure, too much of this country will be a digital wasteland.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): The Minister is right: this is the first part of a much greater endeavour. An increasing number of younger people find that they can do without a landline at all, so can he reassure me that this great, expensive endeavour will not be overtaken by the development of new technology, particularly as regards 5G, that will render it obsolete?

Matt Warman: I can absolutely assure my right hon. Friend that our approach to connectivity is technology-agnostic, and 5G is very much part of the solution, rather than something leading to the exclusion of connectivity. He is right to imply that we aim to go significantly beyond current demand to pre-empt the sort of problem that would occur if we did not build far in advance.

The Prime Minister and this Government have been unwavering in their commitment to the delivery of high-speed, reliable, resilient connectivity to every home and business as soon as possible. For the United Kingdom to remain at the forefront of the global economy, our businesses and consumers must have access to the tools they need to thrive. Already, our superfast broadband programme covers over 96% of the country and has brought connectivity to more than 3 million premises that would otherwise have been bypassed by commercial deployment.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Labour Members recognise the importance of faster broadband. Indeed, I have worked with previous Ministers on this, and on the issue of notspots in my constituency. Does the Minister agree with me on the importance of the issue to young children, who need to study and do their school homework, and to people working at home? Issues have been raised about that in my constituency. Does he agree that the essential criterion of affordability must also be part of the Government's strategy?

Matt Warman: Yes, the hon. Member is absolutely right. Teachers can only teach at the pace of the slowest broadband in the class if they are using digital technology; we have to be cognisant of that. We, with Ofcom, also have to be determined to ensure that competition continues to preserve the low prices that this country has typically benefited from.

Seema Malhotra: May I make a point of clarification? I was talking about children studying at home, and being able to do their homework. That is the issue raised with me by my constituents, particularly in areas where there are leasehold properties.

Matt Warman: The hon. Member is absolutely right. My point about teachers was that when they send pupils home to do their homework, pupils must of course have to have the tools to do it. The pencil is now digital, shall we say?

On that point, the universal service obligation will give people in the UK the legal right to request a decent and affordable broadband connection if they cannot get 10 megabits per second, and we intend to invest £5 billion to ensure gigabit-capable networks are delivered without delay to every area of the country. We are proud of the work that we have done, and continue to do, to support deployment across the United Kingdom, from the Scottish highlands to Cornwall, from Armagh to Anglesey, but the digital revolution is far from finished.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Matt Warman: I give way to the former Chair of the Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Damian Collins: And I am standing for re-election, as the Minister knows.

The Bill gets rid of unnecessary delays in rolling out superfast broadband, which is what consumers want. He will know that in some areas of the country, particularly rural, notspot areas, one of the problems is that alternative providers—say, to Openreach—will not come in and provide superfast broadband because they are concerned that it will be overbuilt by another operator. Are there things we can do beyond the scope of the Bill—things he is working on now—to give more certainty to people who want to invest in the network, but want to make sure that they get a fair return if they do?

Matt Warman: Absolutely. My hon. Friend will know that the single greatest barrier to rolling out in the final 20% of the country is the risk of overbuild, which makes roll-out uneconomic and potentially makes using public funds even harder. We are absolutely working hand in glove with Ofcom on that, and to ensure that the system that we design ensures that the money—as my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) said, it is a significant amount—is spent in the best possible way.

Those gigabit-capable connections, by which I mean 1,000 megabits per second and above, will ensure that British businesses can retain their global reach. They will be a catalyst for entrepreneurs in areas such as cyber-security, big data and artificial intelligence, and will support innovation in operations that use cloud services and blockchain technologies. They will transform how and where people work and collaborate.

Perhaps the most exciting promise of gigabit broadband is for consumers, because as we all know, poor internet connections hold people back. They prevent children from doing their homework, the ill from arranging appointments to see their doctors and those who need it most from saving money online. It was superfast broadband that facilitated the rise of Netflix, Spotify and the iPlayer; gigabit broadband, with its improved reliability, resilience and speed, will herald the era of the internet of things, the connected home, integrated transport

networks and personalised healthcare, and that is why this Government are committed to investing in it across the country.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): I wonder what conclusions my hon. Friend draws from York, which became a gigabit city in 2008, and whether the Government are looking at that example and learning from what has happened in that great city.

Matt Warman: York is an exemplar for these sorts of projects. It demonstrates why investment is the right thing to do for the commercial sector, and why it is right for the state to support it. I look forward to the other place seeing the Bill in much more detail. That will happen imminently, I am sure—or maybe not; we will see.

As I say, superfast broadband facilitated the original internet that we are so familiar with, and gigabit will do so much more. It will support older people in staying independent for longer, will allow people to work how and where they choose to a much greater extent, and will make sure that commuters can join up their life in a much more effective way. However, the benefits for businesses and consumers can be realised only if digital infrastructure providers such as Openreach, Virgin Media, CityFibre and many others—increasingly more—can access homes, workplaces and public buildings such as hospitals and train stations. It is for that reason that this Government have made the deployment of gigabit broadband one of our key priorities.

With this Bill, we are taking the first hammer blow to the barriers preventing the deployment of gigabit connectivity. We will similarly take aim at new-build homes that are being built without access to futureproof connections, and we are exploring how we can make it easier for digital infrastructure providers to share the infrastructure of others, and how we can promote 5G mobile services by simplifying the planning regime.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): The Minister mentioned delays. I welcome the Bill, although it is overdue, and its objectives. One of our challenges, however, is that up to 3,000 applications a year could be going to the tribunal from suppliers wanting to secure access. The Minister said that he would be taking a hammer to the delays and barriers; what will he do to ensure that the tribunal has the capacity and resources to process those applications and ensure that they go through?

Matt Warman: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that the system is only as good as the resourcing behind it. We will explore every option to ensure that the tribunal gets those resources. We are confident that what we are proposing will work—we will make sure that it does—but of course we are open to considering what we can do to make it better as soon as we might need to.

Seema Malhotra: I thank the Minister for giving way again. Will he clarify how he envisages the Government working with the devolved Administrations and councils—we should bear in mind the very good work with Transport for London on connectivity through tube stations—so that we get the maximum for the investment made from the public purse?

Matt Warman: Telecommunications is a reserved matter, but I have already discussed how the system will work through the equivalent tribunal schemes in the devolved

Administrations. The hon. Lady is absolutely right that although bodies such as TfL are not directly affected by the Bill, we are working with colleagues at the Department for Transport to make sure that London and other places get the connectivity that they deserve on public transport. Plans are forthcoming for wider deployment of the wi-fi system that is currently available only in stations.

As I say, the Bill ensures that those living in blocks of flats and apartments—known by the telecommunications industry as multi-dwelling units, or MDUs—are supported in accessing new networks. Operators have raised concerns that multi-dwelling properties are proving exceptionally difficult to connect. As I am sure Members will know, operators require the permission of a landowner before they are permitted to install equipment on a property.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): I welcome the Bill, which will help those people, but what about commercial tenants in business parks? I am thinking particularly of rural areas such as Meon Valley, where there are problems with connectivity.

Matt Warman: My hon. Friend is right that we should not simply look at residential property. We are exploring with the industry what that issue looks like; the Bill has been carefully designed to make sure that it delivers on what both the Government and industry feel is right. Obviously, commercial property is different. It is less prone to the sorts of issues that we are tackling here, but I will be happy to work with my hon. Friend to see what we can do to help Meon Valley in particular.

For those who own their houses, the issue is simple: they request the service and sign a contract, and an operator does the installation. However, for those in flats, whether rented or owned as a leasehold, the permission of the landowner or building owner is required for the common areas—the basement, corridors, stairwells and so on. Currently, on identifying a property in their network build area, operators will attempt to contact landlords, request permission to install, and offer to negotiate a long-term agreement on access. Those wayleaves set out the responsibilities of both the landlord and operator in respect of the installation.

Evidence from operators, however, suggests that across the UK's major digital infrastructure providers, about 40% of requests for access issued by operators receive no response. That cannot be acceptable. Through inactivity, a building owner can prevent multiple families and households from accessing the services that, as so many people have said, are essential for modern life. The UK's digital infrastructure providers are already upgrading this country's broadband network. Failure to address this issue now will give rise to pockets of connectivity disparity. Neighbours will have different connections, based on whether they own a house or flat, and on whether their landlord is engaged or absent. That cannot be fair, and the Government are acting to address it.

This is about commercial realities. The Prime Minister and I made it clear to the industry only last week that we want nationwide access to gigabit-capable connection as soon as possible. Our ambition is to deliver that by 2025.

Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con): We all welcome the Government's commitment to full-fibre broadband, particularly in Eddisbury, where it remains pretty woeful,

but the quality of mobile phone coverage also leaves a lot to be desired. Will my hon. Friend update the House on what is being done through the shared rural network to improve that through a final agreement, and will that include indoor as well as outdoor coverage?

Matt Warman: My hon. Friend is right that mobile coverage, while unrelated to the Bill, is an essential part of the connectivity solution. We have committed to the industry concluding its negotiations in the first 100 days of the Government, which takes us to the middle of March, and we are on track for that. On measurement of a network, we have historically been lumbered with standards that are not terribly useful. We need to do more to ensure that we provide the right kind of information to consumers; Ofcom and the Advertising Standards Agency have a hand in that, alongside Government.

If operators are to achieve our ambitious target, they need to get on and deploy their engineers and civil contractors, and to keep them moving to maintain momentum. They cannot afford to keep their teams idle while they wait for a response from a landlord that never materialises; from a commercial point of view, it makes more sense to bypass the property and its residents and deploy elsewhere to prevent that situation. The Bill will create a new application process in the courts that will allow operators, when faced with an unresponsive landlord and with a resident requesting a service, to apply to the courts to gain the rights to install.

It is important to make it clear that the new court application process is a last resort for operators. The key goal of the legislation is to increase the response rate to operators' requests for access. The Government have always believed—and continue to believe—that the best, most efficient way for operators to install equipment in a property is through a negotiated agreement being reached between the operator and the landlord.

In December 2017, this House passed the Digital Economy Act, which among other things updated the electronic communications code. The code provides a regulatory framework for the relationship between landlords and telecommunications operators and includes provision for the operator to use the lands chamber of the upper tribunal, or its equivalent in the devolved Administrations, to have rights imposed in situations where a landlord is unresponsive.

To the best of my knowledge, as I speak, operators have not sought to use that power to address an unresponsive landlord, in part because they estimate that it will cost £14,000 per application, including legal fees and administrative costs, and take six or seven months in practice, and the outcome would by no means be certain. However, there are estimated to be 450,000 multi-dwelling units in the UK, housing some 10 million people. If operators' current 40% failure-to-respond rate is projected across the country, we are talking about 180,000 cases and some £2.5 billion in costs. I am sure that Members will agree that the money and effort would be better used delivering better connections. The new process proposed by the Bill is proportionate and balanced, and places an exceptionally low burden on the landlord and a high evidential requirement on the operator.

[Matt Warman]

An operator will be expected to have a tenant in the property who has requested a service. They will have issued multiple requests over 28 days and, thereafter, a final notice that explicitly says that the court may be used to gain access, and they will be able to show evidence of all the above to the courts. A landlord who wishes to take themselves out of the policy's scope need respond to only one of the operator's multiple notices. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that responding when someone writes is simply a courtesy. The expectation is that applications made to the tribunal through the provisions in the Bill will allow judges there to make decisions based on operators meeting an evidential threshold. This will allow decisions to be reached quickly and efficiently. Discussions are still ongoing about how we can make the process even faster.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The Minister has said that landlords will have opportunities to respond. If, for whatever reason, they do not respond, and they find themselves in the tribunal, will any costs fall upon them?

Matt Warman: The charging landscape will be set in collaboration with the tribunals and—I suspect that the hon. Gentleman will care about this in particular—the devolved Administrations, but the whole point of this regime is for it to be faster and far more affordable than the current regime. As we work with our colleagues in the Ministry of Justice and the devolved Administrations, we will have that at the front of our minds.

If applicants are successful, they will gain interim rights under the electronic communications code in relation to a property. Those rights will allow them to install, maintain and upgrade infrastructure for a period no longer than 18 months and will be accompanied by strictly defined terms regarding their use. These terms, which we have committed to consulting on publicly, will set out the standard to which works must be completed, and will make it clear that care must be taken to minimise the impact on other residents. If an operator wishes to continue providing a service to the building after the interim code rights have expired, and the landlord continues to be unresponsive, applicants may use provisions in the electronic communications code to apply for full rights. Time-limiting the rights to a maximum of 18 months incentivises operators to continue their efforts to contact landowners so as to avoid the cost, time and uncertainty of making a further application to the tribunal. It also ensures that where a landowner does engage, there is sufficient time for negotiations to take place and an agreement to be reached without disruption to residents' broadband service.

To conclude, this is a technical Bill that achieves a specific purpose, but it does that in the context of the Government's significant scale of ambition in this area. Gigabit broadband will be the enabling infrastructure of the next century. It will turbo-charge businesses, facilitate innovation and change how we work, live and engage in society, and how society engages with us. It is good for every part of this country, for our economy and for the public. The Government will support every home—every family wanting to shop online, and every pupil wanting to do their homework—whether it is in

the middle of a city or the middle of nowhere, and whether it is a mansion, a terraced house or a block of flats. The Government will help them all to be part of this country's gigabit future. I commend the Bill to the House.

3.52 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to speak on the Bill as the shadow Minister for Digital. I start by declaring an interest: before entering the House, I worked as a telecommunications engineer for 23 years, rolling out telecoms infrastructure in countries as diverse as Germany and Nigeria, Britain and Singapore. I have a lifelong interest in and passion for digital and technology. I love a good network.

I am afraid that the 10 years I have been in Parliament has coincided with a rapid decline in the quality of our telecommunications infrastructure—not because of my move, but because successive Conservative Governments chose to leave everything to the market. As a consequence, at a time of digital revolution, of which the Minister spoke, when so much could have been achieved, we have instead had 10 wasted years. The last Labour Government oversaw a communications revolution, with first generation broadband reaching 50% of all households within 10 years. Labour understood the importance of supporting both investment and infrastructure competition. Under the Conservatives in the past decade, fibre has reached only 10% of homes and without meaningful support for competition.

Our telecoms infrastructure is letting us down, economically and socially, and it is our towns and villages that are suffering most, with farmers and rural businesses, the poor and the isolated in a digital no man's land. We have lost a decade, and we need to make up and build out the full-fibre infrastructure that the country needs.

The Conservatives talk about unlocking the whole of Britain's potential, and we are at the top of the class in business, research and technology, development, science and education, but how can we continue to lead on bottom-of-the-table infrastructure? The OECD ranks us 35th out of 37 countries for broadband connectivity, although ours is the fifth largest economy, and 85% of small and medium-sized enterprises said that their productivity was adversely affected by unreliable connections in 2019.

Seema Malhotra: My hon. Friend is making an important contribution to the debate. Does she agree that it is important to assess what this will achieve in practice, and to establish whether we will then be getting anywhere near the levels of full-fibre coverage in leading nations such as South Korea or Japan? Should we not measure the outcomes to ensure that the poorest and most distant communities can have the broadband that they need and deserve, and—as I said earlier—should we not also ensure that affordability remains at the core of the Government's strategy?

Chi Onwurah: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's experience and knowledge of the digital sector, which makes her very aware of the importance of ending the current digital divide. I shall say more about that in a moment.

Jonathan Edwards: I was glad to hear of the hon. Lady's expertise in the building of infrastructure. The situation in rural Wales is particularly dire. I could

name a host of villages in Carmarthenshire, including Abergorlech, Pont-ar-goth, Brechfa and Llansawel, where there are cables coiled along the posts which have not been connected. Will the hon. Lady please have a discussion with her colleagues in Cardiff so that some progress can be made in improving connectivity in the villages in my constituency?

Chi Onwurah: The hon. Gentleman paints a disturbing picture of rural communities that have yet to have the connectivity that they require, but it is also very true of the country as a whole. Telecommunications are not a devolved matter but the responsibility of the UK Government, and we need to look to them to ensure that we have the environment and the investment that are necessary to deliver fibre for everyone.

Sadly, our wasted 10 years in telecoms are not limited to fixed infrastructure. As we have heard, mobile and the softer infrastructure of regulation have also been left to languish, and that will have an impact on the effectiveness of the Bill. Conservative Governments have entrenched the digital divide in the UK: 11 million adults lack one or more basic digital skills, and 10% of households do not have internet access. At this rate, there will still be 7 million people without these skills in 2028, which is tantamount to leaving one in 10 of our population permanently disenfranchised. It is a real issue of social justice: for instance, the West End food bank in Newcastle receives many visits from parents who have been sanctioned because they cannot sign on online.

Seema Malhotra: My hon. Friend is continuing to make an excellent speech. Does she agree that it is important to address the issue of notspots as well as the issue of speed of broadband access, and not just in rural areas? Thousands of households even in big cities like London, and more than 1,000 in my constituency, have little or no access to broadband.

Chi Onwurah: My hon. Friend has made another important point. Notspots do happen, even in city centres. There are householders who can see Canary Wharf from their windows, but cannot connect with its broadband network. We need to take responsibility for ensuring that we have a network infrastructure of fibre that reaches every home.

This wasted decade in telecoms has made many of us digiphobes. Two decades into the online age, we still do not have any date for the online harms Bill, even though the harms it addresses—children accessing pornography and online grooming—were well identified 10 years ago. Newer harms from algorithms, artificial intelligence, the internet of things—which the Minister did mention—and data dominance are ignored, repeating the mistakes of the past. We need a robust legal framework that deals with privacy, data, age verification and identity, complemented by measures that put in place protections for vulnerable people online, not ones that kick in after they have already been exposed, compromised, abused or scammed.

This wasted decade has allowed algorithms and disinformation to take hold of the news online. It is said that a lie gets around the world before truth has had a chance to get its shoes on. Unfortunately, this Government have taken 10 years just to tie their laces. They have failed to understand the opportunities and challenges

of the digital revolution in the way in which the Labour party did. A decade of inaction has seen regulatory and infrastructural failures at the expense of the British people and British businesses.

Edward Timpson: The hon. Lady talks about Labour's record, and we heard about its plans during the general election to nationalise the broadband network. Is that still the Labour party's policy, and is the £100 billion figure that BT estimates would be necessary to do that something that she would be prepared to admit to at the Dispatch Box?

Chi Onwurah: I would like to ask the Minister whether he feels that the current regulatory environment is delivering for businesses and people. Does he feel that a regulatory environment where we have a monopoly—Openreach is a monopoly that is regulated, but not as a monopoly; it still has market share—is the right environment in which to deliver the digital economy that we need? The answer is clearly no. As for the solution to that, I can say with absolute certainty that the Government have absolutely no ideas and, more importantly, no plans to address this. We need to ensure that a monopoly network—which is what Openreach currently is—is enabled to deliver the excellent service, speeds and infrastructure that the whole country needs.

We recognise that the Bill is an acknowledgement by the Government of their current failure and an acceptance that the market as it stands is not delivering, but what is it actually trying to achieve? The Prime Minister has held three different positions on broadband infrastructure in six months. Standing to lead his party, he promised to deliver full-fibre connectivity to all households by 2025.

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab): The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) made an important point in highlighting the issues in Wales, and I would ask that the UK Government look at the recent Welsh Labour Government's review of the superfast broadband project to roll out full-fibre broadband throughout rural premises in Wales, only 16% of which are currently covered.

Chi Onwurah: I welcome my hon. Friend. She makes an excellent point: an active Government can really make a difference in ensuring that all their citizens can benefit from broadband. It is a real pity that we do not have such an active Government in Westminster.

As I was saying, the Prime Minister first promised full-fibre connectivity to all households by 2025. Then the Conservative manifesto committed his Government to

“a massive programme of improvements for our roads”—

and—

“gigabit-capable broadband to every home and business across the UK by 2025.”

What is gigabit broadband? However, the Queen's Speech dropped the 2025 reference altogether, saying only:

“New laws will accelerate the delivery of gigabit capable broadband.”—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2019; Vol. 669, c. 32.]

I am sure the Minister knows as well as I do that gigabit-capable broadband can be delivered through various forms of infrastructure, not only fibre.

[Chi Onwurah]

Whichever promise the Government are thinking of keeping, they will not do it through this Bill. As the Minister said, it provides a bespoke process for telecoms network operators to gain access to multiple-dwelling buildings in order to deploy, upgrade or maintain fixed-line broadband connections in cases where a tenant has requested electronic communication services, but the landlord has repeatedly failed to respond to an operator's request for access. Network builders say that they face significant challenges, and if they cannot identify or do not receive a response to requests for access from the building owner, they cannot proceed with network deployment. According to Openreach, 76% of MDUs miss out on initial efforts to deploy fibre because of challenges in gaining access.

The Bill takes into account the fact that landlords are not always responsive or eager to meet their tenants' needs, but it is not a hammer blow. Its ambition is laudable, and we will not vote against it, but it will not achieve any of the multiple and contradictory aims that the Minister and the Prime Minister have talked about. It has a number of failings and needs to be significantly improved through scrutiny. First, it does not go far enough. The sector has welcomed the Bill, but not with any great enthusiasm. The trade body techUK says that the Bill

“does not go far enough,”

and that,

“from new builds to street works,”

many issues

“have not been tackled by the Government's Bill.”

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that, given other well-known leasehold issues, such as rising ground rents and other charges levied by distant landlords, access should not result in extra service charges and that there might be a need to assess and reform the legal relationship between leaseholders and freeholders?

Chi Onwurah: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House and to this debate, and I thank her for that excellent contribution. I was coming to that point, but let me make it now and agree with her. The need for this Bill is a reflection of the broken leasehold system, which Labour has significant plans to reform and change, but which the Government apparently have no intention of doing anything about, despite the misery in which many leaseholders find themselves as a consequence of the actions of freeholders.

I do not expect the Minister to be able to address the leasehold issue—although I hope he will say something about it—but he can address the issue of full-fibre broadband. He must be aware that BT said in its response to the Bill that the Government need to go further. BT said that, with the right fiscal, regulatory and legislative enablers, it would be prepared to commit funding to Openreach to fit 15 million homes with fibre by 2025. That would account for 50% of the 30 million that need to be reached, but that raises two questions. First, where would the other 50% come from? I hope the Minister can share with us his plan—it would be good to see one. Secondly, without the enablers that BT refers

to, how many homes does the Minister expect to be reached by BT? We need a plan from the Government before we can have any confidence in their vague promises.

We recognise, as I think the Minister acknowledged, that the internet is now an essential utility for modern life. However, the Government's “Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review” talked of bringing telecoms operators' powers into line with other utilities. Does this Bill do that? It is not clear. Electricity and gas operators are empowered under the Rights of Entry (Gas and Electricity Boards) Act 1954 to gain entry to a property at all reasonable times, should the landlord or occupier damage the maintenance of a connection. Where water companies are under an obligation to provide water to a property, they are entitled to enter any premises for the purposes of determining whether or how to exercise their powers, and the same powers are extended to sewerage providers.

However, this Bill gives no statutory right of access to telecoms companies and places no obligation on landlords to facilitate access. I am not saying the Bill should do that, but I am trying to understand how the Government are treating telecoms. It would be nice to have a sense that the Government understand the difference between telecoms and other utilities. Other utilities are permitted to force entry to ensure there is no threat to life or safety. Although I believe online harms are a real danger, I do not believe they are the same thing.

For other utilities, such as energy, there is competition only in the retail layer, not the infrastructure layer. I will come back to that point but, given the Government claim to be encouraging infrastructure competition, it will create complexities that need to be explored. From what I can see, although the Minister talks a lot about exploring things, those complexities have not been considered so far.

Given the confusion on what kind of utility telecoms are, it is not surprising that doubts remain on whether this bespoke process will actually work or have any impact at all. What constitutes a meaningful response from a landlord? Can they just acknowledge the request? There is a question on whether the tribunals will have the right resources and expertise. The Country Landowners Association has observed that there is an existing code of practice. Why is that not working? What assessment has or will be made of the effective impact of these processes and costs on businesses? I understand there has been no impact assessment, and I expect to hear when one will be made.

We have heard that the Bill is a hammer blow. The Government promise to accelerate broadband roll-out but, as we have also heard and as I am sure many Members are aware, mobile is an important part of that and the Bill does not mention it. Some 96% of urban areas can get 4G reception from all four operators, compared with only 62% of rural areas; 5% of the UK landmass gets no mobile coverage whatsoever. Rural mobile coverage is set to increase due to an industry project recently announced by Ofcom, and 5G has finally launched in the UK, so we expect to see network roll-out from the mobile operators.

Mobile UK, the industry body, has called on the Government to ensure that mobile and fixed-line broadband services receive equal focus and attention. Does the Minister have any plans to support mobile network roll-out, or is that to be left to the market?

Jonathan Edwards: The hon. Lady is raising an important point about mobile, which has huge potential. We have the technology to bring broadband into the home, but the big issue is the size of the data packages. Families find mobile prohibitive because it uses up their data allowance within a matter of days. Should not the Government work with the mobile companies to ensure these products are far better suited for family use?

Chi Onwurah: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and affordability is a consequence of the level of competition, of the profits that mobile operators are making and of network capacity. The Government can address all those things, but they are apparently choosing not to do so.

The Government claim to be supporting infrastructure competition, and the “Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review” says that infrastructure competition is most effective at delivering investment. Where is the support for infrastructure competition in this Bill? What requirement is there on landlords and internet service providers to support infrastructure access for more than one telecoms operator? Residents will not be able to choose their supplier, leaving them liable to be fleeced by a single provider.

This is particularly important because of the wasted decade we have seen, which has allowed the re-monopolisation of the broadband network to take place. The last Labour Government delivered infrastructure competition in first generation broadband. It survives to this day, which is why people can get decent broadband from providers such as TalkTalk, Plusnet and Sky, as well as BT, but the Conservative Government gave BT hundreds of millions of pounds of public money, to establish, in effect, a monopoly on second generation superfast broadband. The Government were warned at the time, and not only by me, that that would entrench BT’s monopoly, but Ministers refused even to use the word “fibre”, as if by ignoring it, they could make demand for it go away. Other countries require shared access to building infrastructure. Have the Government examined case studies in other countries, such as France, which has a much higher proportion of MDUs than we have and much better infrastructure access competition? Speaking of MDUs, the definition in the Bill seems to imply that the situation is the same for a two-flat house conversion as for a block of flats with 100 apartments in it. Is that really appropriate?

The Minister mentioned new build. In 2008, I ran Ofcom’s consultation on fibre access for new build, and since then we seem to have made absolutely zero progress. What recommendations or guidance for new build apartments, and what other policies, is he proposing to ensure that new build houses have fibre access? As has been suggested, the huge question overshadowing this is the relationship between leaseholders and freeholders. Leasehold is broken. Labour has promised to end it, but, unfortunately this Government appear to have no meaningful proposals.

In conclusion, telecoms companies need to be able to deploy infrastructure quickly and effectively. Absentee and bad landlords can deprive residents of decent broadband by not co-operating, but telecoms companies should not be able to fleece residents or crowd out smaller competitors, and savings must be passed on to consumers. There is much the Government could be

doing to deliver the infrastructure we need. We support the aims of this Bill but fear that the measures are not properly thought through and will not make a significant difference. We need a proper plan to overcome 10 wasted years.

When, last week, I said that Big Ben was the only telecoms infrastructure the Government could plan for, the Minister told me off, saying that, “as an engineer”, I should know that Big Ben “is not telecoms infrastructure”. He clearly does not know his telecoms infrastructure, as bells and beacons were our earliest forms of telecoms, which is, in essence, communicating at a distance, as the Spanish Armada found out. They were supported by public investment—[*Laughter.*] The Minister laughs, but he knows that we want to make sure that we have public investment to support the telecoms infrastructure, which provides a public good. It is sad that although the Government are happy to leave our infrastructure stuck in the past, they refuse to learn lessons from it. Under the Conservative party, one wasted decade may become two, and the British people will be the biggest losers.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Let us have the usual courtesies respected during maiden speeches. I call Anthony Mangnall to make his maiden speech.

4.18 pm

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you. I am going to try to be simultaneously positive and brief in my deliberations in this debate on telecommunications infrastructure. I hope to be able to contribute my views on this issue and address the House for the first time as the Member for Totnes.

May I first congratulate my colleagues across the House whose maiden speeches have preceded mine? They have done little to calm my nerves, but they have highlighted the breadth of new knowledge, experience and talent that has been brought to this place. I wish my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford) good luck in making his maiden speech later this afternoon. I also wish to pay tribute to my predecessor, Dr Sarah Wollaston. She took many views across this House, but she always treated me with courtesy, respect and decency. She served the constituents of Totnes for nine years, with diligence and hard work, and I wish her well.

My constituency of Totnes is a landscape of vivacious variety and beauty. From the rolling moorlands of Dartmoor to the meanderings of the rivers Avon and Dart, and with a coastline that stretches from Bantham to Brixham, it is unquestionably the most beautiful constituency—a fact that has only been underlined by the visits in recent months by my right hon. Friends the Members for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson), for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) and for Braintree (James Cleverly), along with countless others. Quite what I have done to deserve such visits, I am unsure.

I am proud to be the representative of the hill farmers of Dartmoor, the fishermen of Brixham, the superior gin distillers of Dartmouth and Salcombe, and the independent small business owners of Kingsbridge and the booming town of Totnes, confirming that this is a constituency rich in history, innovation, individuality

[Anthony Mangnall]

and character, as well as natural beauty. From its landscape to the vibrant economic hubs of our towns and villages, there is no other place in this country quite like it.

In fact, I can boast of the world-famous Brixham fish market, which allows connoisseurs of fine fish—fine British fish, I hasten to add—to purchase from the comfort of their own home using cloud-based technology. How about that? We also have numerous community partnership groups—such as Pete’s Dragons or Young Devon—whose work provides hope, comfort, opportunity and support to those most in need. Of course, for those of a military mindset, we are home to Britannia Royal Naval College, the epicentre of our naval officer training course and, perhaps just as importantly, the site where the first significant encounter between Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh took place.

John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Explain. [Laughter.]

Anthony Mangnall: Later.

We have many successes, of which we are proud, but we also have underlying issues, which I hope to be able to address as the representative for Totnes. The closure of Dartmouth’s cottage hospital in 2017 has left a community fearing for its future health provisions. With a health and wellbeing centre scheduled to be built in the coming months, there are still calls for beds, X-ray units and a minor injuries unit. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk will forgive me if I am somewhat persistent on the matter.

Towns such as Dartmouth, and towns in other rural constituencies, can easily be cut off without properly resourced frontline services and transport links. In fact, connectivity—both transport and digital—in Devon and the south-west lags far behind that in the rest of the country. I know that I speak for all my colleagues in the south-west when I say that those are two issues on which we will be working together.

The Second Reading of this Bill gives a clear sign of the Government’s commitment to providing improved digital connectivity across this country. I welcome this action and look forward to working on this Bill and future Bills that will improve connectivity for my urban and rural communities. Our road and rail infrastructure leaves much to be desired: any Member of this House who has travelled up and down the A303, A30 or A38 will understand the need for action. Major infrastructure projects all too often find themselves being talked about rather than implemented. I hope that this new outward-looking Britain will take an energetic approach to our transport networks.

The Australian bushfires that so grimly greeted the start of 2020 are yet another acute wake-up call for us to engage on the issue of climate change. Our hosting of this year’s COP26 in Glasgow is an opportunity for Britain to lead the world in combating climate change and stave off ecological disaster. Global Britain can be the champion of a green future. In my constituency, I hope to inform that debate by the creation of my own climate change expert group. I look forward to that engagement with my constituents.

I could, like every Member of this House, wax lyrical about my constituency for many hours, but I shall not. Conscious of the time, I shall move on to what my constituents might expect of me. Given that one of my predecessors was a communist spy and another a mystic, I feel it is only acceptable for me to outline what sort of politician I might be. To do so, my explanation to the House can begin only by thanking the right hon. Lord Hague of Richmond, Baroness Helic of Millbank and Chloe Dalton, with whom I have worked on a range of different subjects over the past 12 years. Their guidance, advice and friendship are part of the reason I am here today, and I am grateful to them for their persistent patience, kindness and generosity. It was while working for them in 2012 that I saw the creation of the preventing sexual violence in conflict initiative. By 2014 more than 150 countries had signed up to our commitment to tackle this issue—to tackle the culture of impunity and bring perpetrators to justice. This year we have a renewed opportunity to reinvigorate our leadership on this initiative and to drive forward action into progress and deliverance.

Last year I played a small role in helping to shut down the UK’s domestic trade in ivory—many Members of this place were active and engaged in helping to close that trade. Together, this House took the right course, by closing the UK’s market, implementing some of the toughest legislation in the world and encouraging others to follow. I am proud of the work that I have done with many Members of this House and the other place to introduce and implement this policy and that of preventing sexual violence in conflict, showing that the UK can take global leads on many issues.

Away from Westminster, I have had the benefit of working for two shipping companies, in Singapore and the United Kingdom. While those firms very nicely indulged my love of politics, they also taught me some of the finer points of international trade, business and negotiation—skills that I hope to be able to use in this House. They also highlighted the UK’s shipping sector, which is an often overlooked jewel in the crown of British business and enterprise.

As Members may have recognised, the direction of my speech is about seizing opportunity, expanding on what we have as a nation and restoring what we have lost. This country has taken a momentous step. I understand the fears and concerns about not knowing every element of our future, but we must reflect on the things that we do well and the areas in which we can grow. To do so is to recognise that the answer to globalisation is localisation, which, if achieved, can help restore faith in politics and in this place. If we can get this right, we can promote our regions and deliver the opportunity to which the Prime Minister so frequently refers. I hope to use my experience from shipping, politics and charity to guide me through Westminster waters in the coming months and years, doubtlessly with the help of my Whip—whether she is holding my hand or leading me is to be decided.

I am eager to play my part in the fisheries and agriculture Bill, to seize the opportunity to expand in our fishing and farming sectors and to take back control of our waters and own the agricultural destiny that we have before us.

The south-west has often been overlooked by successive Governments of all persuasions—whether Labour, Conservative or coalition. It is now more important than ever to ensure that we see through our promises by

tackling climate change, implementing major infrastructure projects and creating a field of opportunity by reducing business rates, encouraging innovation and cultivating entrepreneurialism in every region of this country.

Mr Deputy Speaker, may I thank you for your patience and this House for its kindness in hearing my maiden speech, and may I offer my sincere gratitude to all those who have supported me both in this House and beyond over the past five months? Those of us who have the privilege to sit in this historic Chamber know that knocking on doors across constituencies enables us to see the very best of our communities and country, from the constituent who decided to vote for me depending on my like or dislike of Marmite, to the enthusiastic member of the public who greeted me and the Prime Minister as her “little teddy bears”—we have all been there. This House now has the duty and expectation to restore our people’s faith in this Parliament, honour our promises, and tackle the burning issues of the day for the good of the country and to demonstrate our global ability.

4.28 pm

John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) on his very fine maiden speech. I have heard winching described in many different ways, but never before as “significant encountering”. That is one to add to the lexicon. I was very encouraged by some of the things that he decided to highlight as issues of great passion for him, not least the ban on the ivory trade and sexual violence in war. Those are issues that will draw support from across the whole House, and we on the SNP Benches certainly look forward to working with him if he chooses to highlight them in his time here in Parliament.

Digital connectivity is critical to opening up economic opportunity in every part of Scotland. As telecommunications is a reserved matter, the Bill will have effect in Scotland. It is therefore vital, given the Scottish Government’s commitment to digital infrastructure through the Reaching 100% programme, that barriers to commercial deployment are addressed whenever possible. The SNP welcomes these proposals, which will unlock build opportunities for a number of telecoms operators in Scotland who are being prevented by access issues from fulfilling their customers’ demands. The R100 contract provider could also benefit from this legislation reducing the cost of delivery in multi-dwelling units that fall within the scope of the programme.

Scottish Government officials have taken advice from the Scottish Government legal directorate, and at present this Bill does not impact on devolved areas so will not require the legislative consent of the Scottish Parliament. However, the SNP will continue to monitor developments around the Bill, and Ministers in Scotland stand ready to engage with the UK Government and provide advice accordingly.

I also want to highlight issues surrounding new builds. Because of the failure of commercial broadband suppliers and developers to engage, new developments are being built without fibre broadband. In the Queen’s Speech of 19 December 2019, reference was made to forthcoming legislation that aims to resolve the issues around new build properties. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport published a consultation, “New Build

Developments: Delivering gigabit-capable connections”, on 29 October 2018, and a response is expected to be issued within the next three months. Legislation is intended to be introduced shortly thereafter. Discussions with the Department to date have indicated that its current position is that this will be implemented through amendments to building regulations, which are devolved. It will therefore be important for the Minister to engage with counterparts from the Scottish Government to allow for a full evaluation of the proposals to ensure that, at a minimum, they are compatible in Scotland, and to allow the Scottish Government the opportunity to consider where they can go even further.

I know that you will be disappointed, Mr Deputy Speaker, if I conclude this exciting speech at this juncture. I know that you are begging for more, but I feel I should draw to a close. It is, incidentally, my first speech back in Parliament since my re-election, and what a pleasure it is to see you back in the Chair.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): To make his maiden speech, I call Christian Wakeford.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

4.32 pm

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker; I could get used to that. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall), who delivered a rather marvellous maiden speech. Although I hate to disappoint my colleagues, mine will not be as riveting—but neither will it be as long. I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on regaining your position in the Chair.

I start by saying how proud I am and how humbling it is to be here delivering this, my maiden speech, on the highly important topic of the Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Bill. I know what you are thinking, Mr Deputy Speaker. Many of my new colleagues have previously said that they know what you are thinking, but I actually do. You, along with right hon. and hon. Members from all parts of the House, are thinking, “Why would you choose to do your maiden speech during the Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Bill?” Indeed, as a new Member, I am asking myself the same question. The answer is that, like the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), I have experience working in the telecommunications sector.

I spent several years working in the sector—I reassure colleagues that I was not working for Openreach—and I know that the number of appointments that network operators miss because they cannot access properties creates several disadvantages. First, there was the financial cost to operators of sending an engineer out to a property only for them to be unable to deliver the service. That cost was ultimately passed on to the end-user. Secondly, there was an opportunity cost to not being able to deliver on one job: it meant that engineers could not go and deliver a service at another location, which led to people waiting longer for an installation than specified under the service level agreements. Finally, the end-users themselves only want one simple thing: a telephony and broadband service. If a network operator is unable to go to their location, they are going without the one basic service that they require. It is right that the

[Christian Wakeford]

Government are committed to delivering gigabit broadband to every single house and business in the country by 2025, and this Bill goes some way to delivering that.

While I am discussing telecommunications infrastructure, it would be remiss of me not actually to discuss infrastructure, and one cannot discuss infrastructure without building a few walls. I hope that my colleagues know where I am going with this. After many years of Labour neglect in the north and our northern towns, the Conservatives have now been able to build our very own blue wall in the north; after those many years of Labour neglect, our northern counterparts from “Game of Thrones” remind us that “the north remembers”.

It is customary in one’s maiden speech to take Members on a virtual tour of the constituency. Mr Deputy Speaker, you have probably heard in maiden speeches many times—indeed, you have just heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes—that everyone seems to have the most picturesque landscapes and the most vibrant towns. I do not want to break with convention. However, I also want to be on your good side, Mr Deputy Speaker. I therefore admit that your constituency clearly has the most picturesque landscape and most vibrant towns, with Bury South obviously coming a very close second.

The constituency of Bury South is rather ironically named; it does not actually contain any single part of the town of Bury. Instead, it is actually the south of the borough of Bury. Bury South is situated to the north of Greater Manchester, although to many it will remain a key part of the county palatine that I know Mr Speaker holds dear: the county of Lancashire. The constituency is made up of the townships of Radcliffe, Whitefield and Prestwich, and the villages of Ainsworth and Simister—places that many people believe to have been left behind. Given the choice in a referendum, as my predecessor mentioned in his maiden speech back in 1997, they would arguably vote for their own Bur-exit and more localisation of powers, along with the creation of town and parish councils.

Radcliffe was previously famous for its paper mills. Like many industrial towns, it has unfortunately seen the decline of the manufacturing industry, and is in need of a new high school and the regeneration of its town centre—two issues that I will be championing in this House and have already been speaking to Ministers about. Prestwich is famous for its municipal park, Heaton Park, which I am sure many hon. Members will have heard of. It is home to several music festivals and large congregations; and although I profess to have attended many, I can confirm to my constituents that not a single one was Parklife.

Prestwich is also home to one of the largest, most vibrant and thriving Jewish communities in the country, and I thank the community from the bottom of my heart for the generosity and kindness they have shown me, before the election and since. This is a community that had real fear in the run-up to the election. Members should not let anyone—either in this House or in any other place—try to convince them otherwise. The best example I have seen of the fear of the community was on the day after polling day, when a Jewish lady approached me in the street as I was heading back to my car, with tears running down her face and the simple message,

“Thank you. Thanks to you and the Conservatives, we no longer have to leave the country.” I will hold that meeting with me until the end of my days, because it was a powerful message that resonated with me at the time and will continue to do so.

It has been highlighted to me that I am the first non-Jewish Member of Parliament for Bury South. Certainly, the *Financial Times* referred to it—but obviously there are other newspaper publications available. I was described as Christian, which quite clearly is neither Jewish nor Muslim—something so obvious I do not quite think it needed writing down, but they chose to do so anyway.

It is also customary to pay tribute to one’s predecessor. I find myself in a much easier position than most when replacing a former Labour Member—and a former Labour Minister, no less—because I received an endorsement from my predecessor, Ivan Lewis. Not only did he endorse me, but on polling day he actually donned a blue rosette and knocked on doors for me. That certainly makes paying tribute to one’s predecessor much, much easier. I have also been very fortunate to get to know Ivan Lewis quite well over the past few months—even more so through meeting him for coffee regularly in the constituency to discuss some of the issues that, while he was not quite able to see them through, we are working on closely to bring to fruition. I would like to pay tribute to the work he has done over 22 years in this place and truly to wish him the best with all his future endeavours.

My predecessor and I share very many similar passions, one being social mobility and one being education and improving our towns. I would like to take a moment to share those passions. One passion that we did not share was football, because unfortunately he did rather side with our noisy neighbours in Manchester—something he likes to remind me about, especially when they defeat us.

Many have asked why I decided to come to this place. As a former insurance broker, I was already hated, so, with not really having a passion for selling houses, I thought, why not go into politics and become a Member of Parliament? So that was the clear direction of travel. All jokes aside, I am a strong believer in social mobility, as a compassionate Conservative, and I believe the best way to achieve social mobility is through education. I declare an interest because, having a very young daughter, I obviously want the very best education for her, but in doing so I also want the best education for every child in this country, and even more so from early years through to further and higher education.

I stood on a platform of policies to regenerate our towns of Radcliffe and Prestwich and to protect our green belt at Simister and Elton Reservoir, on which at the moment there is a fear that thousands of houses will be built. I also fought a campaign based on ensuring that our streets are safe for our residents and not for the criminals, and that our police have the resources that they need to tackle crime. So I was certainly pleased to hear the Queen’s Speech reaffirm the commitment to putting more police on the street and deploying them where they are needed. I also fought campaigns to deliver the new high school for Radcliffe to make sure that every child in my constituency could go to a good-quality and local school; and to tackle the issues of congestion on Bury New Road in Prestwich, which has been described as one of the most congested roads in the north-west of England.

This moment, while filled with pride, is one that too many of my colleagues have also described as rather bittersweet, because unfortunately neither my father nor my older brother Mark could be here. They were lost far too soon, but they have given me a passion to support cancer care, road safety, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation. I am driven each and every day by whether my father would be proud of me. Hopefully today I can say he would be.

I conclude by summing up my approach to this place for the next five years, and hopefully longer: it is nice to be important, but it is more important to be nice.

4.44 pm

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con): I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) and for Bury South (Christian Wakeford), who delivered excellent, engaging and thought-provoking speeches. I congratulate them both on joining us as fully initiated Members of this place. I quoted from Harry Potter in my maiden speech, and I am delighted to be joined on these green Benches by a fellow geek—my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South, who quoted “Game of Thrones”.

It is great to see someone at the Dispatch Box with such knowledge and experience of digital infrastructure. There is no fear of this modern Conservative party being represented at the Dispatch Box by a fibre-optic Fagin like Peter Mannion in “The Thick of It”. I am pleased that this excellent Bill is being spearheaded by the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman).

It may seem strange to talk about the year 1855 when discussing future-proofing our broadband, but this quote from the pastor Henry Melvill resonated with me: “a thousand fibres connect you with your fellow-men”.

I am not sure whether Mr Melvill had a Tardis, but he certainly predicted the future, with fibre cabling now literally connecting millions of our citizens.

As I said in my maiden speech, we work best when we work together. As a modern, tech-savvy society, we work best when we are connected, but connectivity can be very bitty around our country. That is why one of my local priorities is improving access to decent broadband and 4G. At the moment, 4.8% of my local properties do not have access to decent broadband, which is more than double the national average. I am delighted to see the Government taking this seriously through the rural gigabit connectivity programme, local full-fibre networks programme and various other schemes. I look forward to working with the Minister on those schemes, to ensure that Bishop Auckland benefits from them in the fullest possible way.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend’s wonderful speech, but does she agree that it is vital for the Government to work with universities such as the University of Suffolk in Ipswich to bring forward degree apprenticeships focusing on the kind of research needed to provide the first-class digital infrastructure that her constituency needs to thrive?

Dehenna Davison: I do agree, but I would also make a pitch for other great universities, such as the University of Durham, to be involved in that research. Improving that research to ensure that we get the most cost-effective and efficient infrastructure is really important.

In Teesdale particularly, access to decent broadband is a key consideration for many when moving property. My party has highlighted its commitment to this country becoming the best place in the world to do business online, and I wholeheartedly support that. To achieve that aim, we must do all within our power to ensure that the correct infrastructure is in place, so that local residents are not left time and again with buffer face. Infrastructure is crucial.

I fully support the Bill, because it will help Bishop Auckland constituents and our country in two key ways. First, it will help those living in rented properties. For renters in multiple-dwelling buildings, there is currently no guarantee of access for operators to upgrade digital infrastructure. While there are, of course, good, supportive landlords out there who understand that decent broadband is crucial, the current legislative framework means that, through inactivity, building owners can prevent tenants from accessing decent broadband. With almost 6% of Bishop Auckland residents living in flats, this is not good enough. That is why I am chuffed to support the Bill, which allows telecom companies to gain temporary access rights to a property to install broadband connections where the landlord has failed to respond to multiple requests for access. This is a great, positive step to ensure that renters are protected, and it ties into our wider commitment to improving renters’ lives. I look forward to learning more about the plans of my right hon. Friend and blue-collar champion, the Minister for Housing, who has a great Instagram feed, full of pictures of her in hard hats on building sites.

That leads on nicely to the second theme of the Bill. It will also ensure that new homes are built with fast and reliable broadband in mind. The Bill amends legislation so that new homes must have the infrastructure in place to support gigabit-capable connections, and it will also create a requirement for developers to work with broadband companies to install those connections. That is another excellent step forward in improving our digital infrastructure.

This Government are committed to ensuring that both homeowners and renters are able to access good, high-speed, reliable broadband. In a modern world of flexible and virtual working, it has never been more important for people to have good broadband in their home. When the laptop screen is closed and the working day is done, I find that quality of life is always improved by being able to stream “The Crown” on Netflix without buffering. I will finish with a quote from “The Crown”:

“History was not made by those who did nothing.”

This Bill certainly does something—something good—and I am delighted to speak in support of it.

4.50 pm

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): It is a great pleasure to speak on the Second Reading of the Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Bill as the shadow Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. It has been quite a thrilling afternoon, with a couple of fine maiden speeches. The hon. Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall), who is no longer in his place, gave a warm and passionate maiden speech. I would certainly be very happy to work with him cross-party on climate change, and especially on violence against women and girls. There was a fine speech from the new

[Tracy Brabin]

hon. Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford), who was personal and passionate. I can certainly work closely with him on revitalising our high streets, and as Members of Parliament who represent our whole communities, we share a passion for ensuring that people of faith and no faith feel very welcome and secure in the places where they live. We have had very good interventions, too. I thank the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison) for her comment about the need for a better deal for renters.

We have heard today—all our constituents know it to be true—that reliable, fast internet is a crucial part of modern life. Even 10 years ago, a global BBC survey found that four out of five people believe that access to the internet is a human right. If that is the case, it is sadly a right that many in the UK do not enjoy fully. According to Ofcom, there are still nearly 700,000 people in our country without a decent broadband connection. The Government's universal service obligation requires providers to offer a very minimal service as a baseline, but this is simply not fast enough to take advantage of all the benefits the internet brings. When it comes to the speed and quality of broadband, the figures make for even more grim reading.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), the shadow Minister for digital—I pay tribute to her many years of experience in this field; she probably knows more about this than anyone in this building—was right to bring up the achievements of the previous Labour Government in this area; to be frank, this Tory Government's record is shameful. She highlighted the communications revolution that we oversaw in office, with first-generation broadband reaching 50% of all households in only a decade. Under the Conservatives in the past decade, full fibre has reached less than 10% of homes. We must strive for full fibre because of the possibilities that it brings.

This is about modernising our country. As the number of internet devices rises, so must internet speeds, allowing us all to enjoy the benefits of connectivity. We must also support business and opportunity. Increasingly, the world's marketplace is going online, and the sad truth is that we are being left behind. In Ofcom's 2017 international communications market report, the UK was ranked 19th out of 19 countries for fibre-to-the-premises connections, and if the Minister will forgive me for repeating the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central—this does need repeating—the OECD ranks us 35th out of 37 countries for the proportion of fibre broadband coverage. For the fifth richest economy in the world and a country with a proud technological heritage—home to the inventor of the world wide web—this simply is not good enough.

As we heard in the maiden speeches, it is our towns and rural areas—from Batley and Cleckheaton in my constituency to the west coast of Cumbria—that suffer most from this neglect. According to 2016 research from the Oxford Internet Institute, there is a 30% gap in internet usage between the south-east, where the figure for internet use is close to 90%, and the north of England, where the figure is closer to 60%. What does this mean in an age when the internet is now where we go to relax, communicate with people, get around, and

apply for jobs and benefits? It means in practice that many are locked out of modern society, unable to reap the benefits of the digital age.

What are the Government doing about this? We have heard a lot about levelling up, but since the Prime Minister came to office less than a year ago, he has had not one, not two, but three different positions on broadband connectivity. It is clear that we cannot take this Government at their word, so let us judge them on their deeds—on the provisions in the Bill.

The Bill is designed to enable people who live in flats and apartment blocks to receive gigabit-capable connections when their landlord repeatedly fails to respond to telecommunications operators' requests for permission to install their infrastructure. We are told by network builders that more than three quarters of multi-dwelling units are missing out on fibre broadband as a result of the negligence of building owners. The Bill provides a bespoke process through which telecoms network operators can gain access to buildings to deploy, upgrade or maintain fixed-line broadband connections in cases where a tenant has requested electronic communication services but the landlord has repeatedly failed to respond to requests for access.

We will not vote against this Bill. Telecom companies need to be able to deploy infrastructure quickly and effectively. Absentee and bad landlords should not be allowed to deprive customers and consumers of decent broadband by not co-operating. We do, however, have concerns. Telecom companies should not be allowed to fleece residents by locking them into dependence on a single provider, nor should they be allowed to crowd out smaller competitors, but what guarantees—I am sure the Minister will respond to this question when he is on his feet—can the Minister provide that this will not happen? If the Bill does make rolling out fibre broadband cheaper and easier, the savings must be passed on to the consumer, not pocketed by the shareholders. Does the Minister agree? Will this be ensured?

Considered more widely, none of the Government's proposals will provide the step change—the hammer blow—in internet connection that this country requires or that the Prime Minister has promised. The sum of £5 billion quoted in the Conservative manifesto is less than one sixth of the cost needed to roll out full fibre to every home, which the National Infrastructure Commission estimates at £33 billion.

Even if the investment is raised to the level needed, a real concern is that the money spent by Government on fibre roll-out is simply a massive subsidy for existing private operators. The Government put in investment, but keep none of its fruits. We will wait and see whether the Chancellor loosens the purse strings further in the upcoming Budget, but unfortunately, given the track record of the Conservative party, I am not holding my breath.

4.58 pm

Matt Warman: I thank the Labour party for its support, however grudging. It is important to say what this Government have done over the last 10 years, however the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) describes them; they have fostered the largest digital economy in the G20. That success does not happen by accident; it happens through effective regulation that supports investment from the private sector. We need

a proper plan, she said, and we have got one. What the Opposition have is a plan to nationalise BT at a cost of £100 billion—or at least I think that is what they have, because when she was asked that question, I did not hear a full-throated endorsement of the Labour manifesto position. Perhaps she is just positioning herself for her future leader. None the less, I enjoyed her reference to the Spanish Armada and I look forward to an historical tour de force that covers bells and a whole host of telecommunications infrastructure as we work through the passage of this Bill in Committee.

The hon. Lady raised a number of points. We consulted extensively in ending up with this solution. We will, of course, continue to be flexible where we can be to make sure that it evolves if it needs to. It is, as the hon. Lady said, a bespoke process that is dedicated to the telecoms industry. She is right that it would be silly to suggest that this should be treated in exactly the same way as other infrastructure, but we need to bear in mind the fact that digital infrastructure will become progressively more vital, as well as the question of how we line up the appropriate regimes.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): When it comes to the infrastructure for broadband and its delivery, we are at the mercy of very few suppliers or providers. Unfortunately, although they put money into their pockets, they sometimes do not deliver at all to rural communities. That is our problem in Northern Ireland: there is money there, but the providers cannot deliver.

Matt Warman: The hon. Gentleman is right that effective competition is absolutely essential to rolling out broadband in the best possible way. I have seen for myself in Dundrum and Belfast a whole host of really excellent work in Northern Ireland, demonstrating not only that it can be done but that it can be done at an even more efficient price than in some parts of the rest of the United Kingdom. Good work is going on that promotes competition. The role of the Government is, of course, to make sure we get maximum value for money across the whole of the United Kingdom.

I pay tribute to both the new Members who spoke for the first time. My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) asked us to reimagine what a significant encounter might look like, but, more seriously, elsewhere demonstrated the depth of knowledge and breadth of expertise that he brings to this place. His constituents are lucky to have him, even though he is neither a communist spy nor a mystic—to our knowledge. Just as the Bill represents a significant upgrade for broadband in this country, my hon. Friend is an upgrade on communist spies and mystics, so we pay tribute to him.

I also welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford). He was initially somewhat disparaging about the Bill, and I was worried. But he showed genuine expertise on the topic as well as on antisemitism, one of the most challenging issues of our age. I also pay tribute to his courageous predecessor. I know from his funny and down-to-earth speech that he will be a worthy Member of this place.

Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison) said that she had seen two new Members becoming initiated into full involvement in this place; I should say that full involvement comes

when one colleague like her says something nice about me while another—who I shall not name—heckles to say that she is probably wrong. Welcome to politics. My hon. Friend is of course right to say that the Bill introduces things that will make a real and meaningful difference—not just in urban constituencies, but across the country. People are living in multi-dwelling units and blocks of flats in all our constituencies.

I am also, of course, happy to discuss some of the other issues that various Members raised in this debate. Some of those will come out in Committee. I was grateful to receive applications from a number of Members to serve on the Bill Committee—we will try to ensure that they do not regret it. It will be an important piece of legislation and I am grateful to them for their expertise in this debate and beyond.

To conclude, I am sure that we can continue to work together across the House to bring this important Bill into law as soon as possible, and on the other legislation that forms the building blocks of a comprehensive plan to deliver gigabit-capable networks across this country.

We are bringing this Bill forward first because it allows us to crack on with a plan that we would otherwise have to deliver by waiting for a single, larger piece of legislation. The Bill allows us to address some aspects of a broader challenge, and we will get on with the rest of the plan as soon as possible.

Chi Onwurah rose—

Matt Warman: I look forward to encountering the hon. Lady across the Dispatch Box—it would be mean not to give way to her.

Chi Onwurah: I was pleased to hear the third or fourth reference, I think, to a plan. Will he share with us when he will publish the plan for gigabit-capable broadband delivery?

Matt Warman: We will, of course, be talking much more extensively and consulting on various aspects of the plan, which the hon. Lady will see emerge in good time. We are genuinely keen to be collaborative on many aspects of the Bill, because it is good to see cross-party support for a Bill that we all acknowledge is important. We hope to be able to do the vast majority of any legislation with cross-party support, because that is the right thing to do.

Government Members care passionately about this issue, and I am sure that the same spirit will continue as the Bill makes its passage through the House. This is a real contribution to the agenda of levelling up across the country and bringing digital infrastructure to every school, home and classroom in a way that allows all our constituents to benefit from the infrastructure that they deserve, and from a digital revolution that this Government will foster.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE (LEASEHOLD PROPERTY) BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Telecommunications Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) 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 6 February 2020.

(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.

School Meals: Hull

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Mr Marcus Jones.*)

5.6 pm

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): It is very nice to see you back in your place, Mr Deputy Speaker. I convey my thanks to Mr Speaker for allowing this debate, and it is very good to see the Minister in her place.

I requested this debate to talk about primary school meals and their cost in Kingston upon Hull. I am sure that the Minister will have been told by her civil servants that Hull has had a reputation over many years of taking forward pioneering policies on school food, thanks to councillors such as Colin Inglis and Mary Glew. For a period, Hull had free school meals in all primary and special schools and, in more recent times, it has had a very well supported, low-cost school meals policy, even though most of our primary schools are academies. However, some of those schools have now increased the price of school meals by 200% in the last year. My debate seeks answers on academy accountability and how councils can influence academies' decision making under the current legal framework.

It will be useful to give a bit of background. Hull is one of the most deprived cities in the country. Twenty years ago, we needed to up our game in terms of educational achievement. While huge improvements had been made, more needed to be done. In the 2003 local elections, Hull Labour campaigned on the connection between good nutrition and educational achievement and on the fact that in order to learn effectively, children must be well nourished. The vision was summed up in four simple words: "Eat Well Do Well".

Labour believed passionately that by introducing a free, healthy school meal it could break the vicious cycle of educational underachievement, greater welfare dependency with limited life chances, and the subsequent poor health in later years at a great cost to the NHS, and that that could all be linked back to poor nutrition in childhood. Labour won the election and set about turning its manifesto pledge into reality, showing the power that progressive local government can have to help to change lives. The council was adamant that the cost of providing universal free school meals would not lead to cuts elsewhere. It believed that by not taking decisive action to tackle the city's inequalities, the council would be failing in its responsibilities.

Research has also shown a clear correlation between a healthy diet and improved school performance, attainment, self-esteem and behaviour, and, in the case of breakfast clubs, better attendance and punctuality. It could therefore be argued that the cost of the scheme was a very good investment for the far-reaching and long-term benefit of the health of future generations in Hull.

An evaluation of the Eat Well Do Well programme by Professor Derek Colquhoun at the University of Hull found headteachers to be delighted with the success of the scheme in creating calmer learning environments in which children had the opportunity to reach their potential. For its three-year duration, the programme was the envy of local authorities across the country.

It displayed long-term vision and ambition, using the buying power and economies of scale of the local authority to invest in the future of Hull's children and families.

In addition to tackling food poverty and childhood obesity, the pioneering initiative aimed also to eradicate the social stigma attached to the current free school meals system and ease the bureaucracy of means-testing. It also promoted good practice for parents in making healthier hot food attractive to children—more attractive than cold packed lunches, which were often of poor nutritional value.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech on a very important subject. On the nutritional value of packed lunches, I am sure she is aware that studies have found that only 2% of packed lunches meet the standards required of food provided in schools. In every way, we should want our children to be eating the food in schools, rather than bringing in packed lunches that, with the best will in the world, are unhealthy. Does she agree?

Dame Diana Johnson: I pay tribute to the amazing work that my hon. Friend has done over the years on school food and free school meals in particular. I absolutely agree with her.

It is worth reflecting that in Hull 23% of primary school children claim free school meals, yet Hull City Council has estimated that as many as 800 pupils entitled to free school meals are not claiming them, and we know that many thousands across the country do not take up their entitlements, largely due to parental fears of social isolation or bullying. In addition, thousands of children classed as living in poverty or just above the poverty line but not entitled to free school meals could access Hull City Council's Eat Well Do Well scheme.

Sadly, the scheme came to an end in the summer of 2007 after the Liberal Democrats took control of Hull City Council and reintroduced charges of £1 per meal. At a time when budgets were not under pressure, Hull's Liberal Democrats decided to scrap the progressive measure for what I can only consider ideological reasons.

Following on from the undoubted success of Hull's Eat Well Do Well scheme, two events followed. First, I remember sitting on the Front Bench 10 years ago as an Education Minister in the last Labour Government, and one of the things I was responsible for was helping to set up the free school meals pilots in Durham, Newham and Wolverhampton to get further evidence of the link between nutrition and educational attainment through free school meals. To this day, Newham still provides free school meals.

Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): As my hon. Friend is saying, there is undeniably a link between educational attainment and free school meals. It is suggested that it can add two months of schooling, which is why Newham Council, in collaboration with its schools, is currently funding again free school meals for children. It is that important. In an area that is arguably the second worst in the country for child poverty, it is an essential. Does she agree that the Government should adopt the same priorities as Newham Council and Newham's schools?

Dame Diana Johnson: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I pay tribute to her work on social justice and the idea that people ought to have opportunities in their lives and that children should get the support they need in those early years.

A second point came out of the Hull scheme. When the Liberal Democrats got back into power nationally, after a very long time, as part of the coalition Government, they, learning from the experience in Hull—ironically—pushed through free school meals for the earliest years in primary schools, so we now have that from five or seven. When Labour returned to power on the council in 2011, we managed to reduce the price of a school meal to 50p—down from the £1 as set by the Liberal Democrats. That was thanks to an agreement from both the schools and the council.

I see this as a modern-day social contract. The subsidy of 80p per meal was provided by the council: 50p from the public health grant, and 30p from Hull City Council's general fund resources. The council has been subsidising the school meals of children aged between seven and 11, and I do not think that any other local authority has been doing that very specific job. Again, Councillor Inglis was instrumental in making both the educational and public health cases for reducing the cost of school meals. The cost has remained at 50p, well below the rates of surrounding local authorities, for some years. Although the Eat Well Do Well scheme has ended, Hull has achieved a low-cost school meal and a partnership between our city's schools and the council for so long, and in the face of national austerity that resulted in massive and unfair cuts in the council's funding.

I understand that the threshold for free school meals has not risen for 14 years from a family income of about £17,000, so many more working poor families will not be eligible. The scheme that Hull City Council entered into with its academies was of particular benefit to them.

That brings me to why I initiated this debate, and to what has happened over the last 12 months. In January 2019 the price of a school meal in Hull, which had been 50p, doubled to £1 after academy heads decided to reduce their schools' contributions to the subsidy funding agreement. I understand that that was agreed at a meeting of the Hull Association of Primary Head Teachers. I appreciate that school budgets have been under enormous pressure, and that difficult decisions have to be made. According to a report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, schools and colleges in England have suffered the biggest fall in funding since the 1970s, and the funding shortfall for Kingston upon Hull in 2020 is £12.5 million. Nevertheless, Hull City Council, which was also under financial pressure, continued its subsidy at the same rate. But in January 2020—this month—the Hull Association of Primary Head Teachers again reduced the money for school meals, so the price has gone up to £1.50 per meal, and plans are being made for it to increase to the full cost of £2.30 later this year.

What has actually happened, however, is not a uniform increase. There is now a postcode lottery in Hull, and the charge depends on which school a child attends. Oldfield Primary School has stuck to 50p, and it is great that it has managed to do so. The co-operative learning trust, with seven primary schools, has not raised its price from £1, but many other schools now charge £1.50. Councillor Peter Clark, the current holder of the education portfolio, said that he did not support the price increases, but the council has no formal powers to

[*Dame Diana Johnson*]

affect the decisions that academies make. However, I think that there is a socialist moral case, and a one nation case, for this policy. The art of politics is at least trying to influence events on behalf of the communities that elect us. It is also unclear what has been agreed about continuing to pay a subsidy to schools that then go on to charge the full cost of a meal, and do not use that subsidy for its intended purpose.

This is extremely disappointing, as Hull's strong reputation for supporting healthy, low-priced school meals cannot simply be abandoned. For me, politics is about standing up when something is not right, rolling up my sleeves and fighting to challenge it. I strongly believe that the benefits of access to low-cost, nutritious food to children in Hull cannot be overstated. These price hikes will mean that those "just managing" working families will be under even more financial pressure, and children may miss out on good nutritious food that helps them to succeed at school and grow up as healthily as possible.

I know that there are many in Hull City Council, and in the academy trusts, who want to do what is in the best interests of children and families in Hull, but who are constrained from doing so. With the academies, the problem seems to be that, owing to a silo-like structure, they can focus only on short-term targets, with too little reference to the needs of the wider community. As a result, academy schools that were meant to innovate are undoing the gains of past innovation in school food, in which respect Hull has of course been leading the way.

There are a number of issues that I would like to raise with the Minister directly. First, local authorities are under a duty to improve the health of their local population, as set out in the Health and Social Care Act 2012. Despite the huge change in the educational landscape, councils are also required to be champions of educational excellence for all children and young people. But how can these two requirements work when there is no accountability flowing from the academies in Hull to the council and the wider community? Is there a place for a review of this relationship?

Secondly, there appears to be no clear requirement or mechanism for co-operation. From a public health perspective, the council has a clear role in dealing with the consequences of health inequalities and mortality, so what does the Minister have to say about the role of education establishments and institutions in co-operating on these public health requirements? Thirdly, there are no formal provisions for a local authority to challenge public decisions from schools on issues such as school meal prices. Accountability is limited to Ofsted, the regional schools commissioner and the Department for Education, and seems to relate only to poor performance. How does this help when all parties want to work positively together to improve health and educational attainment? Should there be an enhanced scrutiny role for the council, for example? In Hull, I do not think that the scrutiny committee looked at what was happening around the arrangements with school food, because it said that it had no powers to do anything about it.

Mrs Hodgson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. She has been very generous, although she could go on until 7 o'clock if she wanted to detain the

House for that long. She mentioned public health, and that reminded me of the pilots, which she also mentioned, in Newham, Wolverhampton and Durham. The funding for those pilots came from the then Education Secretary and the then Health Secretary, the former Members for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle and for Normanton. They got together and jointly funded the pilots from Education and Health for the very reason that it should not have been only Education that paid for them, because there were going to be huge health benefits as well. My hon. Friend is making a point about local government, but does she agree that this could equally be something for the Department of Health to look at under the public health budget?

Dame Diana Johnson: Yes, absolutely. What I have been trying to say in my speech is that there is a link between education and public health, and that at the moment it is clear that they are completely separate. I am trying to bring them together to work collaboratively. I am also grateful for being reminded that, because the previous business went down early, we have until 7 o'clock to debate this issue. I notice that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) is in his place, and I know that he usually intervenes in Adjournment debates, so I would be happy to give way to him as well.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson) on bringing this debate forward. This issue is appropriate to her own area, but it is one that probably applies across all our constituencies. She has referred to subsidy and the provision of school meals. The importance of that for me and my constituency is also very real, because if we did not have that subsidy and help for those families, some of those young children would never have a solid meal in their day. Does she feel, as I do, that when it comes to making provision for those who are at the bottom of the poverty level and who need our help to get at least one square meal a day, the Government need to respond in a very positive way?

Dame Diana Johnson: I am grateful for that intervention, and I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. We have a new Government in place, and I think that they want to deal with some of the long-standing issues in this country around the working poor and how those children can be best served in our schools when it comes to access to hot healthy school food. What Hull was trying to do, from a local authority perspective, was to have those progressive policies that have perhaps been lacking at national level for some time. I am not going to detain the House for much longer. I just have a few more questions, unless the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) would like me to give way to him.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): In a moment.

Dame Diana Johnson: Let me return to my questions for the Minister. I want her to be clear about whether it is right that all schools have to take individual decisions on school meal prices, because there was some dispute in Hull about the role of the headteachers association, not being a lawful decision-making body, and each academy school having to go through its governing body to make decisions about school meal prices. I want her to confirm that that is her understanding as well. What do the Minister and the Government think about the postcode lottery that has developed in Hull,

with prices in schools varying? How does she feel about one parent taking a child to school and paying 50p a day and another taking their child to a different school down the road and being charged £1.50? Is that what she wants to see happening? Is she aware that there appears to be no restriction on the maximum price that an academy can charge per meal? Does that need to be considered?

The other point is about the efforts made to increase registration of those eligible for free school meals, which obviously is right. We need to ensure that eligible children can access those meals. I am told that the academies are saying that one of the issues in Hull is that the reduced price of school meals acts as a disincentive to getting families signed up for the free school meals that they might well be entitled to. That has an impact on the pupil premium. I am sure that the Minister has looked at that issue already and is concerned about it, so what is her thinking about that? Obviously we want to encourage people to apply for free school meals, but where they are just above the entitlement level—there are a lot of those families in Hull; the working poor—how do we ensure that they can access good, nutritious food at a reasonable cost without causing problems for the school because of the pupil premium policy?

Ms Lyn Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue. I say gently to the Minister that the criteria might be outdated, given what is happening in our communities, with 75% of families in poverty having somebody in work. We should not be stopping children who are experiencing real deprivation having a decent meal each day. I genuinely think that the criteria are outdated, outmoded and need some attention.

Dame Diana Johnson: I echo my hon. Friend's sentiments; that is right. While we need to make sure that money is made available for those children most in need, that particular scheme now needs to be reviewed in the light of what is happening.

Andrew Percy: The hon. Lady will recall that I was on Hull City Council when the free school meal policy was introduced. There was a huge political fight about it. We all wanted to achieve the same thing, but there were big differences. However, the reason for my intervention is to say from the Government side of the House to my hon. Friend the Minister that I, too, believe it is time that we looked at the criteria, for the very reasons that the hon. Member for West Ham (Ms Brown) raised. When I was teaching in Hull, it was not just a case of people who could not afford to send their kids to school with a proper meal; sometimes it was also parents who did not know how to do that. I had kids coming into my classroom who had had chips for breakfast. That is not acceptable. This is not just about the criteria; it is also about how we educate people better to ensure that they are sending kids to school with a proper meal inside them. There is a role for Government here, which is why I would fully support a look at the criteria, but I would also urge my hon. Friend the Minister to do exactly as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson) has suggested and do more to address those struggling families—the working poor, as we refer to them, sometimes a bit patronisingly. I hope that my hon. Friend will, under this new Government, look at that as well.

Dame Diana Johnson: Not for the first time, I find myself in agreement with the hon. Gentleman. I pay tribute to him for the role that he played on Hull City Council. He was an esteemed member of the Conservative group on the council, although there were only two of them.

This has been a useful debate. Elected local councils are responsible and accountable. Alongside them, unelected academies have power but no responsibility. Academies have a vital role to play in the wider community, but there needs to be some responsibility and accountability locally, as well as through the Department. Can we look at whether rebalancing that relationship is necessary for the good of the coming generations upon which our country's future depends?

5.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Michelle Donelan): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson) on securing this important debate. I was pleased to see her receive a damehood in the new year honours list.

The hon. Member has helped to highlight the value of school meals, which play a vital role in ensuring that children are healthy, well nourished and ready to concentrate and learn in the classroom. That is why the Department for Education not only sets school food standards to ensure that meals are healthy but provides free school meals for 1.3 million disadvantaged children, as well as universal infant free school meals for 1.4 million children.

I understand the hon. Member's concerns about what has happened in Hull, which previously subsidised the cost of meals for children who are not eligible for free school meals. I am aware of the local decision to change those subsidies, but I stress that decisions about school food provision are devolved. This decision has been made by the local authority and local primary headteachers, based on their local knowledge and priorities.

To put it in a national context, most parents are asked to cover the full cost of meals for their child. It is important to note, however, that the recent changes in Hull do not affect those children who are already eligible for free school meals. I reassure the hon. Member that we encourage local authorities and school governing boards to give due consideration when making changes if this nature and to consult parents, which means considering the impact of prices.

I am sure that the local authority and primary headteachers will not have taken this decision lightly, and I note that the change is being made incrementally over two years. I have heard the hon. Member's concerns, and I sympathise with them, but my Department and I believe it is absolutely right that school leaders have the freedom to run their schools as they know best.

Dame Diana Johnson: I am grateful for what the Minister is saying. I am interested in this idea that school leaders are acting in their best interests. Of course they are acting in the best interests of their school, but my concern is about the wider public health agenda, which the council has responsibility for, and how best to ensure that schools are fitting into the wider public health benefit that we all want to see.

Michelle Donelan: The hon. Member has highlighted the academies programme's facilitating this, and the Government and I see it as providing opportunities

[Michelle Donelan]

through the key principles of autonomy, accountability and collaboration. Schools are ultimately responsible for delivering the free school meals policy and the actual meals, but the academies programme gives schools the opportunity to collaborate by coming together in strong trusts.

We encourage all academy trusts to build proactive relationships with parents and local communities to create a shared ownership of their school strategy and vision, which is what I think the hon. Member wants to happen. I stress that it is right that decisions are based on the local priorities of the school that has to administer the policy.

Ms Lyn Brown: I have some sympathy with the Minister, as I have sat on the Treasury Bench and have had to deliver uncomfortable news to Opposition Members on things they are campaigning for, but will she meet me and my hon. Friends the Members for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson) and for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) to talk about poverty proofing for schools generally and the kind of advice the Government might be able to provide to councils and schools about how that might proceed? We would find it really useful to talk to her about free school meals and other issues for working families who are struggling because they simply do not have the wherewithal to pay for rent and food. We would very much appreciate an opportunity to talk to her outside this Chamber.

Michelle Donelan: I am more than happy to meet the hon. Member, or any other Member, to discuss this subject or any other within my brief, because these are important topics and there is a lot of mileage in what has been brought up today.

I was going to say that it is reasonable that we empower our local academies to make these decisions. It is also absolutely right that we are targeting our support at the families most in need. I have heard the pleas from those opposite and from my own side questioning the current eligibility criteria, to make sure that we are reaching those who are genuinely the most in need. Our Government have committed to review this once the roll-out of universal credit is finished, and I will ensure that I personally examine the eligibility criteria.

On wider funding, the Government have recognised the pressures that schools have faced and we have listened to teachers. That is why we have recently announced the biggest funding boost for schools in a decade, which will give every school the money it needs for its children. This includes levelling up all primary schools to receive a minimum of £4,000 from 2021-22, so the biggest increases are going to the schools that genuinely most need it.

Mrs Hodgson: I am chair of the all-party group on school food, as I know the Minister is aware. The thing campaigners raise with me all the time is that £2.30 is the amount given per free school meal by the Government. Not only is there the eligibility issue, but campaigners say that this amount should be more in the region of £2.73, in order to meet the real costs. This is part of the school funding thing, but the funding that schools are given towards that meal needs to be uprated. Will she also look at that?

Michelle Donelan: Yes, indeed. We have committed to increase that amount in line with inflation, but we constantly keep it under review.

I want to take this opportunity to set out the critical role that the Department plays in providing healthy, nutritious food for children, which I know Members are passionate about. This is delivered through a range of programmes, many of which are targeted specifically at the most disadvantaged children. This is part of our strong commitment to promoting social mobility and ensuring equality of opportunity for every child.

Jim Shannon: That was a programme on TV last week that specifically talked about food for children in schools. It indicated that there was not an all-round policy across the whole of the United Kingdom whereby all the food had to be nutritious, did not lead to obesity and contained the right numbers of carbohydrates and so on. In other words, we are talking about the sort of food that children need to develop their bodies and minds. The programme indicated that children can get those types of foods in certain areas of the mainland UK but not in all schools. I welcome what the Minister has said about what is going to happen, but how can we make sure that all schools provide the same nutritious food, for the development of the child, both in mind and body?

Michelle Donelan: That is extremely important. National food standards are already in place and schools have to adhere to them; they ensure that food is high quality, healthy and nutritious, and that it is lower in fat and salt. I want personally to look at that issue, to ensure that that is happening across the country. We are going further on this, as our forthcoming update on standards has been produced by the Department and Public Health England, to ensure that we are making the meals as nutritious as possible. Alongside that, our healthy school rating system celebrates schools' efforts to support children in this regard, so we are almost incentivising schools, as well as enforcing this.

We remain committed to ensuring that the most disadvantaged children receive a healthy lunch at school. As I stated, last year about 1.3 million disadvantaged children benefited from this important provision. Included in that number were around 10,000 pupils in the city of Kingston upon Hull. The universal infant free school meals programme, introduced in 2014, has proved successful, and a further 1.4 million infant pupils have received free nutritious meals at lunch time.

We know that free school meal take-up is high, but we want to make sure that as many eligible pupils take up and claim free school meals as possible, so we tried to make it as simple as possible by introducing an eligibility checking system, whereby the local authority and school can easily identify those who are eligible. We have also set up model registration forms to make it as easy as possible for parents, and we have provided more guidance at jobcentres for those who are eligible.

In addition to school meals—it is not just about the lunch time offering; it is also about breakfast, which has been mentioned in this debate—the Government continue to support the expansion of school breakfast clubs, and we are investing up to £35 million to kick-start or improve existing clubs in schools, with a clear aim for them to become fully sustainable over the long term.

We recently announced that the programme has been extended for an additional year until March 2021. Breakfast clubs ensure that children start the day with a nutritious breakfast—I am a strong believer that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North will no doubt be aware that there are already a number of successful breakfast clubs in her constituency.

Our work goes beyond the school gates. The Government's holiday activities and food programme supports disadvantaged children to access healthy food and enriching activities over the school holidays, which is vital. In 2019, we invested £9 million in local holiday activity and food co-ordinators in 11 authorities throughout the UK. They were responsible for funding and overseeing free holiday clubs so that disadvantaged children in those areas could benefit from high-quality provision during the school holidays. Before Christmas, we launched a grant fund for a further £9 million in 2020.

Dame Diana Johnson: Unfortunately, Hull did not receive any of that funding for the school holidays. I am growing increasingly concerned about the problem of holiday hunger. Although it is great that money went to 11 local authority areas, many more local authority areas in the country need assistance. Can the Minister say anything about the plans for this year and whether additional funding will be made available?

Michelle Donelan: We have already announced the further £9 million. I completely agree with the hon. Member about the importance of tackling this issue. In fact, our manifesto included a £1 billion fund for holiday activities, and we are working on what that will encompass—I believe it will encompass some of these issues.¹

I note the work of the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) on the Children's Future Food inquiry. Although it has not been specifically referred to today, I assure her that the Government will respond to the report in due course. A number of interesting suggestions were made in that review. In the meantime, Ministers have addressed some of the most pressing issues by writing to schools to ensure that they are fully aware of their responsibilities in respect of these matters, including the fact that they should provide access to free fresh drinking water at all times.

I take this opportunity to thank the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North again for raising this important issue with me and the House. Our recent funding announcement will be a significant boost to schools, but it is of course right that local authorities and schools have the freedom to decide how they spend their money. I have referred throughout my remarks to how the Government value the continuation of the contribution that school funds make by ensuring that children are healthy and able to concentrate and learn in school. We have an ongoing programme of work that supports our commitments in this policy area, and we are going further by updating the school food standards and expanding our breakfast and holiday club programmes.

I look forward to meeting hon. Members to discuss the details further, but wish to assure them not only that I will respond shortly to the Children's Future Food inquiry, but that we will continue to work closely with the sector over the coming months.

Question put and agreed to.

5.44 pm

House adjourned.

1. [Official Report, 27 January 2020, Vol. 670, c. 4MC.]

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 22 January 2020

[IAN PAISLEY *in the Chair*]

National Productivity

9.30 am

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I beg to move,
That this House has considered national productivity.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley, and I declare an interest as a metropolitan mayor. I am pleased to see the Minister and the shadow Ministers here this morning. I know they all take this issue very seriously, and rightly so, because it affects all corners of our United Kingdom and all our communities.

I wanted to secure this debate because, for too long, the general debate about productivity has been too narrow—it has been too focused on the purely economic, on gross value added and on national statistics. That is the wrong approach. Growing productivity matters to people, matters to our businesses' ability to raise wage levels and matters in terms of the types of job our economy makes available and the prospects we seek to create for our young people.

Being part of a productive economy also builds those intangible bonds between our people and our places, and between our role and our contribution. I hope that I speak for all Members when I say that we all want to live productive lives; we all want to leave the world in a better place than we found it; we all want our children to grow up full of ambition and aspiration and to be confident that we are building a world in which their hopes and dreams can be realised; and we all want an economy that creates wealth, enabling us to invest in our public services, in our people and in our communities.

Raising productivity, which is, in essence, about creating more value with the same or less input, is at the heart of all of those aims. Yet, despite the importance of raising productivity, the size of our economy has for too long been the overriding measure of success. That has led to an approach towards economic growth that has neglected the real long-term drivers of success: skills; investment in research and development; a balanced economy, with opportunities available right across the country; and the enabling infrastructure, the lack of which in many parts of the country means that we lag behind.

Perhaps conveniently, we have been able to ignore the growing weight of evidence that we are in the midst of a productivity crisis. The figures are stark. Since the financial crash, the UK's average productivity growth has been a woeful 0.3% a year. For that reason, the Royal Statistical Society awarded it what in this instance is the unwelcome accolade of the "statistic of the decade".

That is costing us billions in lost economic output, and the situation is even starker outside London and the south-east. Public policy has entrenched a productivity gap between the north and the rest of the UK of around 12%, which costs the economy about £40 billion. The OECD calculates that regional productivity gaps alone account for lost economic growth of around 10%. Looking across the whole UK, according to the Core

Cities Group, which represents cities across the UK, if we brought all our regions up to the UK economic average, we would put around £80 billion into the economy every year. So the current situation is a huge missed opportunity for our people, our businesses and the Exchequer.

There is no silver-bullet solution to tackle the productivity challenge, but the levers to pull are all within our collective grasp, and there are things we can do urgently that will start the process of addressing the national and regional productivity challenges we face. First and foremost, we must win the argument for investing in an active place-based programme of investment that includes every region, city and town across the country. That programme must be focused on investment that is linked to the strengths and capabilities of each individual local area: its people, its businesses and its research institutions.

We must ensure that such investment is better balanced across the UK. Public R&D investment in Oxford, Cambridge and inner west London accounts for 41% of total public R&D spending in the UK. I do not begrudge any of those fine places any of that investment, but we must close the gap between academic research and the implementation of the ideas that we create. That means increasing investment in institutions such as the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre, the Advanced Wellbeing Research Centre and the Olympic Legacy Park in the Sheffield city region. Such institutions connect ideas, innovation and research with real-life business challenges. They are ready-made vehicles through which we can supercharge regional economies, and they must be the focus of greater Government investment.

Around such institutions, we must build deep and pervasive programmes of support, to connect them more effectively with the productive potential of our existing businesses. We are already starting to do that in my own region of South Yorkshire; indeed, I believe we offer a national blueprint that shows how we can turn the productivity challenge around through the creation of innovation districts.

Many hon. Members will have heard of the University of Sheffield's Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre. At the AMRC, the Government, the university and the public sector have invested alongside industry to build an institution that is focused on tackling real-life industrial problems, operating in that sweet spot between academic research and industry, and applying knowledge to problems.

Through the AMRC, we have been able to attract companies such as Boeing, McLaren, Rolls-Royce and many others to our region. We have built our inward investment offer around that approach. We have built the AMRC training centre, which helps to connect our young people to the opportunities that are being created. We have started to develop supply chain programmes that connect small businesses in the region to the opportunities being created by larger manufacturers. We are also looking to invest in the enabling infrastructure, to enable our workers to get to work by rail, tram and bike. That approach is building a true industrial commons, where academia, the public sector and businesses come together in a way that puts us in the vanguard of the reindustrialisation of the north.

However, there is so much more we can do. To create transformational productivity growth, we must embed this culture of innovation and ideas more broadly, across all our businesses, from sandwich-makers to steel

[Dan Jarvis]

manufacturers, and from education technology to energy production. If the Government are looking to establish a Massachusetts-style institute of technology for the north, they should look no further than South Yorkshire and the assets that we already have in place.

What we need right across the country is the ambition, matched with the investment, to scale up that approach and scale it out. Underpinning it all, the Government must take care of the fundamentals of any modern, regionally balanced and progressive economy. According to the Core Cities Group, deprivation is the cause of up to 40% of low regional productivity. Therefore, economic policy must sit right alongside our social regeneration and skills policies. We must tackle the issue of vocational and technical education head-on, and the Government must reverse a decade of under-investment in vocational education.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate and on all the work he has done on this issue. He is absolutely right to highlight the lack of funding, because it has had a huge impact on areas such as ours, in Barnsley. Does he agree that skills are the missing link in South Yorkshire? We need more investment in vocational education, so that all kids can access courses.

Dan Jarvis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and parliamentary neighbour for that intervention. She is precisely right about all of that. We are seeking to do a huge amount of work across South Yorkshire, working with our further education colleges, our universities, our training providers and our businesses. I am incredibly concerned to ensure that, within our local enterprise partnership, we have the requisite knowledge, skills and experience to develop our skills sector. It is a fundamental and crucial pillar of our strategic economic plan, but it requires more thought and certainly more investment, as my hon. Friend rightly suggests. I give her an assurance that it is right at the top of my list of priorities, and I look forward to working with her and with colleagues right across South Yorkshire to ensure we have the investment in our skills system that we so need and deserve.

I was just making the point about the importance of investment in vocational and technical education. We need to ensure that we create parity of esteem across academic and vocational education routes so that we give businesses, our young people and their parents confidence in the skills system. We must better connect our businesses to the skills system. Notwithstanding the excellence of our civil servants and the capabilities and competences of Ministers of this Government, there is no way that skills, innovation, enterprise and transport systems can best be brought together at the national level. I know the Minister understands that.

To make all that happen, our places have to be given the right tools, so we must empower our places up and down the country to build their own industrial commons. Following years of austerity and systemic neglect, the manifesto on which the Government were elected contained a raft of ambitious infrastructure projects and a promise to level up investment across Britain, much of which was aimed at voters in the north of England.

If the Government are serious about building a collaborative, sustainable and inclusive economy where everyone shares the benefits, reversing the prolonged stagnation in productivity should feature at the very top of their agenda. The way to do that is by redistributing power to our nation's regions through a programme of meaningful devolution. Westminster needs to give us the tools to do the job. I say this with the greatest respect to colleagues in the Government, but it is time to let go, because it is no coincidence that a country that has this level of political and economic centralisation also has some of the lowest levels of productivity growth and some of the highest regional inequalities. That is not good for the state of our nation. Nor is it good for the state of our public finances or the health, happiness and wellbeing of our communities. Let us make a change.

9.42 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is nice to be involved in a debate anywhere in the House, but especially in Westminster Hall. I thank the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) for setting the scene. As he does so often, he spoke in a cool and calm voice, giving all the detail and evidence that backs up the case. He does it well, and it is a pleasure to be involved with him. I see the Minister in his place. I think this is the second time he has responded in Westminster Hall, and we look forward to his comments.

As the hon. Member for Barnsley Central said—it was one of his first sentences—this debate is all about how we help all the regions in the UK to benefit from national productivity. Productivity is certainly an intricate subject, with many facets. As always, I am very thankful to the Library for the briefing note it prepared, which clearly makes the point that while we are up on productivity from this time last year, the overall increase is not satisfactory. The hon. Gentleman talked about ensuring that we improve productivity in areas or regions where it could be better. Productivity rose by 0.4% in the third quarter of 2019 compared with the previous quarter, but it was only 0.1 percentage points higher than a year ago, so the rise is not as significant or as positive as we would like it to be. The slight pick-up in productivity growth should not obscure the continued weakness in the overall trend. We welcome any increase—we have clearly seen an increase, and it is important we recognise that as a positive facet—but at the same time we have to recognise that it is a bit slow.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the reasons, if not the central reason, for the decline in productivity has been the past three years of uncertainty about Brexit, and that now that that is—hopefully—departing fast over the ridgeline, productivity will improve in all the regions, but particularly in Northern Ireland, the north of England and Scotland?

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The debate should not be centred just on England, but on all the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and how we can all grow. Historically, UK labour productivity has grown by around 2% a year, but since the 2008-09 recession it has stagnated. To be clear, I am a Brexiteer and I look forward to the possibilities of Brexit and leaving on 31 January. Even though we in Northern Ireland have not got the deal that we wanted, we must be pragmatic and look forward to where the

possibilities are. Labour productivity in quarter 3 in 2019 was only 2.4% above what it was more than 11 years ago in Q4. That was the pre-recession peak.

We could play the blame game and blame an ageing population. We could continue to blame the banks for the banking crisis. Some will blame Brexit. People always look for someone to blame—that is the nature of life—but in this case we want to be more positive. We could more accurately blame the behaviour in this place and the refusal to honour the vote of the people, point to the uncertainty that the trading partners have been displaying and point to the new leadership regimes in trading partners, but doing that is now pointless; we have to look positively towards the future, where we are and what we are trying to achieve. With that in mind, there are the possibilities after Brexit for trade deals with many parts of the world, and the Minister might give us some detail of that.

There are many possibilities and positives that we should be looking at to see how we can all gain. We in Northern Ireland want to participate in that gain, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) said. We want to see what is coming our way, so that everyone in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland benefits. We must look at how we can increase productivity throughout the United Kingdom and how we can realise those possibilities and new markets.

I put on record my thanks for the hard work of my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) and others who played a huge part in securing the future of Harland and Wolff, and indeed the successful sale of Bombardier, or Shorts, as we would all know it and so affectionately still call it in our part of the country. Both those businesses were in doubt not because of the quality of the service or what they manufacture, but because of the uncertainty in the market at that time. It was hard work that secured those businesses, so I put on record my thanks to my hon. Friend for all that he did in relation to that.

At that time, the Government stepped into that gap to help my hon. Friend because the Northern Ireland Assembly was not functioning, but the Northern Ireland Assembly is now functioning. We welcome it being back in place and offer the Minister for the Department for the Economy, Diane Dodds, all the best. Has the Minister had the opportunity yet to speak to the Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly? If not, when will that happen? It is important that we communicate regionally about where we want to be and how we can benefit each other. More of that needs to be done, and the start of that is ensuring that as much Government business as possible is carried out by British-owned, British-supplied and British-staffed factories.

My constituency of Strangford, like yours, Mr Paisley, has a burgeoning agrifood sector. Manufacturers are not just looking within the United Kingdom to sell their produce. Sales go down south, as far as the middle east and out to the States as well. The businesses involved include Willowbrook Foods, Mash Direct and Rich Sauces, along with Pritchitts and Lakeland Dairies. Probably 1,600 jobs depend on those factories, and then there are all the farmers that feed into those companies as well. We have a thriving pharmaceutical sector, with Eakin in Ballystockart outside Comber leading the way.

It wants new opportunities in markets across the seas. We need a close working relationship between Ministers here and those in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Light engineering is prominent in North Antrim and elsewhere. Cooke Bros is a small company that does magnificent work through its engineering firm. Again, such companies need help from the Northern Ireland Assembly as well as from central Government here. Bus orders should no longer be fulfilled in Europe because of EU regulations, but by our own Wrightbus. I put on the record our thanks to you, Mr Paisley, for your hard work and endeavours in that respect. We all note the reasons why that firm was helped from going under: by finding a new buyer, retaining some of the jobs and having a really good base for the future. Wrightbus has a global reputation for high quality and reasonable prices. It should win on the level playing field. Such companies from our own areas have done very well, and we want to see how they go in future.

As I said in this Chamber yesterday, I agree with the industrial strategy. Now is the time to invest in ourselves. We want to be more productive and we want to compete globally, so we need help to make sure we can do that. We can be proactive and positive. When it comes to promoting ourselves on the world stage, we should do it under the flag of Great Britain, the Union flag, because that is our flag—that flag of our country collectively. I know the Department does do that and it is really proactive, but I want to make sure we can build upon it. We must show that we have belief in ourselves. We have to encourage employers to take on employees in their 50s. We have those who perhaps need help in that age bracket, so we should try to help. With the increased pension age, people will be in work longer. We must encourage businesses to look at skills and not simply age. By the same token, we must also ensure that we raise generations of skilled workers with a good work ethic and a healthy work-life balance. We have a very good skilled workforce in Northern Ireland, as we have in other parts of the United Kingdom. Again, how do we build on that?

On 31 January, we will turn to a fresh page in the history of this great nation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We need to take the opportunity to make better decisions, encourage better behaviour and simply do better by our own constituents. We must start productivity reform by being productive in this place and giving better than we have given thus far.

9.52 am

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) on an intelligent, measured and thoughtful speech that went to the nub of the issue. We have a new Parliament and there has been a lot of change, but some things never change. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) set himself up in Westminster Hall in 2010 and is now claiming squatters' rights because he speaks here so often. *[Laughter.]*

Before I begin my comments on productivity, I have to express my disappointment in the attendance on the Tory Benches today. A couple of weeks ago, a large number of Tories were elected in the north. In this

[Chris Evans]

debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central focused his remarks on the north. I am disappointed to see that many of those representing northern constituencies are not here today to speak up for their constituents. This debate is important.

The prize-winning global economist, Paul Krugman, wrote in 1994:

“Productivity isn’t everything, but in the long run it is almost everything.”

The words Krugman wrote 26 years ago are as important today as they were then. Productivity is the key driver of economic growth in the UK. As the Bank of England chief economist, Andy Haldane, said in a speech in June 2018:

“It is a terrible word, as it leaves most people dazed and confused. Few are those who can define it and fewer still those who can measure it. Yet it has entered the popular lexicon and with good reason: the one thing we do know is that productivity is crucial to our pay and living standards over the longer run. Productivity is what pays for pay rises. And productivity is what puts the life into living standards.”

Productivity is no higher now than it was just before the 2008 financial crash. Annual growth of 2.1% was recorded during the decade before the crash; had the pre-crisis trend persisted, productivity would now be 20% higher—a stark statistic. With the Office for National Statistics releasing figures in November showing labour productivity—a measure of economic output per hour of work—slumping by 0.5% in the three months to June compared with the same period a year ago, it is the worst performance since mid-2014. We now face a situation whereby low productivity is no longer a mere blip but endemic to our economy.

Productivity stagnation since the crisis has been concentrated in a small number of industries: finance, telecoms, energy and management consulting. Over the past 18 months, the issue has been heightened by higher employment in less productive service sectors. In the past decade, we have arrived at a productivity puzzle that can be put down to three things. First, the UK is less productive than similar countries, most importantly, France and Germany. It is a long-standing feature of the British economy. In about 1960, France and Germany overtook us in terms of output per hour. To put it more colloquially, the people living in France will have been more productive by Thursday lunchtime than will the people living in Britain by Friday teatime. Secondly, productivity growth has slowed since the 2008 financial crash. Before 2008, output per hour worked was increasing by 1%. Since the crisis, it has grown by 2% in just one decade. Lastly, we have a third element. The slowdown in productivity growth has been more rapid and steeper in the UK than in any other developed economy. Before the crash, Britain was near the top of the G7; since then, it has been near the bottom.

To add some context, across the board companies’ capital spending is only 5% above its pre-crisis peak compared with a 60% increase over the decade after the 1980s recession, and 30% following the 1990s slowdown. In the immediate aftermath of the 2008 crisis, business investment was constrained by some companies’ inability to borrow money as banks shored up their balance sheets. That is less of a problem now because most banks have recapitalised. Other factors, such as a lack

of worthwhile investment or uncertainty about the economic outlook must now be playing a greater role in deterring companies from more capital spending.

The financial crash saw the election of a coalition Government. For all the talk of paying down the deficit or paying the national debt off—they are mixed up—the simple fact is that it was the Bank of England that used monetary policy to see off another recession. Fiscal policy, unfortunately, was largely ignored. Quantitative easing and low interest rates kept unemployment low, but had a huge effect on productivity. It is argued that low interest rates have sustained zombie companies. Record low interest rates have cut companies’ borrowing costs, allowing some highly unproductive companies—so-called zombies—to avoid going bust. That appears to be borne out by how the rise in the number of companies going into administration was much less dramatic in the past recession.

Monetary policy was very different in the most recent big economic slowdowns compared with the previous ones. The Bank of England cut interest rates to 0.5 per cent, making it easier for companies to finance their loans. By contrast, interest rates were held above 10% during the recession of the early ‘90s. However, it is not only unproductive companies that have high levels of debt relative to their profits—leverage that puts them at risk of becoming insolvent when monetary policy inevitably tightens.

Both high-productivity and low-productivity companies have high debt ratios.

“Higher interest rates hit both types of company,”

said Andy Haldane, the chief economist at the Bank of England in March 2018. Interest rates explain part but not all of the productivity stagnation. An increase in the number of people looking for work, which has helped to hold down wage demands, and uncertainty about the economic outlook since the Brexit vote might have encouraged companies to hire more staff rather than invest in technology. The question should be asked: in the wake of a lost decade of low productivity, can the country solve its own productivity puzzle? Many of the problems that have come down to productivity come from a skills shortage. Getting the right workers with the right skills to work efficiently and effectively is a simplistic and obvious way to boost performance, but it is easier said than done.

I was interested in what the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said about Northern Ireland. I could not help but think that Northern Ireland, the north-east and Wales have the same problem: we are heavily reliant on the public sector to provide jobs. We have a smaller private sector than other regions. It is very difficult to increase entrepreneurship and encourage people to set up their businesses. The vast majority of businesses set up in Northern Ireland, the north-east and Wales are microbusinesses, which provide employment for one person. The fact is that we do not have a history of entrepreneurship. It is vital that as part of careers advice in schools we talk to children about setting up their own business and employing people. I talk to so many people who have the ambition of setting up a business, inspired by “Dragons’ Den” and “The Apprentice”, but when they go to do it, even though they have a fantastic idea, they find it extremely difficult.

The Government need to educate people on self-employment and give them the confidence to be self-employed.

We talk about skills shortages. In my constituency, we have General Dynamics, a defence contractor from the States, where the average wage is £40,000—high-skill, high-tech jobs. We also have Axiom, another high-level engineering plant, and Unilever. They are all household names and big blue-chip companies. They will not have a problem upskilling their workers. On the other side of the coin, a small engineering outfit will need its workers to work and will not have time to upskill them. It is a truism of society today that people will not have a job for life; everybody needs to upskill continuously. That is why it is important that the Government introduce a skills levy, to allow companies to upskill their workers. In the short term, that will cost money, but in the long term it will work because we will have a more highly skilled workforce. If we ask businesses to invest in technology, a small business with fewer than five employees will have to decide between machinery or skills. That is where the Government need to step up to the plate.

The second area that we need to look at is even more obvious than upskilling. Technology has driven every change in society. From the first industrial revolution to the fourth revolution now, technology is at the forefront and the cutting edge. The biggest changes in society have come about because of technology. Even today, the most productive companies in this country are those that have invested in cutting-edge technology. The figures bear that out: on average, those that have cutting-edge technology are up to 6% more productive than other companies. Again, the Government could step in. Yes, we could have high levels of connectivity and faster broadband, particularly in rural areas, and such areas as Northern Ireland, the north-east and Wales, which I have talked about. However, there also has to be an effort from companies themselves. They need to utilise that technology, which feeds into my earlier point that they need to have the skills to do so.

Low productivity is the biggest problem facing our economy. We have high employment, but people feel unhappy because they are not feeling it through their wages. We can say that low productivity is a fact of our economy, but if we have the political will and we harness the skills and energy of the British people, the next decade can be this country's most productive.

10.3 am

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Paisley, and to speak in the debate introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis), who made a characteristically serious contribution.

Those of us who have participated in economic debates over the past decade, as I have had the great fortune to do in this House, have been talking about productivity for some time; yet the problem is not resolved. Today, we are talking about national productivity, and we have heard about regional disparity, which is certainly a problem for our economy. The divergence between some of the regions of the United Kingdom is greater than between some of the regions of the European Union as a whole, so if we think that Brexit will solve all our problems we are in for a bad surprise. However, that is not the reason I rise to speak.

It is true that investment in our economy, particularly from the private sector, is in a chronic and parlous state. We need a greater contribution to the future potential of our economy, and as an ex-employee of Network Rail nobody believes more than I do in the power of infrastructure, particularly trains, to do great good for our economy. Unfortunately for us all, infrastructure investment is necessary but not sufficient for the future good of our economy.

I want to make a different contribution on how we should look at productivity in the UK, because it is important to understand and get to the root of the issue. When we look at who does the jobs in the least productive firms—those jobs that add less to our national productivity—the answer is women. Women work in jobs that are, on average, 22% less productive than those that men do. Why? It is because they work in those areas of our economy that are the least productive, such as retail and hospitality, where productivity growth has been slow for many years.

As a result, women do the worst-paid work. We can ask ourselves whether women do those jobs because of gender stereotypes, whether those jobs are paid less because of gender stereotypes, or whether investment in those areas is so poor because of gender stereotypes, but the truth is that that is the situation we face. I simply ask the Minister to point to what the Government strategy will be to approach that, because if they do not approach the question of productivity with a focus on gender we will not solve the problem.

Women are also less likely to work in high-productive firms. We have heard a lot about advanced manufacturing. It is certainly the case that the most productive firms are those that invest heavily in technology. I do not think that it is fair that half the population has much less of a chance of working in the sectors of employment in our country that are likely to offer a higher pay packet.

In order to understand the question, we need to think about what productivity actually is. As has been said, it is a measure of how much value is added to the economy with the time that we have. That is why the question of time is so important. How we improve productivity depends on who decides what we do with our time. According to the data, women's productivity really drops off around child-bearing age, because that is the point at which women have less of a choice about what they do with their time.

Childcare responsibilities still fall heavily on women, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies has found that access to childcare is a central problem for the productivity of our country. If we focus just on putting pounds in the ground—building new railways and road links, and investing in heavy infrastructure—we will fail to solve the productivity crisis in our country for yet another generation.

The other aspect is about power inside low-productivity firms. It is about time management, and the poor quality of management that we have had in the United Kingdom for many years in low-productivity firms, where people do not have the power to say, "Actually, I would like to manage my time so that I can be out of the business for one day a week, so that I can learn and upgrade my skills." Again, women are most likely to be unable to do that, because of childcare responsibilities and, increasingly, responsibilities looking after older people in our society. Our social care system is collapsing

[Alison McGovern]

before our eyes, and when that system collapses, it means that women cannot get to work because they are busy looking after older relatives as well as children.

In summary, if national productivity is to mean anything and if the Government are to have any kind of strategy to improve the productivity of this country, we must recognise that one half of our population are unable to take the steps they need to improve their working life and their ability to contribute to our economy. If we do not recognise that, we will fail yet again.

10.10 am

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Paisley, and I thank everybody who has come to contribute to today's debate and try to resolve the productivity issue that is plaguing the UK economy. The hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) pointed out that there is a real need for investment in skills, research and development, creating a balanced economy and infrastructure, and also a need to tackle the deprivation that holds back so many people in so many communities from accessing and participating in the economy.

Since the Scottish National party came to power in Scotland, productivity there has grown three times faster than in the UK—a rate of 1% a year, compared with the UK average which, as the hon. Member for Barnsley Central said, is 0.3%. When we consider that we have done that against the backdrop of austerity, and more recently against the backdrop of Brexit, it is all the more impressive. We are doing things such as encouraging businesses to sign up to the Scottish business pledge. According to its website, 722 businesses have now signed up to that pledge, including firms of all different sizes, large and small, from multinationals such as Coca-Cola and Deloitte to The Good Spirits Co., which is a small shop in my Glasgow constituency. Hearts football club has also signed up to that pledge, so a range of different organisations have signed up to it.

The Minister will be interested to hear that the Scottish business pledge has three core elements: payment of a real living wage, not the Chancellor's pretend living wage but one that people can actually afford to live on; action on the gender pay gap; and no inappropriate use of zero-hours contracts within the companies that sign up. Once companies have met those three core pledges, they are encouraged to work towards further elements of the Scottish business pledge, including environmental impact, having a skilled and diverse workforce, workforce engagement, innovation, internationalisation, community and prompt payment, all of which are important to businesses of all sizes.

I encourage the Minister to look at that pledge; I believe it has been a hugely important factor in improving productivity rates in Scotland, because businesses are being asked to sign up to something that will make them, or encourage them to, act responsibly. That pledge also has a wider effect on the economy, as those businesses spread the good word and encourage more and more people, including those in their supply chains, to sign up to it. This is not just an issue of business growth, but of the wellbeing of employees, which has a huge impact on

productivity and how people feel when they turn up to work in the morning. The Minister needs to look at that further as well.

The Scottish Government are taking other measures, such as the Scottish National Investment Bank legislation which, excitingly, passed unanimously in the Scottish Parliament yesterday. The Scottish National Investment Bank seeks to increase innovation, give support to small and medium-sized enterprises and build an inclusive, high-tech economy, which is incredibly important. We can see how investment banks such as KfW, which was set up post-war in Germany, have changed, worked for and invested in their economies; for example, KfW has changed housing so that investment in that sector works towards greener standards. There are real things that we can learn, and it seems bizarre that the UK Government at that time set up an investment bank in Germany but never thought to set one up for itself, when we could use it so much.

The hon. Member for Barnsley Central mentioned the importance of R&D. The Scottish Government have invested £37 million in R&D and have a target of doubling business investment by 2025, which should go some way to make sure that people are investing in the businesses, technology and infrastructure that they have, as well as in people. We have a green new deal that will harness the power of that Scottish National Investment Bank, including a £3 billion green investment portfolio and a green growth accelerator to attract green finance to Scotland and bring the inward investment that will help drive its economy. We in Scotland have also recognised the importance of inclusive growth, and have been recognised internationally for our approach to inclusive growth. If an economy leaves people behind, it cannot be a particularly good or productive economy, never mind a happy one.

The Scottish Government are reviewing measures to tackle historic disparity. It would be useful to hear whether the Minister has any further information about things like the shared prosperity fund, because European money has been absolutely crucial to addressing that historic disparity in a number of ways. In areas of Scotland where we have been working so hard over so many years to try to correct that post-industrial Thatcher legacy, European money has been crucial, not just for constructing buildings and other things, but putting money into training programmes, universities, colleges and infrastructure. During last week's education debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) mentioned the importance of college education in Scotland. I have City of Glasgow College in my constituency, which now has two campuses in the city centre, and looks and feels like a beacon that will attract people to enter. It does not sit, up on Cathedral Street, with any less dignity than the University of Strathclyde, which neighbours it, and that is important for how people feel when they are accessing those education institutions.

Our lack of control over wages in Scotland is a real challenge to productivity. I have already mentioned the Chancellor's pretend living wage; I am yet to hear a reasonable explanation as to why a 16-year-old starting in the same job and on the same day as a 25-year-old is worth over £4 less, which is all they are entitled to. The majority of people in those low-paid jobs will be women, and they will be in part-time work as well, which makes

it very difficult for those women to bring more money in to support their family and to bring along the next generation. They will be struggling. As the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) said, it is crucial that we look at women as part of this productivity issue.

I attended the graduation ceremony at the Open University, which plays a huge role in enabling people who might not have been able to access more traditional forms of degree to obtain skills. At the end of the graduation ceremony, the participants in the room who were receiving their degrees were asked to put up their hands if they had children, had a disability, had caring responsibilities, or were working while they were doing their degree. Hands went up everywhere. I am pretty sure that no other graduation ceremony would look like that, so I ask the Minister to consider the importance of the Open University in ensuring that productivity is increased.

I also ask the Minister to review the mechanisms that are currently holding people back, particularly universal credit. Universal credit makes it incredibly difficult for people to change their job and improve their circumstances, because they are penalised when they try to do so. For example, the two-child limit traps working families who perhaps started off in life with three children, and were working quite well until something went wrong. It makes it incredibly difficult for them to get back on track when they cannot get enough money to feed their family; they end up in a trap that they cannot work their way out of. The childcare element of universal credit should be paid up front, rather than in arrears, because that is a barrier to families taking on work. It makes it very difficult for families to access employment when they have to pay those childcare fees themselves and claim them back. Other elements of universal credit, such as conditionality, sanctions, and the fact that if a woman is added as a second earner in a household it automatically has an impact on household benefits, also make it difficult for those families to improve their circumstances.

Other hon. Members have mentioned entrepreneurship, self-employment and skills shortages, all of which are important to addressing productivity. Looking ahead, all those things will be made worse by Brexit. I disagree with the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon); he always views things with great optimism, but I am afraid that I do not share his optimism about Brexit, because it will have an impact on investment and on skills. At the moment, skills shortages are filled by EU nationals' being able to work and travel freely. I fear that the absence of those people, who are running businesses and are in our schools and our education system, will have a significant impact on our ability to improve the productivity of this country, and that impact will continue for many years to come.

Interestingly, the Chartered Management Institute sent a briefing to the debate. Its research, which is backed by the Bank of England, mentions

"a long tail of poorly managed and unproductive organisations"—a real issue, which the Minister would do well to address. It gives a figure of 2.4 million "accidental and unskilled managers" and has worked on management apprenticeships to try to ensure that firms do not just put people into management roles without that support. An interesting aspect of the debate is to ask what more can be done to support those managers—those people who end up in

positions of influence—and make sure they understand that their roles are important, that they are well supported, and that they can play an important and active role in their organisation to make it more productive.

In Scotland we look to the experience of the Scandinavian countries, which have happier and, by all definitions, more productive and equal societies. I look at them with envy, because they have the full set of economic powers that small independent countries can have and they do well for their people—not just for their economies—as a result. I imagine what Scotland, as an independent European nation, could do with the full set of economic levers to move towards being a more inclusive, fair and prosperous country for all our people. That is very much something to aspire to, but which we cannot fully reach at the moment in the UK.

10.21 am

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Paisley. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) for securing the debate. He made an excellent contribution, as did the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and my hon. Friends the Members for Islwyn (Chris Evans) and for Wirral South (Alison McGovern). I genuinely enjoyed listening to them. I say that every time I close a debate, but it was true today, because if I had my way, we would be talking about this subject every day of the week.

All hon. Members have correctly said that the No. 1 objective of any Government must be to ensure that the country's economy works to provide the maximum prosperity and living standards for all parts of the country and all our constituents. That is what we all want, which means that we should celebrate what we do well as a country and the optimism that the Government are asking us to embrace. It also means, however, that we must be honest about what is not working well and what needs to get better, and then discuss what the solutions might be. In the UK, productivity is clearly one of those significant problems.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central said, according to the figures from the House of Commons Library, UK labour productivity has historically grown by about 2% a year, but it has stagnated since the recession in 2008-09. The level of labour productivity in the third quarter of last year was only marginally above what it was 11 years earlier, in 2007. We might look at the impact of Brexit and the uncertainty that was mentioned earlier, but we must acknowledge that the problem is more deep-seated.

It is normal to expect a recession of the depth and severity that the financial crisis brought about to have an impact on productivity, but we would expect that to last only for a certain amount of time. The fact that we are still only just recovering to pre-crisis levels is a deeply worrying indicator and does not reflect well on how the Government have handled the recovery. Overall, UK productivity is still 16% below the average for the rest of the G7 countries. As hon. Members have said, that matters a great deal. In a highly competitive global environment, we are not match-fit. We are about to voluntarily increase our barriers to trade—at least in the short term—with our major trading partner, the European Union, as Brexit occurs, so if we do not improve productivity, we face a challenging future.

[Jonathan Reynolds]

There are many reasons for that underperformance. Something so persistently bad must be deep-rooted, and many hon. Members have put forward accurate analyses and persuasive arguments about what they want to be addressed. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central talked about skills and devolution, and I agree entirely. My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn talked about capital investment and monetary policy, which was spot on. I particularly agreed with the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South about gender disparity and the need to look at issues such as childcare alongside capital infrastructure projects.

I will talk about three additional areas where we need decisive action: transport, automation and business support. I acknowledge, however, that there is a counter-argument to what I will say. Some people will put the UK's poor productivity down to our higher employment rate. In other words, some might say that, by definition, having more economically active people than France, for example, comes at the expense of higher productivity—so a country could feasibly have a smaller but more productive workforce that exists alongside significant unemployment.

We cannot be satisfied by that explanation. In 2018, the employment rate among people of working age was the highest ever in this country, as we have often heard from Ministers in Treasury debates. But in 2018 the employment rate was also the highest ever in Canada, Germany, Australia and 22 other OECD countries. The truth is that the Government have been incredibly fortunate to be in office at a time when technology has driven up employment rates in all developed countries. We should therefore be in no doubt that we have serious work to do.

On transport, I will shamelessly talk about my own constituency. Every hon. Member present has a sound grasp of north-west geography, but for people who are not aware, Stalybridge, Hyde, Mossley and Dukinfield sit about 10 miles east of Manchester city centre. My constituency's other border is where Derbyshire begins. It should take about 15 minutes to get from Stalybridge train station to Manchester city centre, but that can happen only if the train turns up. Every single day—today is no different—I get up, turn on Twitter, and see my constituents telling me, rightly, that they are not getting the service they deserve. If I say, “Brexit is coming. We've all got to roll up our sleeves and improve this nation's productivity,” they will reasonably suggest that the first thing to do to achieve that might be to give them a train service that gets them to work on time.

The problem is about much more than underperformance by the franchisee, although that is evident too. It is an endemic problem of inadequate infrastructure outside the south-east of England. Not that long ago, my constituency was full of big firms such as ICI, Christy, which produces towels, and Total Petrochemicals—real industrial giants—that employed the vast majority of local people.

Jim Shannon: On that point, there were people on the news this morning who were unable to get a train on time. One lady, who started a new job in Manchester in the new year, had been late to work every day since—not because of her, but because the trains were late. If there

is going to be connectivity and dependability on the train service, that service must ensure that the trains are on time and that the number of trains can grow, so that people are not saying, as they were this morning, “If the train doesn't go on time, I'm going to go by car.”

Jonathan Reynolds: I could not agree more. I am delighted to hear about new jobs being created in Manchester, but not that people are struggling to get to them.

My point about the state of infrastructure, and not just the short or medium-term performance of the franchise operators, is that, not that long ago, people said that modern communications technology would make place less relevant to economic development, that we would all be able to work from home, that it would improve productivity, and that we would see the benefits of that. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central made the point, however, that place is as crucial as ever, because cities have generated the jobs of the future, particularly in the knowledge industries and in services. Our transport system is only now trying to catch up.

If we cannot give people an adequate journey over 10 miles, we have no chance of linking up the north, the midlands or South Yorkshire more comprehensively. From Stalybridge and Hyde, people should be able to go to work by public transport in not just Manchester, but Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield and, of course, Barnsley. That is why I have always championed transport projects in my constituency, such as electrifying the Huddersfield rail line, which the Government are still prevaricating about and telling us might be partly possible; the Mottram-Tintwistle bypass, which would make it easier to get to Barnsley; and the extension of successful transport networks, such as the Metrolink tram network. That is also why we need schemes such as HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail. I say to the Minister that those two projects are complementary, not in competition. They will require major transport investment, but it will be worth it.

Secondly, I want to talk about automation. Many people fear the rise of automation and worry that it will destroy jobs and create huge and painful upheaval. I understand those concerns; I grew up in the north-east in the 1980s, which was a time of tremendous upheaval. We did not deal with those changes well, but, in the right hands and with the right leadership, automation makes the country more productive and more prosperous, not less. The problem in the UK is that we have not enough automation, rather than too much. The International Federation of Robotics notes that, in 2018, there were 71 robot units in the UK for every 10,000 manufacturing employees. The comparative figure in Japan was 303, in Germany, 309, and in South Korea, 631. We need more ambition with technology, not less. It is amazing that, until very recently, one 10th of all the fax machines in the world were in use in the NHS. I would like to see the Government lead on a managed automation plan as part of their industrial strategy, to drive up the use of new technology, and alongside that, have a technology displacement fund to support workers with the skills and training they would need if they faced displacement through new technology.

I also want to talk about business support, because as well as the things the Government need to do to improve productivity, decisions that individual firms make clearly

have a big impact, based on the leadership and training they possess. The previous Chancellor, Philip Hammond, used to mention that a lot. There is some excellent work already happening. Many Members will be familiar with Be the Business, the business-led organisation that works with peers to improve and benchmark productivity performance. I am impressed with its work, but I wonder whether it could be taken further. Could Be the Business be the basis for a new social partnership or standing organisation to further expand on that work?

I hope this is one of many debates we will have on this subject in this Parliament, but I want to sound a word of warning. We are told the Government want to ban the word “Brexit” in an attempt to present it as being done, but, in reality, so many of the debates in this Parliament will be related to our exit from the European Union. The impact of future trade deals, in particular, will require serious debate about which sectors will be prioritised and which will be severely disrupted. The announcements we have had so far suggest there will be no substantive deal covering services of any kind, especially financial services, and that, on goods, the just-in-time supply chains that the automotive and aerospace manufacturers depend on will be significantly disrupted. Those sectors are where productivity is currently strongest. For instance, the Nissan car factory in Sunderland has a claim to being the most efficient in the world. If all of us here today are in agreement that national productivity must be improved, we must also make sure we do not lose the good sectors that we have.

We should work to improve the UK’s productivity where we can, but we should not take poor decisions that would make our productivity and therefore our prosperity and the living standards of our constituents much worse. I look forward to what the Minister has to tell us about the Government’s plans in this area.

10.32 am

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Simon Clarke): I begin by echoing the thanks of all Members to the hon. and gallant Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) for calling today’s debate on an issue that goes to the heart of so many of the issues facing our economy and our society. I congratulate him on his key role in progressing the devolution deal for South Yorkshire, which we all hope will help to unlock significant productivity benefits for the people of his region. I know he shares this Government’s view that devolution across the nations and regions of the United Kingdom can boost productivity across the country, and we look forward to working together to achieve that.

Giving power to local people on the ground is undoubtedly the best way to make the most of every area’s unique strengths and to confront their unique challenges. That is why since 2014 the Treasury has led negotiations with several city regions across the country to strike landmark deals with eight places as part of a devolution revolution. The slogan might have changed, but the metro mayors are now delivering on local priorities. Tees Valley, where I live, is home to the South Tees Development Corporation, which is regenerating the former SSI site at Redcar. Manchester, the home of the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds), has a focus on trams. We are talking about Northern Powerhouse Rail connecting up the regions better. Liverpool has its rail networks, as the hon.

Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) alluded to, which are key to driving the benefits that we all want. Our commitment to enabling local people, who know their areas best, to be the masters of their own economic destiny could not be stronger.

We saw further progress just last week, as South Yorkshire moved forward with its own deal that agreed £900 million of new Government funding over 30 years for investment in local priorities identified by the Mayor and his combined authority, not by Westminster. I will be travelling to Leeds next week to hold talks with West Yorkshire’s leaders on a mayoral devolution deal for Leeds city region. We are determined to build on Leeds city region’s strengths in digital, financial services and the creative sectors, as we level up and share the success of the opportunities ahead. We will put our money where our mouth is for the right agreement. I will go to Leeds next week in search of that deal.

We know that Britain is currently too centralised and that solving the productivity puzzle will need us to think differently. We cannot just sit in Whitehall, pull a lever and cross our fingers—I completely understand that. People want control over their lives to come up with their own plans and, crucially, to be able to put them into action more quickly than the machinery of central Government sometimes allows. We need to give them that. We are hugely committed to making devolution to Sheffield city region a success. We look forward to continuing to work closely with regional leaders to build an economy that works for everyone by improving connectivity, strengthening skills, supporting enterprise and innovation and promoting trade to ensure that the people of South Yorkshire benefit from the powers and investment envisaged in the deal.

Clearly, such issues transcend the borders of England. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) referred to Northern Ireland, and I am delighted that we have managed to get devolution back up and running at Stormont. It is crucial to ensuring that all parts of the community in Northern Ireland feel the benefits of renewed growth and renewed control over their own destiny. I very much look forward to picking up talks with the new Ministers there as part of our efforts to make sure that our policies and theirs work as closely as they can for our shared benefit.

In her powerful speech for the SNP, the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) mentioned the UK shared prosperity fund. Obviously, we are determined to make sure that that is delivered correctly; we need to take the time to get that right. I confirm that we will be setting out our full plans at the comprehensive spending review later this year. That will be the moment when we start unveiling how that will work and give people the clarity that they need to make the investment decisions over the course of the years ahead, as we transition out of the European Union.

Alison Thewliss: The Minister says “correctly”. His definition and interpretation of that might be slightly different from mine. Will the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government have full control over the purse strings and decision making for the shared prosperity fund?

Mr Clarke: I am afraid the hon. Lady will have to wait for the publication of the consultation at the comprehensive spending review. The key point is that

[Mr Simon Clarke]

we want to make sure that this gives the Scottish Government meaningful control over key aspects of resources. She mentioned European funding in her remarks. The point I would submit is that that money was fundamentally UK money that was recycled back to this country, with conditions attached. We should be clear that we want to devolve control of that funding to the lowest possible level, and we will inevitably want to do so in a spirit of genuine concord with Holyrood.

The Government will set out further information about our plans here in an English devolution White Paper this year, which will outline our strategy to unleash the potential of our regions, level up powers and investment and give power to people and places across the country. Alongside that, we will publish a refreshed northern powerhouse strategy, building on the successes of the existing strategy in bringing together local leaders to address key barriers to productivity in the regions.

As the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) said, productivity is not a concept that always commands headlines, but it goes to the heart of national prosperity. It is the best way to boost wages, improve living standards and enhance economic growth across the country, regionally as well as nationally. We are working hard to build a stronger and fairer economy—dealing with the deficit, helping people into work and cutting taxes for businesses and families. There are 3.7 million more people in work, and the hon. Member for Wirral South alluded to the record rate of women in employment, which is worth highlighting. More than 60% of the increase is in regions outside London and the south-east, but we need to go further and we need to be candid about the extent of the productivity challenge we face. Productivity growth slowed globally in the aftermath of 2008, but the slowdown has been particularly acute here. The Government are committed to tackling that challenge as we enter a new decade in which we are less under the shadow of the financial crisis and the impact on our public finances.

The key will be an ambitious programme of investment. Infrastructure is a key driver of productivity—it is not sufficient in itself, but it is an absolute good. It links people to jobs and products to markets and supports supply chains, encouraging domestic and international trade. It affects daily life: speeding up internet connectivity means less time staring at blank screens; improving roads and trains, which the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde rightly mentioned, means less time stuck waiting to get to work and more time to play; decarbonisation means cleaner air for us all to breathe and more efficient energy. When the national infrastructure strategy is published alongside the Budget on 11 March, that will be a core moment in this piece. We will set out further details of our plan to invest £100 billion to transform our infrastructure and achieve a real step change. The strategy will set out our long-term ambitions across all areas of economic infrastructure, including transport, local growth, decarbonisation, digital infrastructure, and infrastructure finance and delivery.

Alongside that investment in our physical capital, it is essential to focus on and improve our human capital, as the hon. Member for Wirral South, whom I had the pleasure of serving alongside on the Treasury Committee, rightly said. I know that from my constituency. The hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) is

right to say that talent is evenly spread across this country, but opportunity is not. We know that, which is why our recent manifesto pledged a national skills fund—I was briefed on it yesterday, and it is exciting, bold and visionary. We all know that it needs to happen, because there has been profound personal, human dislocation as part of our transition from one era of industrialisation to a new one. That has had uneven consequences across England, let alone across the UK. We will seek to give a leg up to people looking to get onto the career ladder, support those wanting to switch careers, and support growth by ensuring firms can get access to the skills they need.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde referred to Be the Business. I had the pleasure of meeting it last week, and it is hugely impressive. I heard first-hand from several of the entrepreneurs it has helped about how targeted interventions and upskilling have helped them to be better business leaders. We need more of that to create a culture of entrepreneurship, which, as the hon. Member for Islwyn said, is not always common in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Increasing our productivity also means innovating. The hon. Member for Barnsley Central referred to the AMRC in Sheffield. That is precisely the kind of thing that we want to see more of. That is why we are committed to meeting our target of raising investment in research and development to 2.4% of GDP by 2027, ensuring that the UK remains at the cutting edge of science and technology. One of the great frustrations of recent decades is that the UK has so often come up with brilliant ideas but has not had the opportunity to build them out at scale. That needs to change. If we do that correctly, there is so much good that we can unlock and economic potential that we can unleash. We are increasing public spending on science and innovation by an additional £7 billion by 2021-22, which marks the biggest increase in 40 years.

The point that the hon. Member for Wirral South made about human capital, and in particular women, was well made, and I take it to heart. It is something I have been talking to my officials about. The Government are seized of the cost of childcare and the need to resolve fundamentally the problem we face with social care, which has so many spillover consequences for our health service and our economy, and we will be coming forward with proposals. Particularly on the social care piece, we genuinely welcome constructive engagement with the Opposition as we try to build a settlement that has lasting legitimacy. We want to do it right for successive generations, which will doubtless encompass Governments of both colours.

On female entrepreneurship, my predecessor—the current Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government—and I are working with Alison Rose to develop the Investing in Women code, which will help to pioneer work. We are looking to increase lending to female entrepreneurs to increase the possibilities. Clearly, if someone cannot even make the time to work because of competing priorities, that constrains them. I genuinely take the hon. Lady's point to heart, and I will continue to work on it with officials.

Alison McGovern: Will the Minister make a commitment that the Treasury's next productivity strategy, connected to the Budget or otherwise, will have a gender analysis of who does what work and for what remuneration?

Mr Clarke: That is certainly an interesting idea, which I promise to look at. I would very much welcome the hon. Lady's sending through her thoughts on this. We have, for example, committed to compulsory gender pay gap reporting. Those kinds of tools that can help to shine a light on hidden inequities, and we are keen to look at that. I am certainly happy to consider that idea.

We are excited about putting our plans into action, but we have to make sure that, when we begin to tackle the productivity puzzle, everyone in our country benefits. That is why we are taking advantage of low interest rates to invest in our priorities across the regions and nations of the UK. In our manifesto, we committed to spend £4.2 billion on upgrading local transport connections in England's largest cities, and £500 million a year on tackling potholes—a recurrent source of frustration for all of us across the country. We are spending over £28 billion on roads through the national roads fund from 2020 to 2025—the largest ever investment in England's roads. We are making sure every corner of the country benefits: we are spending almost £3 billion in the north, £2 billion in the midlands, and £2 billion in the south-west on improvements to our major road infrastructure. We are investing £2.5 billion in up to 18 city regions across England to improve roads, public transport, and cycling and walking networks through the transforming cities fund.

The hon. Member for Barnsley Central will no doubt welcome the fact that the Sheffield City Region and West Yorkshire Combined Authorities have both been shortlisted for the £1.2 billion transforming cities fund. We will be announcing allocations from the fund shortly. I am sure that he has seen that the Government are also investing in a £3.6 billion towns fund to unlock regional potential and create places across the UK where people can live and thrive. I am sure he will be pleased that we have allocated more than £12 billion from the local growth fund to local enterprise partnerships, to be spent on local priorities.

I pay tribute to everyone who has taken the time to contribute. This has been a genuinely good debate, conducted in a tone of consensus. So many of the issues raised are accepted on both sides of the Chamber as priorities that we need to tackle as we move into the 2020s. From Strangford to Sheffield, we remain highly ambitious. On 11 March, the Chancellor will set out a Budget that lays the foundations for what we should all hope is a decade of renewal that will unleash our country's potential and level up opportunities.

Jonathan Reynolds: In an interview with the *Financial Times* at the weekend, the Chancellor very ambitiously said he intends to double the trend rate of economic growth that we have seen since the Conservative party returned to power. What kind of improvement in productivity would the Minister like to see, and what can we use to hold him to account for the successes of the strategy?

Mr Clarke: It is best that we wait for a fiscal event to set out our targets in this area. The Government are clear that we need to increase trend growth. There is no doubt that we accept that challenge, which is thrown down quite legitimately. As we have now cleared the rubble from the 2008 crisis, we need to aspire to do more. I accept that in the spirit in which it is offered. It is right to challenge the Government and hold us to

account on whether we can now put that vision into practice. There is always a lag when it comes to investment on the scale and of the nature that we are talking about, but we are doing things that I hope by the end of the Parliament will have made a demonstrable impact, in terms of changing our economic structure.

Alison McGovern: I apologise for testing your patience, Mr Paisley. Doubling the trend rate of growth would really return it only to pre-crash levels of growth. To repeat the questions that my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) just asked, what measure for the Government to be held to, specifically on productivity, will the Minister commit to?

Mr Clarke: That is simply not something that I am in a position to commit to on behalf of the Government today. As I said to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde, we are resolved to do more to increase growth in a way that will mean that, the next time we come to review these statistics at the start of a new Parliament, there is a new tone and a new level of ambition realised in the results. That is genuinely the Government's commitment. We are particularly interested in ensuring that areas such as Merseyside, Teesside, Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire lead the charge and are not left behind.

10.48 am

Dan Jarvis: I want very briefly to reflect on two points that the Minister referred to. First, the transforming cities fund is absolutely vital for us, in terms of productivity and economic growth. We have worked incredibly hard with the Department for Transport to put forward an outstanding bid into the transforming cities fund. I am the only metro mayor who has been required to bid for that money. My parliamentary colleagues in South Yorkshire, who now include three Conservative Members for the first time, and I will be looking very closely at what the Chancellor announces in his Budget in March.

I want to reiterate the points that the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) rightly made about the shared prosperity fund. It is a critical amount of money for our regional economies. I am pleased that the Minister said that the consultation will be launched later this year. It is vital that both regional and national leaders can contribute to the important process of determining how the shared prosperity fund will be allocated in our regional economies—that is incredibly important. We urgently require clarity so that we can make long-term investment decisions.

The debate has been really useful; we have had a series of very constructive contributions from Members representing every corner of the country—Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland, the north-west and north-east of England, and Yorkshire. We have established a consensus that productivity is a key driver of economic growth in the UK, and that regional imbalances are huge challenges that will require investment in skills, R&D and infrastructure, of which public transport is key. Devolution is a significant way to address some of those challenges, but democratically elected leaders need investment and resources to make regional and local decisions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) rightly placed the focus on women and challenged the Minister and the Government on what

[Dan Jarvis]

they will do about gender disparities. To be fair, that important challenge also needs to be levelled at our metro mayors, all of whom are men, as she will know.

Alison McGovern: Oh yes, I know!

Dan Jarvis: I had no doubt about it. My hon. Friend has put that important challenge to the Government and we will look and listen very carefully at how they respond to it. That challenge should also be put to our metro mayors, and I assure her that in South Yorkshire we take that very seriously and have a programme of work, through our skills and employment board, that looks specifically at the points she raised. I would be grateful for the opportunity to discuss that further with her at some point.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered national productivity.

10.52 am

Sitting suspended.

All-lane Running Motorways

11 am

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the safety of all-lane running motorways.

Last year, in June, my constituent Jason Mercer said goodbye to his wife Claire at 8 am. Fifteen minutes later, he and another motorist were dead. Jason had been involved in a minor collision on the M1 in South Yorkshire, but in March 2017 the hard shoulder on that section of motorway had been converted into a full-time running lane, so, with no emergency refuge in sight, Jason and his fellow motorist were forced to stop in a live lane to exchange details. A steep bank immediately behind the safety barrier meant there was nowhere to move off the road, and instead they were left exposed. A lorry hit one of the stationary vehicles, killing them both instantly.

The safety features promised when the motorway was converted have still not been installed. Jason is one of the growing number of victims of so-called “smart motorways” on which the flow of traffic is controlled by remotely adjustable speed limits. Specifically, Jason was killed on the all-lane running, or ALR, motorway on which the hard shoulder has been permanently removed. Tragically, Jason is not the only victim of that ill-conceived scheme. That same 16-mile section of the M1 has seen five fatalities in just 10 months. Nationally, 2018 figures show 107 deaths across the whole of our motorway system and—let me repeat—I have had five fatalities in the past 10 months, in near-identical circumstances, on 16 miles of road. I acknowledge that ALR schemes can deliver capacity improvements, but they do so at the cost of motorists’ lives.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising this important issue. Does she agree that that could have been avoided had police advice been listened to? In the Parliament of 2010 to 2015, I went to see the Minister’s predecessor with the South Yorkshire police, who had said, “This arrangement is not safe.” Recently, Chief Inspector Darren Starkey of the South Yorkshire police wrote to me that

“any stranded vehicle, in any live lane or carriageway on any motorway or other strategic road presents an immediate safety risk”,

but that when there is a hard shoulder, those

“risks are less than being in the live lane”.

Sarah Champion: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point and for all his campaigning on the issue. It was not only the police but the local authorities, the other emergency services, the RAC and the AA—everyone with any common sense knew that taking away the hard shoulder was going to lead to fatalities.

Hazards presented by the removal of the hard shoulder are manifold. The hard shoulder allows stricken motorists to stop in relative safety, outside the flow of traffic. In its absence, at a minimum, there should be emergency refuges along the carriageway. Mr O’Sullivan, the chief executive of Highways England, recently revealed to the Select Committee on Transport that 38% of all breakdowns

on ALR motorways took place in live lanes, not in refuges. Even having refuges, therefore, does not keep people safe.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): Dev Naran, a young constituent of mine, lost his life suddenly in 2018 in an accident on the M6. His parents are in Parliament today. The coroner's regulation 28 report on his death raised some of the huge issues that the hon. Lady is exploring: despite the name, there is no automated system for spotting broken-down vehicles and where there is, at one place on the M25, it is overwhelmed by false positives; we do not know how often screens that are used manually to look for broken-down vehicles are refreshed, or how many screens an individual has to look at; and there is no consistency in the spacing of refuges, as she said, and huge stretches have no refuges at all. Officials have been too blithe about the problems she is pointing out. I hope that the Minister will stand up to the officials and take the huge problems seriously.

Sarah Champion: I echo those concerns, and the hon. Gentleman's hope that the Minister will now do something. My heart bleeds for the families.

Reaching safety is particularly challenging in newer schemes, where refuges are being spaced further and further apart. The M42 active traffic management pilot placed refuges 500 to 800 metres apart, but in newer ALR schemes that has increased to roughly 2,500 metres. To be explicit, someone needs to travel 2.5 kilometres, or just over 1.5 miles—with a blow-out or an overheating engine, or after being in an accident—before being able to get out of a live traffic lane. The greater the distance between refuges, therefore, the less likely it is that a motorist will be able to reach safety. Motorists are instead left exposed, stopped in live traffic. I can only assume—I am sorry to say this—that that decision was made to save the Government money.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Sarah Champion: I will, multiply.

Gareth Johnson: Does the hon. Lady agree that not only motorists but workers in recovery vehicles need extra protection from smart motorways? One way of achieving that might be to enable those workers to use red lights rather than the simple amber lights that they use at the moment. That would afford them greater protection from other vehicles that might otherwise not see them on the road.

Sarah Champion: I will come on to the existing lighting system, but yes, motorway rescue is walking into a death trap.

Alexander Stafford: Does the hon. Lady agree that one way in which to deal with the situation is to increase the speed at which the gantry signs change to close the lanes, so that people have more warning? Does she also agree that we need quicker access for the emergency services to deal with accidents when they happen?

Sarah Champion: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I will come on to the reality of the stopped-vehicle protection system, which unfortunately is somewhat shocking.

The smart motorway is meant to be smart, and its systems should come into play—for example, to close lanes to traffic automatically—but that of course relies on the stranded vehicle being detected. It pains me to say, however, that the vast majority of England's smart motorways are unable to deliver on that. Almost all smart motorways are underpinned by Highways England's MIDAS—motorway incident detection and automatic signalling—system which, by monitoring traffic flow, allows congestion to be managed. But the system has a significant and life-limiting flaw: it is unable to identify a lone stationary vehicle.

A 2016 Highways England report found that detecting a stranded vehicle took an average of 17 minutes. Safety is compromised still further by Highways England allowing up to three minutes to close a lane once a stationary vehicle has been detected. In Jason Mercer's case, detecting his stationary vehicle took more than six minutes, and the lane in which he was stranded was only closed after the crash that claimed his life.

Stationary vehicle detection, or SVD, technology reduces the time taken to spot stranded vehicles by an average of 16 minutes. Highways England committed to fitting SVD throughout the smart motorway system in 2016. That has not happened. Four years on, SVD is in operation on only two sections of the M25, covering just 24 miles of England's more than 230 miles of smart motorway. The Highways England chief executive acknowledged that, had SVD been installed, a number of fatalities on all-lane running motorways could have been prevented.

Even where SVD is in place, questions remain about its effectiveness.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing a debate on this incredibly important issue. Over recent months, sadly, there have been a number of fatalities and accidents on the stretch of the M1 by Luton. Since raising the issue, a number of residents have echoed concerns about the safety of that stretch of smart motorway. Does my hon. Friend agree that any review by the Government is welcome, but that including in it all the voices of road users and workers is vital?

Sarah Champion: I completely agree, and I compliment my hon. Friend on already raising the issue in the Chamber. The consultation was always flawed, and all the evidence mounting is just not being listened to.

A recent report in *The Sunday Times* revealed that the system's own chief designer has highlighted weaknesses in the system, warning:

"The density of traffic at higher volumes means it is very difficult to detect stopped lone vehicles without an unimaginable number of false alarms."

The Minister must not believe Highways England when it tells him that SVD is the panacea for safety improvements for all-lane running schemes. It is not; it is seriously flawed.

The risks to motorists do not end when a stranded vehicle is detected. Once detected, the system should close the lane that the stranded vehicle is in by marking it with a red X on the gantry. In 2016, non-compliance

[Sarah Champion]

with red X signs was 7% to 8%. However, research by the RAC this year found that more than a fifth of motorists had driven in a lane closed by a red X sign in the past year. If a motorist is detected and lane closures are put in place, their chance of being hit by an oncoming vehicle remains alarmingly high. It will require a concerted education and enforcement programme to reduce non-compliance, and I urge the Minister to commit to that without delay.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a passionate and compelling case. Those concerns were first raised by the Select Committee on Transport, chaired by Dame Louise Ellman, back in 2016. They could—and should—have been addressed much earlier. Some of those who tragically lost their lives could have been saved.

Sarah Champion: That is the sad reality. I will come to the Transport Committee's damning quote. I thank my hon. Friend for her work, as Chair of the Committee, to hold Highways England to account.

The Department for Transport has been aware of the dangers of ALR for some time. Many risks were highlighted in the 2016 Transport Committee report that my hon. Friend mentioned; it concluded that the Committee was unable to support ALR due to fundamental safety concerns. The Department for Transport, in contrast, argued that ALR is not only safe, but safer than traditional motorways. That position is hard to comprehend, but I have tried to figure it out. It is based on the twisted logic of offsetting the safety improvements of a managed motorway environment against the hazards of removing the hard shoulder. The issue with that logic is that those factors are not exclusionary. It is perfectly possible to maintain a hard shoulder on a smart motorway, but it costs more.

By suggesting that the risks are a necessary component of the improvements, the Department unjustifiably downplays the inherent dangers. The Transport Committee's report labelled that approach "disingenuous" and robustly warned against decreasing the risk of some hazards to justify an increase in others. Highlighting the intrinsic problems of all-lane running compared with other smart motorway schemes, the Committee was damning in its criticism of the Department. It stated:

"The All Lane Running design has been chosen on the basis of cost savings, and it is not acceptable for the Department to proceed with a less-safe design, putting people's lives at risk, in order to cut costs."

Motoring organisations, including the RAC and the AA, have been warning for some time that ALR presents an unacceptable risk—concerns echoed by local authorities and police forces. Yesterday, it came to light that the AA will no longer carry out roadside assistance on all-lane running motorways due to serious safety concerns. How bad does it have to get before the Minister will act? Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, in response to the consultation on the conversion of junctions 32 to 35a of the M1, warned starkly that,

"from an operational perspective, the emergency services suggest that the risk of collisions involving stationary vehicles...is an unacceptable one which will have serious and potentially fatal consequences."

Jason Mercer was one of those fatal consequences. Last year, there were nine fatalities on smart motorways.

There is no evidence that ALR can ever be delivered safely. I therefore strongly believe the Government must stop the roll-out with immediate effect. Until the obvious and intrinsic risks of removing the hard shoulder are addressed, existing schemes should revert to traditional motorways from today. At a minimum, Highways England must prioritise retrofitting stationary vehicle detection to existing ALR schemes, with a clear deadline for when that work will be completed. I support the RAC's call for existing schemes to be retrofitted with refuges no greater than one mile apart, but I would go further and ask for the originally proposed 500 to 800 metre intervals. While that work is undertaken, the hard shoulder should be reinstated. If it is not possible to install refuges, the scheme should not go ahead on that road.

Urgent action—both enforcement and education—is needed to improve compliance with red X signs on gantries. Safety of motorists must always be paramount. Before the scheme even began, the Government were inundated with warnings about the intrinsic risks of all-lane running and were urged to rethink their approach to increasing motorway capacity. It is totally unacceptable for a Government to risk lives in the name of cost savings.

I cannot change the past. I cannot bring Jason Mercer back to Claire. But it is in the Minister's gift to stop more deaths.

Several hon. Members rose—

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): Order. The debate is heavily oversubscribed for a half-hour debate. Members may wish to lobby the Backbench Business Committee for a longer debate, given the considerable national interest on this subject. Tracey Crouch has asked for, and has been granted, time to speak.

11.16 am

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): We are all interested to hear the Minister's response, so I will be brief, not least because the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) made a brilliant speech in which she articulated everyone's concerns about smart motorways. This is the second Westminster Hall debate on all-lane running motorways in which I have spoken, the first being about the safety of roadside recovery workers. That was as a consequence of the partner of a constituent being killed on a motorway.

A section of the M20 that goes through my constituency is being converted into a smart motorway, and I have been concerned about the outcome since that was first proposed. Many constituents are petrified about its completion, not least because, since I raised the issue last year, there have unfortunately been a number of high-profile fatalities. When I have spoken on the radio and been quoted in the papers, hundreds of people have got in touch about their concerns and experiences, many of which are incredibly traumatic. We need to pay attention to drivers' experiences on smart motorways.

I want to press on the Minister a point that the hon. Lady articulated incredibly well, about the statistics that are given to Ministers. When he looks at statistics from Highways England, he needs to disaggregate the types of accident. An accident on a motorway caused by someone driving at 90 mph, or a collision between a

moving lorry and a car, is completely different from someone who has come to a halt on a smart motorway being hit by a moving vehicle—quite often a heavy goods vehicle. The statistics given are apples and pears; the Minister must drill down into them, because they are not safe otherwise.

I strongly encourage the Minister to revisit the cost of creating all-lane motorways and to consider whether the money could be better spent on the wider road and transport network, instead of on this increasingly dubious and dangerous upgrade plan.

11.19 am

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (George Freeman): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Paisley. I am standing in for the Roads Minister, Baroness Vere, who will be watching the debate closely, and I will meet her afterwards. Let me congratulate and thank the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) for raising this issue. I agree that it merits a bigger debate. The participation of colleagues across the House signals the strength of feeling.

Let me start by acknowledging the tragedy, pain and trauma suffered by the families of all those who have lost their lives on our roads—especially Jason Mercer, whose family are in the Gallery, and Dev Naran—and particularly, in the context of this debate, on our smart motorways. It is no good Ministers saying that all roads are safe; people need to feel safe and be safe. We need to ensure that safety remains our No. 1 priority. We accept there is a problem here. The Secretary of State is, as we speak, putting the finishing touches on a serious package of measures to tackle it. I cannot and will not pre-empt that, but I will deal with a number of points that were raised.

I would not be doing my job if I did not start by reminding everyone that safety is our No. 1 priority. Highways England's objective in implementing smart motorways is to ensure that they are as safe as the pre-smart motorway network, which is already the safest bit of the road network, and ultimately safer. We are committed to developing an increasingly safe road network, and I am alarmed that the safety statistics showed a slight increase last year. I take the point my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) made about drilling down into that data, which I will raise with Baroness Vere.

Mr Betts: What the Minister has said is interesting, but given all he has heard, does he accept that smart motorways, or all-lane running—whichever he wants to call it—are as safe as building an extra lane and having a permanent hard shoulder?

George Freeman: That is one of the precise questions that the Secretary of State is looking at. I do not want to pre-empt that work, but I absolutely accept the hon. Gentleman's reason for asking that important question.

Highways England is constantly monitoring, and it has introduced a number of measures. This is ongoing work. It is not something we think is done and dusted; it is live as we speak. The truth is that, for anyone involved, one accident is one too many. I want to ensure that no one ever dies in this way again, and that the legacy of the people who have died is that that sort of accident,

and the situation in which it occurred, cannot happen again. That is why the Secretary of State announced an evidence stocktake soon after taking office. He has called in all the evidence and data, and he is looking at a package of measures to deal with this issue, which will be announced imminently. It would be sensible if, following the debate, we quickly reconvened the all-party group on road safety. Perhaps we might go further and create a taskforce for all colleagues who are interested in this issue, so we can listen to their concerns and ensure that that work is fed directly in.

I hope my hon. Friends and colleagues on the Opposition Benches understand that I cannot pre-empt the Secretary of State's announcement, but let me make one or two key points in response to those that were raised. It is true that the principal rationale for smart motorways is to increase capacity, reduce congestion and reduce pollution. There are environmental benefits to ensuring that we maximise the use of existing motorways rather than building new motorway capacity, but there are real issues about awareness, information, the positioning of refuges, rescue, vehicle monitoring, and the safety of vehicles re-entering the highway. All those issues have to be got right, and that is why I am responding in the way I am.

Smart motorways have increased capacity. Since we introduced the scheme, more than 1 billion journeys have been made over the 250-mile network of smart motorways. I do not want people to think this is a very small patch of malfunctioning motorway; it is extensive, and over the last 15 years, millions of people have driven up smart motorways.

Sarah Champion: This debate is about all-lane running, not smart motorways. It actually is about a very small stretch. Please, Minister, do not just focus on smart motorways and how wonderful the M25 is. We get that. We are talking about all-lane running, which is where we do not have investment.

George Freeman: I understand. I am setting the context, because I think there is quite a lot of public misunderstanding about what smart motorways are. I am short of time and I am keen to get to the end of my speech if I can.

The conversion of the hard shoulder to a running lane is a key feature of capacity management, and we avoid having to build more motorways when we can increase the capacity of existing ones. I totally accept that there are real issues, which the hon. Lady raised, not least of which are refuge placement and ensuring that we have full CCTV coverage so we are able properly and quickly to monitor vehicles that are in trouble and ensure that they are dealt with properly. The scheme has been running since 2014. To the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford, there is a lot of data that we ought to be able to draw on, and we are drawing on it in this review.

It is worth reflecting that the hard shoulder on a traditional motorway has never been deemed a safe place to stop. One of the problems is that, traditionally, people have seen the rescue telephones and thought of it as a safe place to stop, find facilities and make a phone call. It is not and never has been. One of the things we have struck is a misunderstanding that it is a good place to pull over. It is not. Let me repeat that the

[George Freeman]

hard lane has never been that and is never that. In contrast, there have been no collisions in refuges resulting in fatalities.

In the original pilot on the M42 in 2006, refuges were set very close together, at approximately 500 metres apart. Based on operational insights, further performance data and ongoing monitoring, Highways England moved that to 1,000 metres on all other dynamic hard shoulder running schemes, and then to 2,500 metres on all-lane running schemes. That is one of the things the Secretary of State is looking at.

Highways England undertook a review of operational all-lane running schemes and found no consistent correlation between the number of live-lane stops and the spacing of emergency areas, but I take the point my hon. Friend made about drilling down into that data, and I will ensure that that is done. We and Highways England know that motorists not only need to be safe but need to feel safe and need to know what to do when they are in the dangerous situation of a breakdown or a collision. We need to ensure that everyone has that information properly.

The specification for the maximum spacing of emergency areas on new schemes has been reduced from 1.5 miles, which is about 90 seconds at 60 mph and equivalent to the spacing of lay-bys on sections of A road, to 1 mile, which is about 60 seconds at 60 mph. However, again, we need to look at the data; on particular sections, given the geography of the road area, the spacing might need to be different. Highways England will also install a number of additional emergency refuge areas in locations with the greatest spacing. We need to look at whether there are particular blackspots where we need more refuges.

All emergency areas are fitted with orange surfacing to make them more visible, and better advance signing will give motorists more information about how far away the next one is. I want to go further and ask whether we could use digital technology, which many drivers use for satellite navigation, to ensure that every driver knows when they are in one of these areas, where the refuge is and what they should do. Technology can help us ensure that we avoid the sort of tragedies we have seen.

Identifying a broken-down vehicle is key, and I know that is something my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford has raised. If a driver is unable to reach a place of safety, the regional traffic control centre can and should use the overhead electronic signals to close lanes, display warning messages and slow down approaching traffic, as well as to create an access lane for the emergency services. To reduce response times in setting those signals, Highways England has installed a stopped vehicle detection system on two sections of the M25 and will shortly install one on part of the M3. Again, however, if that is the prerequisite, we need to put it everywhere and ensure that it works properly. Highways England is designing it into all-lane running smart motorway schemes that are currently scheduled,

and it is exploring how to provide the same benefits on all existing all-lane running smart motorways. I say that not to suggest that it is an adequate response to the points that were made, but simply to highlight the work that is going on.

Lilian Greenwood: The Minister will know that when Highways England appeared at the Transport Committee, it confirmed that stopped vehicle detection systems are only 90% effective. What is in place to deal with the other 10%?

George Freeman: That is an excellent point, and it is one of the issues the Secretary of State will be looking at in his work.

In the remaining seconds, I want to touch on reports that the AA has said it will not let its patrols stop in live lanes. That is concerning, because we need the support of all vehicle rescue operators. It is worth saying they are never expected to work in a live lane on any motorway unless the scene has been made safe by police officers. That has always been the situation. Highways England has developed guidance on safe recovery with the recovery industry, and it has put in place a whole series of measures, such as electronic signs, variable speed limits and red X signals. Regional control centres and on-road traffic officers can now support vehicles leaving an emergency area. Again, I am not suggesting that is adequate; more needs to be done to ensure that this is working properly.

Red X lane enforcement is long standing. It has been in use since the system was introduced in 2006, and Highways England, in partnership with the police, has issued more than 180,000 formal warning letters to drivers identified as having wrongly used the hard shoulder at a number of smart motorway locations. That number must come down. The aim should be to ensure that nobody drives in the wrong lane at the wrong time, rather than to issue letters to warn them. We need faster progress on that. We have brought in legislation to allow automated detection of red X offences using camera equipment and to enable the police to prosecute, but, again, that should be the last line and something we hope never to have to do. We need to ensure that those incidents do not happen. There have been major public information campaigns, which I do not have time to list in detail.

Let me conclude by saying, in the spirit of the debate, that I am keen to work with the Roads Minister, Baroness Vere, to follow up with colleagues on both sides of the House and look at whether we might set up a taskforce to ensure that their insights can be fed in, and to work with the Secretary of State to ensure that the package he announces is adequate for all of us who use the motorways and represent drivers. I want to ensure that the deaths of Jason, Dev and the others were not in vain, and that their legacy is real improvement so everyone knows these routes are safe.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

North Cotswold Line

[MARK PRITCHARD *in the Chair*]

3.28 pm

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered North Cotswold line transformation.

It is a great honour to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Pritchard. I am delighted that the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris), will respond. I will start by declaring an interest, which is that I am an unpaid vice-president of the Cotswold Line Promotion Group, a fantastic voluntary organisation that has worked relentlessly for decades to improve the North Cotswold line. I am grateful that I have secured the debate so early in the Parliament, and in time for the 2020 Budget, because we have a Worcestershire Chancellor, who truly understands the value of infrastructure improvements in unleashing our country's potential and increasing its productivity. I believe that the case for investing in the North Cotswold line will be one of the easiest and most convincing ones he will see.

The North Cotswold line, for those who have not had the pleasure of travelling along it, runs from Oxford to Hereford and crosses many constituencies, one of which is Witney—my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) has recently, and conveniently, been appointed Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Transport Secretary. The line also runs through the constituencies of The Cotswolds and Mid Worcestershire, and I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) will seek to catch your eye later in the debate, Mr Pritchard, although, sadly, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) would have to sit here silently, as he currently serves in the Whips Office. It then runs through the constituency of the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), through my own constituency, and on to North Herefordshire—my hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) is a keen supporter. It then goes through the constituency of the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman). The North Cotswold line plan is to improve services to Kidderminster—I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) is here—and I know it will have knock-on benefits for colleagues in the Oxford area as well. All those colleagues are supporting this debate, even if they are not all speaking in it.

I also wanted to hold this debate now because it coincides with the arrival in the Department for Transport of the strategic outline business case for the North Cotswold line, which has been written by the North Cotswold Line Taskforce. I put on record my thanks to Lord Faulkner of Worcester, for chairing the taskforce, and to all the taskforce members: Worcestershire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire and Warwickshire County Councils, Herefordshire Council, the Worcestershire, GFirst, Marches, Oxfordshire, Coventry and Warwickshire local enterprise partnerships, the West Midlands Rail

Executive and the Cotswold Line Promotion Group. They have all done excellent work since the taskforce was set up two years ago.

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. She has read out a list of a number of those supporting the plan, but I notice that the Greater Birmingham and Solihull local enterprise partnership was not involved. Is she as surprised as I am not to see it there, given that its southern part covers those north Worcestershire constituencies that the line to Droitwich Spa and Kidderminster goes through, where this will make a difference? It is a bit remiss of the LEP not to be on that list.

Harriett Baldwin: The honest answer is that I do not know the background and whether that LEP was approached, or whether my hon. Friend will now be able to tell it about this exciting proposal, which benefits the Wyre Forest and allows services to Kidderminster.

The history of this 86-mile line between Oxford and Hereford represents sharp decline and, now, slow recovery. The lovely, fully doubled line of the early part of the 20th century was reduced to mainly single track in the 1960s, '70s and '80s—perhaps not coincidentally, a time when the whole railway network was in public hands. By the 1980s, there were only two trains a day between Paddington and Hereford.

Thanks to the campaigning of my predecessor, the late Lord Spicer, as well as Sir Peter Luff—the former MP for Mid Worcestershire—and many others, two sections of the track were redoubled between 2008 and 2011. By 2015, a broad hourly service had been achieved. The partial redoubling has also brought some improvements to journey times. Since the December timetable changes, one train per day in each direction completes the London to Worcester journey in less than two hours.

Having looked at a range of options, the North Cotswold Line Taskforce has given unanimous backing for what it calls option 5, a redoubling of four miles of track from Wolvercote Junction, Oxford, to Hanborough station, and the redoubling of five miles of track from Evesham to Pershore. In addition, option 5 includes second platforms at Pershore and Hanborough.

The combination of those elements in option 5 would allow two trains an hour from Worcester to London, additional services beyond Worcester to Malvern, Hereford and Kidderminster, a regular Worcester to London service in less than two hours, and faster services from Malvern and Herefordshire to London, as well as improved performance and reliability.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech. Does she agree that those improvements on the North Cotswold line would also unlock additional opportunities in the nearby area? For example, it would be possible to link the line through to the Cowley branch line, and having the additional capacity at Hanborough might make it possible for that station to operate almost as a parkway, which would relieve some of the pressure on Oxford station. It would be a win-win not only along the route, but in many nearby areas.

Harriett Baldwin: I thank the hon. Lady for her support and, through her, thank Oxfordshire County Council for the support it has given this taskforce.

[*Harriett Baldwin*]

I believe that option 5 allows a significant improvement to services around the Oxford area. I will come on to some of the environmental benefits of the scheme. She may well want to call a similar debate at some point in the future on the proposals she is making.

I do not know the details of the proposals the hon. Lady is making, but I do know that the benefit to cost ratio of this scheme is well over 4:1. That is with a cost estimate of just under £200 million for the whole option 5 scheme, including an optimism bias in the cost estimates. The five counties supporting the taskforce, including Oxfordshire, are home to more than 2.5 million people, and their economic gross value added is greater than that of the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. Moreover, they are only asking for half the budget from the Department for Transport.

As I mentioned, there are clear environmental benefits. As train travel increases, it will take cars off the road. Currently, my West Worcestershire constituents travel miles along the congested motorway network just to get to Warwick Parkway and Birmingham International stations so that they can use the Chiltern line and the west coast main line. The strategic outline business case goes into detail on the benefits to the road system, and estimates that 5 million miles of highway driving would be avoided. Indeed, the delivery of the Worcestershire Parkway station—it is due to open any day, and I invite my hon. Friend the Minister to come and officiate at its opening—will strengthen the case for more travellers across south Worcestershire to use the North Cotswold line.

There will be huge tourism benefits, as the line goes through some of the loveliest countryside in the world. It passes the cathedral city of Oxford and goes on to the cathedral cities of Worcester and Hereford. It goes through the heart of the beautiful Cotswolds, near Blenheim Palace and, of course, through the glorious Malvern hills. There will also be huge housing benefits. The scheme will increase the affordability of housing for those working in Oxford, by giving them the opportunity to commute by rail from less expensive areas. In short, it will unleash the potential of the midlands engine and link it to the Oxford-Cambridge arc corridor, connecting it all more reliably, more frequently and more quickly to London, the Crossrail network and Heathrow.

My only ask of the Minister today is that he agree to pay half of the develop stage costs and allow the proposed scheme into the industry's rail network enhancements pipeline. With that funding, an outline business case and a structural survey can be prepared for 2022. A commitment from his Department of only £1.5 million of the £3 million cost—taskforce members will pay the other half—will enable that progress.

I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister sees how compelling option 5 is in terms of value for money, the environmental benefit and the country's productivity. The proposals are sensible, modest but impactful, and achievable in the tangible future. When he makes his case to the Chancellor, he will be making it to a friendly Worcestershire colleague, and he will know just how many other colleagues will be pleased by approving further progress on this wonderful train line.

3.40 pm

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) for securing the debate, and I am grateful to the Minister for being here to answer our requests.

I have been heavily involved in the Cotswold line redoubling campaign, as it goes through my constituency—Moreton-in-Marsh and Kingham are both very busy stations along the line; the latter is just outside my constituency boundary but is used by many of my constituents—and I have worked closely with my fellow MPs, as my hon. Friend said. I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) in his place. Part of the ask of this feasibility study will be to get the redoubling done in his constituency. I will say more about that in a minute, but I am sure that it will benefit his constituents hugely, and all of our constituents, because it will make the whole journey time quicker. It is delightful to see him here.

We have all worked closely with the Cotswold Line Promotion Group, which has been a staunch advocate for this line for tens of years. I pay tribute, as did my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire, to Lord Faulkner for heading up that group. We have had upgrades on this line, as my hon. Friend said; it was redoubled in the early 1990s, as was the line from Kemble to Swindon. That had huge benefits, because it now takes just 12 minutes to travel from Kemble to Swindon, and reduces journey times from Cheltenham to Swindon to London.

The redoubling of the Cotswold line will increase the number of services along the line for the entire journey. Timetable changes in December 2019 were a milestone, because trains on that line now deliver an hourly service throughout the day. The trains are less crowded, with more capacity and, above all, faster journey times. The new timetable has been welcomed locally, but further investment is required to take it on to the next stage—for rail services to meet the long-term needs of the region which, as my hon. Friend said, is growing both economically and in population terms.

Relative to other regions, this is still a slow journey. The journey from Worcester to London, for example, which is 120 miles, has an end-to-end speed of just 57 mph, compared with the speed from equivalent towns such as Leamington Spa, at 76 mph; Bath, at 77 mph; Swindon, at a very fast 84 mph; and Rugby, at 99 mph. This is a slow service at the moment, and much could be done to improve it.

The journey time between Paddington and Worcester Shrub Hill—120 miles—takes between 1 hour 59 minutes and an appalling 2 hours 40 minutes, which is slow when considering that frequent trains throughout the day can reach Oxford from London in just over 50 minutes. The extra bit, which is another half of the journey, takes well over an hour. It is unacceptable that people travelling beyond Oxford are expected to travel on a second-class, slower service, as the train slows down significantly from Oxford.

The redoubling of the line that I worked to secure has improved the journey time, but the faster trains have to slow down through the single-line sections. Suggestions put forward by the Cotswold Line Promotion Group

and the North Cotswold Line Taskforce would mean two trains per hour travelling through Worcestershire, the Cotswolds, Oxford and to London. Option 5, as my hon. Friend said, would see further redoubling from Wolvercote to Hanborough, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Witney, and eventually a 5-mile stretch between Evesham and Pershore, producing faster journey times of less than two hours between Worcester and London. Minister, that is the ultimate goal; a city of the size, importance and distance from London of Worcester ought to have a rail service of less than two hours.

I am sure the Minister knows—my hon. Friends certainly know—that the line currently operates on both diesel and electric modes. A long-term aim, which would be a game changer, is to fully electrify the line from Oxford to Worcester, but that is not the subject of this particular study. Making the journey faster and more environmentally efficient is most important. I am sorry to tell this tale, but it is absolutely true: I recently caught a very old train from Norwich to Sheringham, and frankly it was like travelling on a moving, polluting factory—the diesel emissions were so bad. The ultimate aim must surely be to phase out all diesel trains in this country. If we want to get rid of the internal combustion engine—petrol and diesel cars—by 2040, we must have a plan to get rid of diesel trains as well.

As my hon. Friend said, the business case for redoubling the Cotswold line is compelling, with more frequent, faster services helping to generate nearly 400,000 new passenger trips each year. An investment of £199 million would have economic benefits of £33 million gross value added per year, and would support 750 new jobs. The operating costs put forward offer efficient rolling stock utilisation, with improved use of the existing fleet and efficient redistribution to match supply with demand.

Such improvements would hugely benefit my constituents who use the North Cotswold line. Moreton-in-Marsh is a growing town that has already seen considerable growth, mainly due to its actually having a station. I recently helped the Fire Service College—a national institution in my constituency—obtain a £500 million contract with the Ministry of Defence to train defence fire and rescue workers, which will help to secure an additional 100 jobs. The Fire Service College critically depends on the Cotswold line.

In addition, as my hon. Friend says, the Cotswolds is an important area of outstanding natural beauty, attracting some 38 million domestic and international tourists a year, generating £1 billion a year for the Cotswolds economy. I might add that that is not only my constituency; there are 17 constituencies in the Cotswolds. For the Cotswolds to be accessible and to retain this industry, it must have strong, sustainable, green transport links that offer an alternative to road-based traffic. For the Government to achieve their targets, as set out in the 25-year environment plan, including meeting the legally binding targets to reduce emissions of five damaging air pollutants and ending the sale of conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040, more investment is needed.

The Cotswold line improvements will link in with the Elizabeth line, which is significant to my constituents, as well as those of my hon. Friends the Members for West Worcestershire and for Witney. At the moment, the journey to Heathrow is so difficult that I should

think that well over 90% of my constituents choose to travel there by car. However, with an improved Cotswold line, meaning that they can get to Oxford and then Reading, and can then use the fast Elizabeth line from Reading straight into Heathrow, I am sure that more of them will change their mode of travel from car to rail. If we do not keep improving these railway lines and connectivity, many of our roads will simply clog up, which cannot be good for the environment.

Overall, this project delivers very high value for money—my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire mentioned a benefit-cost ratio of 4:1; I believe that the actual figure is 4.46:1, so it is nearer 5:1—and will support economic and population growth, tourism, connectivity to London and other regions, access to jobs and reductions in road congestion. We are talking about enhancing rural but economically competitive areas, such as the Cotswolds, that are currently being restrained—constrained—by the transport connectivity with other areas. Other strategic options such as train lengthening, road investment, platform lengthening and other railway projects in the region would all help to achieve those objectives.

My final sentence will be to repeat to the Minister the plea made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire. We need from this debate only half the cost of doing a feasibility study—a mere £1.5 million. Considering the other requests that will be made, that is absolute chicken feed.

3.50 pm

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): I did not originally intend to speak in this debate. One notable thing about this place is that quite often Members of Parliament stand up to speak because although everything has already been said, not everyone has already said it; so I will try to avoid repeating the incredibly excellent points made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin)—my own MP—who initiated the debate, which is a really important one for the local economy, and by my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown). Both have interests in this matter, because the track runs through their constituencies, and they are working extraordinarily hard to champion this scheme. However, the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire about it affecting other constituencies is incredibly important. Although Wyre Forest is in the northern part of Worcestershire, it will benefit very significantly from the opportunity created by the doubling of the track.

I want to make just a couple of points. I raised in an intervention on my hon. Friend the interest of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull local enterprise partnership. I did not want to catch her unawares with that, but it struck me that the more people we get behind this scheme, the better it is in terms of making the business case for what is not actually a very big ask from the group involved. Because the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP also covers the northern part of Worcestershire—Wyre Forest, Redditch and Bromsgrove—it takes in two of the stations that will benefit, Droitwich Spa and Kidderminster, which will benefit from being able to feed into this line through Worcester. Therefore there is an economic interest for that LEP and I will certainly make representations to it in order that it throws its weight behind the scheme.

[Mark Garnier]

My other point is on the benefit to local economies. If people look at the economies along this track and to the north, going towards the Black Country, they will see that we suffer from a number of different things, one of which is lower than average regional wages, particularly in Wyre Forest; that is something I have been particularly aware of. One thing that we are trying to do in the whole of Worcestershire, through the Worcestershire LEP, is to attract more businesses into the area and therefore bring up training, productivity, wages and general wealth and wellbeing for the county. It is well known that the best way to do that is to create infrastructure links. People will not be attracted to come to a county if they cannot get their workers in and the training in and their products in and out, and rail is certainly an incredibly important part of that. And if we free up the road networks by having more people travelling by rail, that benefits the economy as well as the environment. It is incredibly important that we all throw our weight behind this scheme, for so many different reasons, and it is incredibly important that we are having this debate now.

I shall ask just one question. There is obviously the rather peculiar debate going on at the moment about the £105 billion that is being put into HS2. That is not without controversy, and I do not particularly want to make a controversial speech, but I remember that when I was on the Treasury Committee a few years ago, we did an investigation into the value of spending what was then £52 billion, if I remember rightly—I think it was actually lower than that, but let us say that it was £52 billion—on HS2. Were we actually going to get value for money out of it? There was a very strong argument for it, and Andy Street, the Mayor of Birmingham, is arguing very vehemently in favour of that part of HS2 going up to Birmingham—I would agree with him on that.

However, the interesting question now is this. If we were to start the argument from the other end and say that we had £105 billion to spend on the rail network, would we build HS2 or would we spend that money on exactly this type of project and, indeed, other projects whereby we could extend reach down to places such as the far west or to East Anglia and other parts of the country that will not benefit from HS2? I think it is worth using this debate to highlight that point. Although HS2 is a very exciting project, it is not necessarily what we would have spent £105 billion on if we had started with the offer of the money. We may well have started by spending it on this type of project in order to get more—

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, but I think we should not forget that the schemes that we are talking about here are in addition to HS2. This Government are spending £48 billion on the railways on precisely these sorts of schemes. Even if we release the money for HS2, money is still available for these sorts of schemes.

Mark Garnier: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I am not suggesting that we should scrap HS2 to pay for this scheme. He is absolutely right: we need to do an awful lot of different things. I was just trying

to give a slightly different viewpoint on the whole HS2 argument. Actually, I think interregional connectivity is the most important point.

I will not take up any more of the House's time; as I said, this is a really important debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire for initiating the debate. The scheme is really important. It will make a big difference to a lot of constituencies that are not on the track but will benefit. My hon. Friend and everyone who represents a constituency along the track can 100% rely on my support for the scheme and my support in trying to get the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP to come in behind it as well.

3.55 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I apologise for being somewhat late. I also refer hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I congratulate the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) on securing today's debate and on championing investment in our railways. Labour is also very supportive of that. We have been calling for it consistently as part of our endeavours to create a greener and more affordable transport network run in the interests of passengers.

Back in 2017, the North Cotswold Line Taskforce was established. It was made up of the five county authorities, which the hon. Lady mentioned, and five local enterprise partnerships that are served by the line. As part of the Department's enhancements pipeline process, the taskforce brought forward its strategic outline business case just last month, calling for faster, more frequent rail services to serve and better connect the communities and economies we have heard about today.

I also want to make the point about the wider connectivity—referred to by, I think, one Government Member—to the Thames valley and my own constituency in Reading, and about other, wider benefits across Oxfordshire. My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) mentioned branch lines in her constituency. We need to look at this scheme on a system-wide basis, seeing it as a potential benefit not only to residents in the north Cotswold area, but to the wider rail network. Indeed, I will talk later about the importance of looking at the network as a whole.

Harriett Baldwin: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that supportive point. Of course, all the trains that go from Paddington to Worcestershire and Herefordshire will pass through Reading, which in recent years has become a magnificent station, thanks to the investment that we have put in. That will enable connectivity to Crossrail for those areas, which are poorly served at the moment. I therefore thank the hon. Gentleman very much for making that point.

Matt Rodda: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for mentioning Crossrail, because it is important that we think about the integration between London stopping services and the wider countryside beyond London and beyond major towns and cities.

The taskforce made a convincing case for track doubling on parts of the line, as we have heard. Currently, the single-track line on parts of the route does have an

impact on the quality of services. What is proposed would come at a cost, but, as we have heard, with a very high benefit to cost ratio. It is worth noting—certainly we have noted—the very high benefit to cost ratio, at 4.46:1. That is unusually high, so the hon. Lady and other colleagues have made a very good point on that, and I hope the Minister considers the relative strength of the case.

The enhancements would also allow an increase in the speed and frequency of services along the line, as we have heard. The taskforce's business case pointed out that the benefits would be felt by not only passengers, but the local economy. I think it quantified that at about £33 million annually for the economy and the area, and there would also be the creation of about 750 new jobs, which is quite a substantial benefit. We need to consider what this scheme means in real terms to the area, as well as to the wider network and the country as a whole.

It is obviously now up to the Department to look at the scheme—I urge it to do so seriously—and to decide whether to include it in its pipeline of enhancements and to commence the development stage, which, as we have heard from hon. Members, is the next step. Moving the scheme on to that phase will require an additional £3 million initially.

This scheme exemplifies how investments in public transport can bring massive benefit to communities across the country, but that should not be the preserve of just some areas. There should be a system-wide examination of the benefits of this type of scheme for all the UK. Investment in rail should stretch across all nations and regions of the UK. We hope, as hon. Members have described, that that will support other local economies, in counties, groups of towns and cities around Britain, and deal with the problem of rising inequality.

[GRAHAM STRINGER *in the Chair*]

Increased investment in rail is required to tackle air pollution and the climate crisis, as the hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) mentioned. According to the Government's climate change advisory body, the Committee on Climate Change, the Government are not on track to meet their emissions targets, which themselves are insufficiently ambitious to meet the objectives we all have set ourselves.

Transport, as was rightly mentioned, is the most emitting and worst-performing sector of the economy. It is an obvious target for us. There is a potential benefit economically and environmentally, and the hon. Gentleman made that point eloquently. Despite improving technology, transport emissions are rising. There is a serious risk of over-emphasising road transport—with the road schemes in the pipeline currently highlighted by the Government—rather than rail, which is a low-emitting sector.

If the Government are serious about cutting emissions, they must put their money where their mouth is. Unfortunately, Government policy in the last decade has taken us in the wrong direction. Regulated rail fares have risen by over 40% since 2010—more than 2.5 times the rate of increase in median wages. At the same time, overcrowding has increased, and reliability has declined. Rail travel is becoming unaffordable for many people, who are priced off the railway. Those who do travel by rail have to spend more of their income in real terms.

The policies Labour presented at the general election would address many of these issues. That complements my point about investment in particular parts of the country. Bringing the railway back into public ownership would improve services and deal with the timetabling chaos suffered by communities in the north of England last year. We would also have cut regulated rail fares by 33% from January 2020 and delivered a simple London-style ticketing system, which I am sure residents in the north Cotswolds would much appreciate as they travel in and out of the south-east or across their region.

Other countries are already tackling these issues. In Germany, where the railway is under public ownership, the Government recently made a substantial cut in rail fares, specifically as a climate protection measure. That complements expanding rail provision in under-served parts of the country. I would like the Minister to consider that approach. I hope he will take note of my points today in the same way I am sure he will take note of the specific regional issues in the north Cotswolds.

I hope the Minister will consider other policies where I believe we have the wrong balance between rail and other modes of transport. For example, the Government have repeatedly frozen fuel duty for private vehicles and, effectively, air passenger duty, at the same time as allowing rail fares to rise and cutting subsidies for buses. As the hon. Member for The Cotswolds hinted, there is a wider issue of connectivity to other public transport services, both into London and within shires, including better bus services. What steps will the Minister take to reduce the cost of rail travel, and reconsider the balance between rail and other modes of transport?

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman is making an important point about connectivity. We worked hard in Moreton-in-Marsh to try to get the local bus service to coincide with the arrival and departure of trains. We are also working hard on getting trains to coincide with bicycle hire, so that people can arrive at Moreton-in-Marsh from London, hire a bicycle with their family, have a day out in the beautiful Cotswolds and then take the train home again.

Matt Rodda: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point about connectivity to bicycle hire. Cycling can be supported by sensible policies that promote it and link it to rail travel and bus use. As I am standing in as shadow Minister for local transport, I refer him to the recent Labour manifesto on those matters. At least as a fellow cyclist, it is worth considering the need for greater investment in cycling.

I understand the Minister is interested in reversing some of the Beeching cuts. There is some merit in exploring that, but it must be matched by funding. Conservative Members and my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East have articulated the need for funding. I urge the Minister to look at the broader funding envelope for the Department and the relative weighting of spending on rail as opposed to road. He may want to shed some light on various aspects of that, particularly his plans to reopen branch lines in addition to dualing existing railway lines.

If the Government are serious about boosting rail connectivity, the Minister must look at the pot of money the Government have available for road enhancements, which is taken from hypothecated money from vehicle

[Matt Rodda]

excise duty. There is an argument for spending some of that on public transport. We have already suggested that a proportion of it be spent on subsidising bus use, which has recently declined, but there might also be a good case for some of that funding to be hypothecated for rail, considering the obvious points that have been made, as rail can often provide an excellent alternative for rural residents who wish to make long journeys and avoid our congested motorway network. Sadly, at the moment, we are not following the right approach, and we need to look at that balance again.

I commend Conservative Members for highlighting the needs within the north Cotswold area. They have made an excellent point about their railway line. I urge the Minister to consider the weighting of Government spending. I hope he will address such points and the wider package of support for branch lines and other smaller rail routes. I urge him to reconsider, to make a commitment to boost investment in the railway significantly and to cut fares to make rail travel more attractive.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): I do not think this will be a problem, given the time we have, but will the Minister leave a couple of minutes at the end for the mover of the motion to sum up?

4.7 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): I shall have to remove a number of pages from my speech, Mr Stringer. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship—I shall obviously obey your indication from the Chair and ensure that my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) has plenty of time to answer the debate.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I shall now call her the vice-president of the Cotswold Line Promotion Group—“vice-president” is a proper title, even though it is unpaid. She is certainly showing that she is unbelievable value for money, as I am sure the cost-benefit reports she detailed in her speech show for this particular scheme. I congratulate her on the points she made, and I will go into some detail in my speech. My answer will get somewhere along the line towards where she wants to be.

A lot of Members have taken part in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) was instrumental in earlier improvements to the line we are discussing. I am sure that more than a bench on a station will be named after him for his contribution and his work in the area. He reminded us that the ultimate goal is to have journeys between Worcester—I see that the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), is in Westminster Hall this afternoon—and London coming in at under two hours, which is what everybody should expect of a modern-day railway.

My hon. Friend talked wisely about the environment and how trains are a way of reducing car journeys. Actually, I think he would be proud at how much greener our rolling stock is becoming by the day. We have a huge amount of new rolling stock—I think it is about a thousand carriages—coming on to our network this year, so there will be a much greener network at the end of the year.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: The Minister will know that there is new rolling stock on the Cotswolds line itself, and my constituents have well and truly noted the difference.

Chris Heaton-Harris: Yes, indeed. I am pleased to hear they have noted the difference, because, at the end of the day, these are relatively expensive vehicles, so it is nice to know that they are worth what we pay for them and provide good value for money for the taxpayer.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) is no longer in his place; he apologised for leaving, but he had to go to another meeting. He wisely made the point that the Department for Transport needs as much stakeholder involvement in these schemes as possible. It would therefore be good if he could prod the local enterprise partnership for Greater Birmingham and Solihull to provide support, because the scheme would benefit this whole geographical area. My hon. Friend also made some points about High Speed 2, but that is not part of my brief, and it is a bit controversial, so I will duck that one completely.

There were other contributions, including interventions. Brief contributions were made by the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds). It is very kind of her to come along and support her “hon. Friends” on the Government side, and there are a lot of hon. Friends on the Government side, including the Parliamentary Private Secretary for the Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts), who has been itching to speak in the debate, but who has not been allowed to. However, it is fair to say that there is a voice close to the Department that is very positive about the benefits that can flow from this debate and indeed from the improvements to this line.

Then there is the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Reading East (Matt Rodda). We have never really tangled in debate before, so I welcome him to his position—I believe he has been elevated or, at the very least, that his brief now encompasses more things. Everything that I have heard about him leads me to believe he is an honourable and decent man who actually wants to improve our railways and has some sensible suggestions to do that. I look forward to engaging with him on this issue.

The shadow Minister obviously knows a lot about our railways, so I am sure he has seen that there is a huge amount of investment in them. As my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds said, £48 billion will be invested in this five-year control period. That is a huge amount to improve our existing railways, quite apart from the huge schemes on the cards to build new capacity around the country.

The shadow Minister also made a point about fares. I have seen what has been going on in Germany, but I remind him that, in this country, 98p of every pound spent in fares is reinvested back into transport and specifically into the railways. So someone's fare—any fare—is almost an investment in the railways themselves. However, there is a debate to be had about this issue. I welcome that debate, and I look forward to debating this issue with him.

The shadow Minister made a number of points about the road networks and other things that are way beyond my brief. Just as with one of the points raised by my

hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest, I will duck those issues in today's debate and stick to the issue we are here to discuss.

Having said that, there was a point about cycling, which is in my brief, even if it is not part of this debate. I just wanted to back up the point my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds made about how we can connect cycling to the railways so much more than we do currently. Last week, I was privileged to go to the Cycle Rail Awards. Yes, there is such an event; it is a proper, red-carpet event—nothing but the best for the Rail Minister. It was really encouraging to see all the cycling schemes now being delivered up and down our railways, increasing capacity so that people can cycle to the railway and park their bicycle. There are also schemes whereby people can rent cycles. People can come out of a city and rent a cycle to enjoy the countryside, before returning the bike at the end of the day—please. There is a lot of investment in this area as well, so it was good to hear it being highlighted in the debate.

However, I guess I should actually talk about the meat of this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire presented a typically eloquent and persuasive argument for investment in the railway line between Oxford and Worcester. Although the debate is about the transformation of the North Cotswold line, it would be remiss of me not to begin by remarking on the renaissance the route has experienced over the last 10 years—my hon. Friend alluded to it in her speech, and it is quite spectacular.

At one stage in the 1970s, there was just one through train to London from Worcester each day, which meant the line lived up to its nickname of “Old, Worse and Worse”. From that low point, the route and the services on it have all seen slow—quite slow—but steady improvement. Now, thanks to the sterling efforts of the Cotswold Line Promotion Group and the North Cotswold Line Taskforce, it is going from strength to strength.

The real catalyst for the revival of the route was the Government's investment in 2012, which reinstated sections of double-track railway that had previously been cut back—my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds was vociferous in campaigning for that to happen. The increase in capacity was made to improve performance on the route. However, it also enabled Great Western Railway to gradually introduce progressive enhancement of train services.

Fast forward to 2019 and we have seen more investment from the Government in the North Cotswold route and across the whole Great Western Railway network. We are investing over £5 billion to deliver better services and new trains, with thousands more seats, improving over 100 million rail journeys each year and stimulating—as all my hon. Friends have alluded to—economic growth from London through the Thames valley to the Cotswolds, as well as to the west country and south Wales. Our investment has provided 4,900 extra seats into London in the peak hour, which is a 40% increase in capacity.

Matt Rodda: I am extremely grateful to the Minister for giving way on that point. Can he update us on the wider plans across the Great Western Railway region for reusing old infrastructure that was, sadly, taken out of operation in the Beeching era, because it seems that a number of lines will be affected? My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) highlighted

the Cowley branch line. I believe there are a number of other branch lines, and other sections of track, that are currently single track that might be worth reopening, and we should consider them.

Chris Heaton-Harris: I am sorry—I did not answer the point the hon. Gentleman made about Beeching in his speech. We have a £500 million fund. We are now setting out the rules for it. Obviously, Members would expect us to want to get the best value for money out of the schemes that are being brought forward thick and fast to reopen lines or to strengthen lines, so that instead of a line just having freight services it could also have passenger services, which would require the provision of carriages and so on.

Actually, there is way more demand for investment than the initial £500 million that we, as a political party, put in our manifesto and thought would be required. We will be able to pick some amazingly excellent and viable schemes, which are deliverable in short order, to reopen Beeching lines, and obviously there will be a geographical spread across the whole country. I very much hope to announce more details on that in the near future, but I hope that, for now, that answer will suffice for the hon. Gentleman.

The modernisation of the Great Western Railway enabled last month's introduction of a new timetable, which most hon. Members here today would have noticed. It was a big timetable change for the Great Western Railway. I was not the Rail Minister in May 2018, but I was a Whip at the time, and we had debate after debate about the May 2018 timetable changes. There were so many words used to describe them in the Chamber, but they all meant that the changes had been pretty much disastrous in some parts of the country, where things absolutely did not work.

As the new Rail Minister, therefore, having such a big timetable change was a bit of a worry. However, it is fair to say that it has gone particularly well and delivered significant benefits to all rail users, reducing typical journey times between Hereford and London by 10 minutes, and the fastest journey times by seven minutes. The new trains have transformed the travelling experience for North Cotswold line users. A number of stations have benefited from extended platforms to make the best use of the longer trains.

The train operator has also invested in the route. New waiting shelters were opened last year at Moreton-in-Marsh and Kingham, and a combined ticket office and waiting area was opened at Hanborough. Car parking has also been expanded at several stations, reflecting the increasing popularity of the train service. On top of that we are trying to do things to encourage people to cycle to stations. The next key milestone will be the opening of the new station at Worcestershire Parkway. As Rail Minister, I am rather more excited about that than I should be, given the slight delay in proceedings. I am pleased that work is well advanced.

Harriett Baldwin: I reiterate my invitation to my hon. Friend to come and do us the honour of opening that station. It is an exciting moment for the county. I believe it will be the first new station we have had in the county for a century.

Chris Heaton-Harris: I would absolutely love to have that honour. I hope my hon. Friend has the capacity to invite me and that I am not going to turn up and be shoved off a platform because someone else is meant to be opening the station. If I am available, I would love to come. The issue has been a point of interest for me in the Department in the past few months as we have got to this point, but I am pleased that work is now well advanced.

The Government are committed to finding new and innovative ways to attract different forms of investment into the railways. Worcestershire Parkway will be a good example of how such investment can add value to our railway network.

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way and for his positive words. I underline the connection between this line and another major project, which is the change to Oxford station. He will know that is a challenging project and that some of the discussion has been around where the buses will go in Oxford and whether it is necessary to have a multi-storey car park. I do not think that is necessary; I think we should privilege the buses. Having that link to Hanborough could help, if we used that as an additional parkway on top of the new Oxford Parkway station, which has been very successful. Will he bear that in mind when he talks about these issues?

Chris Heaton-Harris: The hon. Lady makes a good point for her constituents. What she has just described is a point of controversy in the city. Hanborough serves as a vital link not only to Oxford, but to Witney and other towns and villages across the piece. Her point is well made.

Worcestershire Parkway will enable thousands of new journeys on the two key rail corridors that it serves: Birmingham to Cardiff, and the line we are talking about today. I very much look forward to coming down and seeing it open, in operation and serving passengers who are seeing the benefits it delivers.

It is fair to say that the North Cotswold line has already been transformed from what it was a little over a decade ago. Members of Parliament and other supporters along the route can take great pride in their actions and what they have achieved, but time does not stand still and the world moves on, especially in the Cotswolds. We must look forward and effectively plan for the next investment and the next generation and for how they can grab the great opportunities that the Government

will be providing and enabling. I therefore welcome and commend the work of the North Cotswold Line Taskforce in taking the lead on how to bring about further enhancements. Where others may have sat back and reflected on their success, the taskforce has galvanised stakeholders to push for more—in this case, £1.5 million more as a starter. I recognise that it wishes to see faster and more frequent services. I very much hope we can work together to move things forwards.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire and all Members here today that the Department will analyse in great detail the proposals set out in the taskforce's strategic outline business case. We only received it 10 days ago, and it would be remiss of me to promise money without going through due process within my Department, but I guarantee we will go through that process as quickly as we can. The request for funding to develop the case further will be properly analysed and considered. There is a lot of information to digest in what we have been given, but I pledge that Department officials will set the way forward with the taskforce by the end of next month, so that we can move forward at a pace that allows us to do the work properly.

To conclude, I thank all Members for their contributions to an important debate. This is a fantastic success story, and I hope it continues to be so in the future.

4.25 pm

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome the words from colleagues and from the Minister this afternoon. We have heard that there is support from all parts of the House for the continued growth of and investment in the North Cotswolds line. There was recognition of the importance of the geographic area and its significance to our country. There was a welcome commitment from the Minister, which I will hold him to, to give us an answer by the end of February. I encourage his officials to go through the recommendations, in particular option 5, as quickly as possible. I note that the end of February is still before this year's Budget.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered North Cotswold line transformation.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Will Members please leave quietly and quickly? We have half an hour for the next debate.

Adult Social Care in Shropshire: Government Funding

4.27 pm

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government funding for adult social care in Shropshire.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. Before I start to outline the concerns we have about Government support for paying for adult social care costs in Shropshire, I will put forward two historical contexts to try to explain to the Minister a little as to why and how we got into this situation.

In 2004, the Labour-controlled Shropshire Council increased council tax in one year by 16.4%. That was the year before my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mark Pritchard), my right hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Philip Dunne) and I were elected for the first time. I am sure they will recall, as I do, the palpable anger, fear and frustration of many people on low fixed incomes in the face of that massive tax increase. When our party came into office, we incentivised councils to freeze council tax because there had been so much frustration and such a backlash against the massive increases, not only in Shropshire, but in Labour-controlled councils up and down the country where there had been double-digit increases in council tax.

Our local council, which became Conservative in 2005, decided to dutifully follow the advice and froze council tax, not just for one year, but for seven years in a row—clearly to the delight of local ratepayers. The council is now telling me that the Government have not adequately filled the shortfall in revenue that it inevitably had to face as a result of the freezing of council tax. The Minister may correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding from Shropshire Council officials is that the additional support that was envisaged to come from Government tapered off quickly, leaving the council without additional support of, it now estimates, in the region of £20 million per annum.

Labour shadow Ministers always criticise repeated references to their management and stewardship of the economy, but let us not forget that in the good times the Labour party, when it was in office, borrowed £50 billion a year, sold off our gold reserves at rock-bottom prices and put all these new hospitals on private finance initiative contracts, with the result that we will pay exorbitant interest rates for decades.

When the financial crash came in 2008, the kitty was bare. I am not ashamed of repeatedly referring to that. People forget about it, but the Minister will remember the sheer gravity of the situation when we came to office. As a nation, in 2009-10, we were borrowing £152 billion a year.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. Does he agree that it is not only about the financial pressures on Shropshire Council but the domino effect of the under-provision of social care in Shropshire on the acute trust, and how that affects A&E waiting times? Finally, does he agree that there needs to be cross-party consensus and working together nationally? We do not need another

review; we have had lots of those. We know what the problem is. We now need solutions, and that has to be done on a cross-party basis, but quickly.

Daniel Kawczynski: I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour for that intervention. I could not agree more.

When we came into office, we of course had to rein in expenditure, and all Government Departments had to have cuts. The cuts to local government have, of course, adversely affected our council. I am pleased that the country's annual deficit is now below £28 billion a year, down from the £152 billion a year that we inherited. However, now that we are getting the finances under control in a more sustainable way, I urge the Minister to take the message back to the Treasury that we need to increase public funding of our councils, so that they can start to meet the huge rise in demand for adult social care in our county. I will explain why Shropshire is uniquely affected.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Although it is absolutely the case that adult social care is very important in Shropshire, and in other parts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, does not the hon. Member agree that we need to attract more workers into adult social care, because there seems to be a dearth of them, and help them to understand how rewarding it can be to make a real difference to the life of a vulnerable person? Also, does the hon. Member believe that we can do anything in this place to encourage more adult workers to be involved?

Daniel Kawczynski: Yes, very much so, and I am sure that some of my colleagues from Shropshire will take up that point in interventions. However, I will make a few quick points before I take another intervention.

During the 2017 general election, we gave the impression to the electorate that somehow they would have to sell their homes in order to pay for their long-term care. I have to tell the Minister that I had never come across such levels of bewilderment, frustration and anger on the streets of Shrewsbury as I did following that announcement, and have not done so subsequently. Whoever came up with that policy for the then Conservative Government was really out of tune with the thinking of many of our natural voters.

Even my own beloved mother—this is the first time I have referenced her in 15 years—Halina, who is a staunch Conservative supporter, said to me, “I haven’t made sacrifices all of my life, I haven’t done the right thing, paid the right amount of tax and done all the right things, for you now to force me to sell my home to look after my long-term social care needs.” I think my mother exemplified the strength of feeling across the United Kingdom.

I am convinced that that policy lost us our majority at the 2017 general election; it was certainly a major contributory factor. I am therefore very pleased that the Prime Minister has indicated that in this Parliament a solution will be found. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin said, we need radical, innovative thinking that has the support of our voters.

Shropshire MPs meet the council on a regular basis. We Shropshire MPs work as a team and hunt as a pack, and one of our greatest strengths is the unity between us all. In fact, we are seeing our council this Friday,

[*Daniel Kawczynski*]

24 January, which happens to be my 48th birthday. I am looking forward to a few bottles of beer from my colleagues during the meeting.

Mark Pritchard: Shropshire Lad.

Daniel Kawczynski: Shropshire Lad. The clear message from Peter Nutting, the leader of our council, from the chief executive, and from the other senior councillors is that social care is their top concern. The Minister will know—she played a part in it as well—that in the last Parliament, MPs from rural shire counties worked constructively together to get a change to the funding mechanisms for our schools. Rural shire counties were unfairly discriminated against in comparison with inner-city, metropolitan areas. In this Parliament it is my intention, and that of many other Members, to make social care the No. 1 issue, because we have to listen to what our councillors are telling us.

There is no doubt in my mind that the black hole of approximately £20 million a year that the council faces is affecting not only adult social care costs but many other services in our county. The leader of the council has to take money away from repairing potholes, and all the other things for which the council is responsible, in order to manage the black hole that is staring them in the face.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on landing the debate and on the powerful case that he is making. As he said, we have all been working very closely on the matter for some time. I think he would agree that the situation is going to get worse. Currently, 23% of Shropshire's population are aged over 65. That will increase by 50%, to 33% of the population, by 2036, compared with the projection for England of 24%. That is an increase from 74,029 to 110,926.

I am sure that, like me, my hon. Friend is an avid reader of the *Shropshire Star*. On Monday there was a story titled, "Dramatic rise in dementia cases", which reported that dementia cases have gone up by 57%. Dr Karen Harrison Denning of Dementia UK said:

"We are going to have a huge increase in population of older people, and one of the main risk factors of dementia is age. There is also going to be a reduction in the number of younger people who will be able to care for them."

Would my hon. Friend like to comment on the inevitability of this getting worse?

Daniel Kawczynski: I would, but I will first give way to my right hon. Friend.

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I endorse what my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) has just said. In south Shropshire, the population of over-65s is currently 29%, compared with 19% of the population across the UK and 23% across the county, as he said, so the issue is particularly pressing in the south.

Today, there are twice as many people over the age of 90 as there were on the day when my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) and I were elected, nearly 15 years ago. However, it is not all gloom and doom about increasing demand,

although that is a major problem. Shropshire is leading the way in this country in developing technologies to help cope with the growing pressure. I commend the Broseley project to him. It is one of the leading projects in the county, and in the country, trying to find technological solutions to keep people out of hospital or residential care. I encourage him to visit that project if he has not done so already.

Daniel Kawczynski: I am extremely grateful for those interventions from my hon. Friends and neighbours. I could not agree with them more. Shrewsbury is listed as one of the top 10 places to retire to in the whole of the United Kingdom because of the beauty of our town—we have more listed buildings than any other town in England. We have a larger number of senior citizens as a percentage of our total population, and that percentage is growing much faster than the national average. Governments of all political colours have poured money disproportionately into inner-city, metropolitan areas while leaving us in the rural shire counties as the poorer cousins, and it is vital that we now start to take action.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Daniel Kawczynski: I will give way for the last time, very quickly.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Order. In half-hour debates on the Adjournment, people who speak have to have the permission of the proposer and of the Minister, and it is not good form to come in after the proposer has started speaking. I ask the proposer and the Minister whether Bill Wiggin has had permission to intervene.

Bill Wiggin: I am happy to withdraw my intervention, Mr Stringer.

Daniel Kawczynski: I will follow your lead on that, Mr Stringer.

In the financial year 2019-20, the social care budget for Shropshire Council was £103.1 million. That represents 48.2% of the council's net budget, up from 32.6% in 2015-16, which is extraordinary: our council's budget for just dealing with adult social care costs has gone up from a third of its net budget to practically a half. I find those figures staggering, and my colleagues from Shropshire agree. Since 2015-16, Shropshire Council's adult social care budget has risen by an average of £7 million per annum. In the coming financial year, it is projected to rise by approximately £10 million; £6 million of that is inflationary, meaning that only approximately £4 million is due to increasing demand.

As has been said, Shropshire's senior citizen population is rising at a much faster rate than the national average, and Shropshire Council has become more efficient, which is the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow was making. The Local Government Association has assessed our council as being very well managed, and as implementing new and innovative policies in this regard. Shropshire Council has become more efficient and innovative in an attempt to control rising costs in social care. Of all initial inquiries into adult social care, 85% are signposted to external support, and of the remainder, only 14.8% enter paid services.

In total, 2.25% of all inquiries enter paid services; in 2014-15, the comparable figure was 32%. The financial pressures on Shropshire Council go beyond single-year budget increases. The most recent available analysis shows that if our council were funded at the English average per head of population, it would have an additional £20 million in its base budget.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to raise this issue, and look forward to hearing the Minister's answers. I am pleased that all the MPs from the Shropshire Council area have attended this debate, and I am very grateful for their support. They know as well as I do the huge pressures that our council is under at the moment because of its lack of funding, and will share those pressures with the Minister. Our hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin also mentioned serious problems with our local hospital acute trust, which we are trying to raise with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

We in Shropshire are experiencing a unique combination of problems at the moment, meaning that our constituents are given services that are creaking at best. That is not something I feel comfortable with. We are the fifth-largest economy in the world; I read today that last year, we reduced our debt as a percentage of GDP by 0.9%, and I am delighted and thrilled that the International Monetary Fund is now forecasting that our country will grow at a faster rate than the eurozone over the next three years. We have turned a corner, so we can start to loosen the purse strings a little bit. We as Conservatives must demonstrate that we have a long-term solution to this issue, which affects so many of our constituents.

4.44 pm

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dineneage): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) on securing this important debate on the funding of adult social care in Shropshire. He is a strong and consistent champion for both his county and his constituency on a range of issues but, particularly today on the subject of adult social care. As he mentioned, he and his colleagues hunt as a pack; they work very effectively together, and I am pleased to see him joined by his colleagues. I do not know what the collective noun is for a group of Shropshire MPs, but it is clearly something very robust and effective. I am pleased to see them all here, and grateful for all the points they have raised.

Clearly, adult social care is one of the biggest challenges we face as a country, but it is not just our country that faces it; it is a global issue. How do we face the challenges of an ageing population? We have to preface this by saying it is not a bad thing that people are living longer; we should be celebrating that. This is not doom and gloom, but we need to make sure that we are equipped to support people in later life. People are also living longer with much more complex conditions. Over half of local authority budgets are spent on working-age adults; although that cohort includes a lower number of people, it is also more expensive, and we need to make sure that we are looking after those people sufficiently as well and supporting local authorities to do so properly.

Successive Governments have wrestled with the challenges of how to deal with the issues caused by an ageing population and of adult social care. Frankly, they have

all then put those challenges in the "too difficult" pile, because the solution is very difficult and potentially very expensive. Unfortunately, the sand has run through the hourglass and we no longer have the luxury of being able to put those issues aside; we now have to face the challenges of an ageing population and of adult social care head on. That is why the Prime Minister, on the steps of Downing Street on his very first day, committed to tackle them. We will therefore set out much more on this issue in due course.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the fact that by 2040, one in four people in the UK will be aged 65 or over. However, it is important to remember that this is not just about older people, as the number of those aged below 65 who access long-term support is growing year on year. Central to all our thinking are all those magnificent adult social care professionals, the social care workers, social workers and nurses, as well as the army of unpaid carers—loved ones, friends and family—who do so much in Shropshire and the whole country to look after their loved ones.

Daniel Kawczynski: The Minister has just reminded me of one thing. Of course, we should pay tribute to the millions of citizens out there who are carers and who look after their elderly relatives in a voluntary capacity, as we looked after my beloved grandfather in the latter stages of his life. It is very important to acknowledge what they do. It is true, is it not, that the way in which a country treats its senior citizens is an indicator of what sort of society and culture prevails in that country?

Caroline Dineneage: That is absolutely right. It is because of the army of paid and unpaid carers that my hon. Friend mentioned that there are many reasons to be positive about the care people receive in Shropshire.

As of 1 January, 86.5% of care home beds in Shropshire were rated good or outstanding by the Care Quality Commission, which is much better than the national average, and 90.3% of care home agencies in Shropshire are good or outstanding. Moreover, in the 2018-19 adult social care survey of users, more than 90% of people receiving care in the county reported that they were satisfied with the care and support that they received. However, we know that there is still a long way to go.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Philip Dunne) spoke about how Shropshire leads the way in technology. If we are to face the challenges of adult social care and tackle what might be regarded as a crisis, we need to look at not just funding but harnessing all modern technology. We need to look at the workforce, and at modern models of care and methods of housing to make sure that we are harnessing the best in all those areas. He was a fantastic Health Minister and a brilliant co-chair of the all-party group on adult social care.

Last autumn, the most recent spending round announced further investment in social care for 2020-21. That will give councils access to an additional £1.5 billion for adult and children's social care, which includes an additional £1 billion of funding and a proposed 2% council tax precept that will enable councils to access a further £500 million specifically for adult social care. The £1.5 billion is over and above the existing £2.5 billion of social care grants that were rolled over in the spending review and is part of the biggest increase in overall core spending power for local government since 2015—an increase of

[*Caroline Dinenage*]

4.4% in real terms in 2020-21. A key stakeholder, the Local Government Association, said that it was delighted that the spending round

“has delivered a funding package of more than £3.5 billion for our vital local services...This is the biggest year-on-year real terms increase in spending power for local government in a decade”.

For Shropshire, the settlement puts considerable new resources into social care. It will receive an additional £7.9 million in funding from the new social care grant and £11.5 million through the improved better care fund, which will drive the integration to stop pressure being put on acute health services. Shropshire will also have the opportunity to raise an additional £15.1 million through the dedicated adult social care precept. That additional funding is an important step towards putting adult social care on a fairer and more sustainable footing. We recognise that it is important for local authorities to have security, predictability and certainty about future funding for social care, which is why the funding beyond 2020-21 will be set out at the next spending review.

On Shropshire Council’s wider funding, my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham set out beautifully the challenges facing local councils up and down the country. All Government Departments and local authorities had to make tough decisions to deal with the parlous finances and extremely high borrowing that we inherited from the last Labour Government. He is right to say that that put huge pressure on local authorities, which were also trying not to put up council tax to deal with the problem. That is why the Government are committed to undertaking a review of the relative needs and resources.

The review will consider the drivers of local authorities’ needs, the resources available to them to fund services, and how to account for them in a way that draws a more transparent and understandable link between local circumstances and local authority funding. In my hon. Friend’s area, for example, the rurality and the relative size of the ageing population would have to be taken into account. The Government are working closely with local government representatives and others to examine all elements of the review, including adult social care. The aim is to share the emerging results with the sector shortly, followed by a full consultation in the spring. I hope that he will find good news for Shropshire Council in that.

I finish by assuring my hon. Friend that my Department and the Government are by no means complacent. Fixing the issues with adult social care is a huge priority for us. As the Prime Minister said, the Government will deliver on their promises and bring forward a plan for social care this year. There are complex questions to address, but we have been clear on two things: everybody will have dignity and security, and nobody will be forced to sell their home to pay for their care.

Question put and agreed to.

Commission on Justice in Wales

4.54 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the report of the Commission on Justice in Wales.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer, and an honour to have the opportunity to discuss the landmark report by the Commission on Justice in Wales for the people of Wales. First, I thank the former Lord Chief Justice, Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd, for our discussions prior to the debate, and all commission members, whose conclusions and recommendations in the report were—I emphasise—unanimous. I also thank Jeremy Miles, the Welsh Government’s Counsel General, for his advice. I look forward to that level of co-working continuing on such matters. The excellent report offers a description and a critique of how the public good, justice, operates in Wales and, more importantly, how justice is experienced by people in Wales. It is clear that there has been a great deal of cross-party agreement on the issue but there is room for further co-operation in and between Westminster and the Senedd.

Of course, Wales has its own legal history. Until the Acts of Union in the 16th century, much of the law of Wales was based on a legal system codified by the lawyers of Hywel Dda, King of Deheubarth, which covered almost the entirety of Wales in the mid-10th century. The attribute “dda” translates as “good”—Hywel the Good—and referred to the fact that his laws were perceived as good and fair by the people who lived under them.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on securing the debate. The report is a serious piece of work. Does she agree that what has not been good and fair is the fact that, in the last decade, the Justice Department has been unprotected and there has been a 40% cut in its budget from Westminster? That is clearly a driving factor in a number of the faults that Lord Thomas identifies.

Liz Saville Roberts: Exactly. Lord Thomas identifies the discrepancies in cost and how much a local citizen contributes to justice in Wales. When I talk about justice being good and fair, I am describing the situation more than 1,000 years ago, not in the present day.

The legal system of Hywel Dda covered the law, procedure, judges and the administration of the land. It was notable for being based on retribution rather than punishment, for its pragmatic and arguably more compassionate approach than that which we now experience, and for granting higher status to women than most contemporary legal systems. Following the Acts of Union, of course, Welsh law was officially abolished and Wales as a legal jurisdiction ceased to exist.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on securing the debate. While the debate is focused on justice for Wales, the same argument applies in Scotland or Northern Ireland. There are differing laws. Does she agree that it is essential that regional laws are fully considered when the Government introduce legislation centrally in Westminster and that

the Government need to work with the regional Administrations to achieve the goal that we all wish to see?

Liz Saville Roberts: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. There is a sense that we can learn from and compare with the other nations within the United Kingdom, if we have the information and the means to act upon that. That is invaluable for each of those nations.

In the last 21 years of devolution, the power of our National Assembly has expanded and its confidence as an institution has grown. Now, in 2020, Welsh Government policy made in that Assembly has a greater impact on the lives of the people of Wales than ever before, yet extraordinarily my country still operates without a corresponding legal jurisdiction, despite having a full law-making legislature, its own Parliament, the Senedd.

In the broader sense, that means that while devolution divergence is expanding Wales-specific legislation, it is being enacted without the underpinning structures of jurisdiction. That creates a jagged edge, duplication, a lack of accountability, additional costs to the citizen without transparency, and confusion. As the commission's report says, the people of Wales both need and deserve a better system. Justice is not an island; it should be truly integrated into policies for a just, fair and prosperous Wales.

I hear myself using these abstract words, but of course justice is not an abstract concept; it is put into action or it does not exist. It is put into action through a range of agencies—education, social services, health and housing—all of which are devolved to the Senedd. Does that matter? Yes, it does. Bingham's first rule of law is that the law must be accessible and, so far as possible, intelligible, clear and predictable. That simply is not the case in Wales in the 21st century.

The commission's report is comprehensive, but today I intend to concentrate on three areas: criminal justice, family justice and legal aid. There are many other areas that are worthy of more attention, and I urge that we have further discussion, because this problem will continue to be exacerbated. It is serious, given people's experience in Wales.

On criminal justice, the report states:

"If criminal justice is to be effective, most particularly its treatment of victims, in policing and in the administration of the sentences of the courts (the principal role of the prison and probation services), it must be closely integrated with services which are the responsibility of other parts of local, devolved and central government—for example, health, drug and alcohol misuse, housing, education, employment, accessing benefits and managing debt and other welfare services."

That, again, is the jagged cutting edge of justice. Whether a criminal reoffends or not is, of course, that individual's responsibility, but that does not absolve the state of any responsibility as the provider of justice. If the state's criminal justice system has contributed to the breakdown of family bonds, the release into homelessness, a failure to grasp the opportunity to address health issues such as addiction, and the likelihood of unemployment implicit in the toxic combination of low skills and a criminal record, what has it achieved, save to tighten the vicious circle of criminality?

I want to mention the case of Conner Marshall, whose inquest concluded last week. I pay my respects to Conner's parents, Nadine and Richard, for their courage and perseverance in seeking justice for their son, and to

my colleague and friend, the late and dearly missed Harry Fletcher, who supported the family in their search for answers. Conner was only 18 when he was murdered by a violent serial offender released on licence and on the books of community rehabilitation company Working Links.

Last Friday, the coroner in the inquest into Conner's murder said that the probation caseworker of Braddon, the offender, was "overwhelmed" and "essentially left to her own devices"

in what is an extremely challenging job at the best of times. Conner's murderer had missed eight probation appointments, six of which were sufficient to return him to prison. The coroner—this is important—noted that that was not the fault of the probation officer. She had a case load of 60 offenders and was new in her post. Rather, Conner's death was the collateral result of a failed social experiment—an ideological concept put into action by a Conservative Secretary of State for Justice in the belief that the profit motive of private enterprise can be trusted with a public good. Who would ever suspect that private companies might interpret contractual payment targets to reduce criminal acts by the simple means of seeing, hearing and recording no such acts? Clearly not the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling). It is to the credit of the former Secretary of State for Justice, David Gauke, that he recognised the abject and costly failure of the transforming rehabilitation programme, and that Wales led the way in bringing probation back into public control with the new National Probation Service of Wales.

The case of Conner Marshall revealed how difficult it was for his family to get to the root of the circumstances leading up to and following their son's tragic death, but the lack of hard data about the crime and offenders in Wales, disaggregated from the wider England-and-Wales picture, was also an issue for the commission. The crime survey for England and Wales warns that separate estimates for Wales are subject to sampling volatility and variability, and that extreme caution should be taken in interpreting figures under the present reporting arrangements when trying to extract Wales-specific data. I am glad to note, however, that CSEW intends to produce Wales-specific estimates for the first time this summer.

Additionally, it is distressing to note that the then Secretary of State for Wales effectively enforced a veto by insisting that all requests from the commission to UK Ministers and entities had to be passed by him. That caused a significant delay to the commission in receiving evidence, which the commission itself expressed. Indeed, in May 2019 he said that he

"did not think it would be appropriate for UK Government Ministers or officials to give evidence on reserved policy to a Commission established by a devolved administration."

Such high-handedness does not engender confidence that the needs of the citizens of Wales were foremost in his mind.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): My right hon. Friend is making a fantastic speech and a very persuasive case, based on the commission's evidence. Do the UK Government's heavy-handed dealings in relation to the commission's work indicate that their objection to devolving these powers is based not on practicality but on ideology?

Liz Saville Roberts: That question will be running through my speech. Of course, we should always be looking to measure and gather evidence about the public costs and what this does for the people of Wales. The fundamental conclusion here is that the present arrangement is not serving the people of Wales effectively. I urge the Minister to consider that. It is not simply matter of asking for the devolution of everything or nothing at all, although the commission recommends the devolution of jurisdiction. There are many stations on the way in the recommendations. I sincerely hope the UK Government will look at them in the spirit of what is best for the people of Wales. I find it difficult to believe that anybody could argue otherwise.

On the effort required to get a picture of what is happening to Wales, another person to whom I must give credit is Rob Jones at the Wales Governance Centre at Cardiff University, who has done excellent work. Dr Rob has made effective use of all research tools at public disposal to extract information of great public interest about the criminal justice system as it is experienced in Wales. That source reveals that Wales has the highest imprisonment rate in western Europe—154 prisoners for every 100,000 people. Although imprisonment dropped by 16% in England between 2010 and 2017, it increased by 0.3% in Wales, at a time when everybody has been talking about the pressures on the prison system in England and Wales. Rob Jones's work exposes that the Government plans for additional prison places will eventually result in Wales becoming a net importer of prisoners from England. Despite that evidence, we simply do not need more prisons in Wales, but unfortunately the Justice Secretary has recently indicated that the UK Government still want to build an extra prison. It begs the question why.

There is more. The commission notes that people who are charged are disproportionately likely to come from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and that there is currently a lack of a joined-up approach to address that inequality as well as inequalities with regard to women, LGBT people and disabled people. The Wales Governance Centre found that there were 72 black men—they would all be men—from Wales in prison for every 10,000 of the population in 2017. That rate compared to just 15 white people per 10,000 of the population. There were 25 Asian people in prison per 10,000, and 37 people from a mixed-race background per 10,000.

For women the current system is, for lack of a better word, simply inadequate; there are no facilities for women in Wales. It is perhaps in relation to women's justice that a public health approach is most needed. There is significant evidence about the prevalence of a wide range of mental health problems afflicting many vulnerable women caught up in the criminal justice system. Most are the direct result of difficult childhoods, trauma, addiction and abusive relationships. In 2018, Wales was promised a residential unit for female offenders. Will the Minister, in due time, update us on where in Wales that unit will be, when it will be opened, and how his Government will work with the Welsh Government in its operation?

I will give the Minister another immediate opportunity to acknowledge the difference between England and Wales and to improve legislation at the stroke of a pen. The serious violence Bill will see new laws to require schools, police, councils and health authorities to work

together to prevent serious crime. That will introduce a much-needed shift towards a public health approach to tackling serious violence in England. The Bill's provisions will also apply to Wales, however, where most of the areas mentioned in the description—schools, councils and health authorities—are the responsibility of the Welsh Government.

I refer the Minister to pages 138 and 139 of the commission's report. Page 138 shows the bodies that his Government have charged with implementing the justice system in Wales. On page 139, we have the Welsh Government's crime prevention support networks. Will the Minister commit to ensuring that the Serious Violence Bill starts off on the right foot by acknowledging that the implementation of many of its measures will require the recognition of the existence of devolution in Wales? Will he commit to acknowledging the existence of those bodies, and to making sure that their best and effective use is planned at the early stage of planning legislation?

Will the Minister also commit to responding to the commission's eminently sensible request to establish an overarching Wales criminal justice board with executive authority to set overall criminal justice strategy for Wales and to provide the means for accountability in Wales, which is presently missing in the delivery of an overall strategic approach? That degree of complexity goes against the first principle of Bingham's rules of law. There is such complexity and presenteeism, and such a lack of coherence and answerability to strategy, that it has a direct impact on the people of Wales and their experience of justice.

Family justice is another area that was covered in the report, and is closely linked with the issue of women's justice and with the part of the justice system that deals with concerns relating to children and interfamily relationships. Again, unquestionably integrating education, health and social policy with family justice would be significantly more suitable than the current state of affairs. Shockingly, in August last year, Dr Sophie Hallett's study into children in care found that in Wales, one child lived in 57 different places while in contact with social services. Although that individual case is extreme, the researchers found that on average, children were moved nine times and saw seven different social workers.

The rate of children in care is significantly higher in Wales, at 102 per 10,000, than in England, where the figure stands at 64 per 10,000. Scotland's rate is higher still, but interestingly, it has fallen in recent years, while the rate continues to rise in Wales. That raises the question about how justice is applied, about the traceable differences between England and Wales, and about the job that we have just getting hold of that data, let alone actually applying it.

Cardiff University research shows that since 2010, spending on children in care in Wales has gone up by £95.9 million, or 33%. That in itself shows that the problem is specific to Wales and requires a solution specific to Wales, in the context of devolution. As family law is reserved to Westminster, however, there are complexities between non-devolved and devolved matters.

Although law-making powers in social welfare are now the responsibility of the Welsh Government, the current law is a mishmash of older laws that cover both England and Wales, such as the Children Act 2004; some that differ slightly between England and Wales, such as the Care Act 2014 and the Social Services and

Well-being (Wales) Act 2014; and some that apply to Wales only, such as Cafcass Cymru. Different legislation and different structures are in place, and we are still finding our way through that.

To cut through the complexities, the commission recommends that the law relating to children and family justice in Wales be brought together in one coherent system, aligned with functions in relation to health, education and welfare. I cannot perceive a logical argument to counter that.

I will move on to legal aid, although there are many other points in the report. The deep cuts to legal aid in 2012 have led to serious deficiencies in Wales, with deserts where legal aid is not available. Before the cuts, there were 31 providers of publicly funded benefits advice; now there are three. The number of firms providing legal aid has fallen by 29% in Wales compared with 20% in England. That has led to an increase in the number of people representing themselves in courts and tribunals, and leaving significantly disadvantaged.

The Welsh Government have rightly chosen to support people by spending their own funds on advice services for a policy that is reserved to the British Government. They are doing that to make amends for the harsh effects of cuts to legal aid, and because they believe it right for the people of Wales. Regardless of one's political leanings, that one Parliament, for the good of the citizens it serves, has to provide its own additional funding to make up for the failings of political decisions made in this place must be seen as being unsustainable and unjust. The commission recommends that the funding for legal aid and the third sector providing advice and assistance should be brought together in Wales, to form a single fund under the strategic direction of an independent body.

To conclude, in the time available I have only been able to touch on certain matters raised in the commission's report. Suffice it to say that the current system clearly does not work. For too long, Wales has put up with complexities that lead to the people of Wales being systematically let down. My party, Plaid Cymru, has long argued that it is time for Wales to take responsibility for justice and to have its own legal jurisdiction. There is a growing cross-party understanding that the devolution of policing and criminal justice, as well as powers over prisons and the probation system, is sorely needed. Surely now, with this landmark report, commissioned by Labour's Welsh Government, we can move away from the accusations of partisanship.

We in Plaid Cymru are calling for devolution of justice, not just because we like the idea and believe in the principle, but because the evidence shows that it will improve the lives of the people of Wales. That is the point of devolution, and all acts that we take in respect of devolution should be with that aim in mind. We should have the tools, the data and the information to measure whether what we do is improving people's lives, so that if it is not, we can make amends and improve the situation; but for all of us, in Cardiff and here in Westminster, that must be the driving force behind why we act.

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): I thank the right hon. Lady for securing this important debate, and I welcome the tone she has adopted. However, in the overriding, constant call of, "Devolve, devolve, devolve!"

what is missing is the people's consent, as is any mention of the cost. The estimate in the report is of between £105 million and £115 million; that is a substantial amount. She has outlined the cuts that have taken place. But where is the people's consent? At the last general election, we stood on a platform of not devolving justice, but I understand that the right hon. Lady's party did not.

Liz Saville Roberts: On the costs, we know from past evidence that policing was funded under the Barnett formula. We have yet to apply that to the new police funding, but the per head rate of Barnett funding should produce an additional £25 million. The people of Wales directly fund the maintenance of the frontline presence of the police on their streets. The people of Wales are funding that themselves, in a way that does not happen with police forces in England. Wales is also already contributing funding for legal aid and advice over and above what happens in England, because that is believed to be best for the people of Wales.

That situation is not sustainable. One Government is propping up the failures experienced by the people of Wales that have been imposed on them by the Government here. By working together we can ensure that no other family will have to endure the pain and suffering that Conner Marshall's family had to suffer over the last four years, by building a probation service that is fit for purpose. We can ensure that no child has to live in 57 different homes while in contact with social services, and design a Welsh policy integrating social services and family law. We can ensure that no one in Wales loses out on justice as a result of lack of access to legal aid.

Justice is a public good. Good governance exists not for its own sake but for the public good. If not now, when? Over the weekend, the Justice Secretary told the BBC:

"What is more important...from the point of view of residents is outcomes"—

rather than "who holds the pen". That is evidence that the UK Government are merely opposing the devolution of justice on ideological grounds, and that the good governance that the Welsh people deserve to enjoy is of secondary importance.

I will close my speech with three specific asks in addition to those that I have already mentioned. Could the Minister tell us what will be the UK Government's formal response to the report on justice in Wales, and when it will be released? Will he commit to providing a response that acknowledges all recommendations individually? When will the working group that the Welsh Government and the Ministry of Justice have agreed to set up to consider the user needs for Welsh justice data be convened? I understand that no timetable has been provided. Finally, I really hope the Minister will be able to find common ground with me on this: will he ensure that the Serious Violence Bill will include the Welsh Government and their agencies for all strands of co-operation?

5.22 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I will keep my comments short because there is not a great deal of time. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) on securing the debate. I could hotly

[Chris Bryant]

dispute every comment she made about the history of a thousand years ago, but we will have to reserve that for some other time as now is not the moment.

When there is a proposal such as the one we are debating, there is a fundamental question, which would make a significant difference, that we always must ask ourselves: is there a problem that needs fixing? I think all of us on the Labour Benches would argue that there is a problem in the delivery of justice in Wales, not least the dramatic changes to legal aid funding in Wales. Of course, the same is true across the whole of the United Kingdom, and we have all been angered by it. We have seen people unable to secure justice for themselves. It feels as if there is one law in the land for the rich and another for those who cannot afford to pay for expensive lawyers.

Many of us would say that it would be very difficult for a constituent who ends up in prison to have to serve most of their time a long way from home. It makes it far more difficult for them to return to their community and to get the support they need not to go back to a life of crime. There is clear evidence that that is the case.

There is less access to justice now because many of the courts have closed—certainly, that is true in the Rhondda. The evidence is that more people are refusing to turn up for court hearings, and consequently justice is not being well served.

There are problems with probation. I do not need to go into the nonsense of the privatisation of the probation service at length. Everyone knows that the Opposition parties were all opposed to that. I visited Cardiff prison and I know there are still significant problems with overcrowding. The staff are trying to do a good job, but they simply do not have enough personnel. My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) rightly said that there has been a dramatic—40%—cut in the Ministry of Justice's budget, which has had very clear effects on the delivery of justice to my constituents and to everyone in Wales.

My question in relation to the proposal on the table is: does devolution solve any of those problems? I am afraid it does not. If anything, I am terrified that the Government might bite off the right hon. Lady's hand and say, "Yes, devolve it," because I know what happens. They devolve the power and the responsibility so that they can devolve the blame when the service is not delivered properly, because they do not devolve the right amount of funding to go with it. I agree that legal aid is underfunded in Wales, but if it is devolved to Wales and no additional funds are provided, Wales will have to find those additional funds somewhere else. That will be the health budget, the education budget or the local authority budget. I am not in favour of that.

I argue here in Westminster that we should fund legal aid properly, and that we should ensure there are proper facilities across the whole of the country so that people do not have to serve their time in prison a long way from home.

Jonathan Edwards: The hon. Gentleman has long-standing views on these issues, but he knows that the devolving of public policy and the funding that comes with it is determined by the Barnett formula and Barnett

consequentials. If policing were devolved to Wales, as it is in Scotland and Northern Ireland, there would be a £20 million per annum bonanza for the Welsh Government to invest in safer communities. Surely, that is a good thing.

Chris Bryant: Actually, the police settlement figures that are out today make it pretty clear that that would not do Wales any favours. We would simply be robbing the police budget to pay for the legal aid budget. I am not sure that solves the problem.

The hon. Gentleman says that my historical views are well known, but I am not sure that he does know my views on this subject, because I have tried to keep them to myself. To be honest, I am agnostic about the devolution of justice and policing, but I am not prepared to have the Welsh Assembly take responsibility for an area of policy if the money does not go with it. That would be cutting off your nose to spite your face.

Liz Saville Roberts: Would the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Bryant: If the right hon. Lady does not mind, other Members want to speak and she spoke for nearly 30 minutes, so I will not give way. I think she gets time at the end to wind up the debate, so if she wants to have a go at me, she can do so then.

There are enormous dangers. The right hon. Lady raised specific issues about children in care. I am not sure that there is a higher number of children in care in Wales because the matter is not devolved. I suspect that is much more related to poverty and deprivation, at historic levels in some of the valleys communities that I and others represent. I want to see causation, not just correlation. That is a fundamental principle in all our policy making.

During the general election, not a single person on the doorstep raised any of these matters. In fact, in all my time as an MP—18 years—I have never known anybody on the doorstep in the Rhondda raise the issue of devolution, except sometimes to say that the Welsh Assembly should be dismantled or done away with. I am in favour of devolution. It is terrible when a higher power arrogates to itself matters that should be decided at a much more local level. I am in favour of devolution. However, I do not think we should spend all our time in Welsh politics picking at the constitutional settlement. We should be trying to deliver better outcomes for our constituents. We should be trying to make sure that the money that is spent in Wales is well-spent. We should be trying to improve the national health service, the education service and all the rest of it. Frankly, I think the constitution can wait for—

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Bryant: Go on, then. It was my last word!

Ben Lake: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman; I just thought I would get a word in edgeways before he resumes his seat. He is right to say that the money the Welsh Government has to spend on health, education and other priorities should be spent on health, education and other priorities, but does he acknowledge the Welsh Government are currently spending up to £141 million per year supplementing elements of what should be

central Government responsibilities because of decisions made here? I agree that it would be good to have all that money going to health and education, but that is not happening, so it would be better for us to have the responsibility, because we are paying for it as well.

Chris Bryant: I agree with that. It doubles my anxiety about the dangerous route that we will go down if we have more things devolved to Wales without the money going with them. I am absolutely certain that the only answer is a Labour Government in Westminster as well as a Labour Government in Cardiff. On that note, Mr Stringer, I resume my seat.

5.30 pm

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): I think it is important to speak, but I will keep my comments short.

The report is important because in Wales we have tied ourselves up in constitutional knots for too long; we now have to deliver. I am impressed by the report because it talks not about constitutional change, but about the delivery of services. The most striking thing that comes out of the report is that people in Wales are being let down by the system in its current state. I am delighted that a Justice Minister will be responding, because the issue goes beyond Wales.

We are in crisis regarding our prison population. That is not being helped by the Government's open door policy on Secretaries of State for Justice and Lord Chancellors. Last February, I secured a debate in this very Chamber in which I talked about the need to reform short prison sentences. I was heartened by the then Lord Chancellor, David Gauke, who talked about abolishing them. The then Minister, Rory Stewart, said he would put his career on the line if he did not deliver the end of short sentences. However, last week we saw the Lord Chancellor on the BBC "Politics Show", once again saying that he wants to build a new prison in Wales without speaking to the Welsh Assembly. To me, that is absolute madness.

In a small country such as Wales it is shameful that we top the charts for locking people up. I believe that the Welsh Government have made progress with this—for example, ensuring that people do not go to prison for not paying off their council tax—but it is the most impoverished people in society who receive short prison sentences. When people are sentenced for six weeks, there is not enough time for the prison service to tackle issues such as drug, alcohol or mental health problems. Research by the Prison Reform Trust and the Ministry of Justice's own statistics show that short prison sentences are less effective than community sentences at reducing reoffending, but still this Government want to lock people up.

One group in society adversely affected by short prison sentences is women. Traditionally, women have a caring role, so if a woman goes to prison, more often than not her children will go into care; those children will be touched by the justice system. When people are in and out of prison there is little we can do about mental health services, yet in the past 10 years, on the watch of this Government—the so-called party of law and order—community sentences have been halved. Economically and socially, community sentences are better in the long run. Prison is expensive. As I said in a

debate on short prison sentences last year, it costs more to send someone to prison than to Eton. But still there is a belief that prison works. Community sentences can work as a way of rehabilitation. They can help offenders to recognise and develop the skills that are necessary for work. They do not disrupt housing arrangements and, more importantly, they keep families together.

For me, this is not a constitutional debate. There is a problem right now and action has to be taken. The priority for Wales is not constitutional change or more devolution; it is tackling the problem of the prison population and reoffending rates. We need to improve provision for those who are released from prison. We hear too many reports about people being released from prison and being sent to live in a tent, due to lack of help in finding accommodation. That increases the risk of rough sleeping, which in turn increases the risk of reoffending and substance abuse relapse, and can exacerbate mental health issues.

We also need to look at Friday and weekend releases, which increase the chances of reoffending. If people are released on a Friday, the housing and welfare services that they need are often closed. We must make sure there are no gaps in post-release support. People who have served their sentences need help. They need to be met at the prison gate and be told what services are available.

I welcome the report, but this is not just a Welsh issue; it is an issue that needs to be looked at more widely by Government. We can devolve the justice system, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said, in devolving it the UK Government will try to devolve blame, as they have in the past. I do not know how long it will take to bring about change. I do not know whether they want to devolve justice, but action needs to be taken right now. I hope we will see some today.

5.35 pm

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): Over the 20 years since the first Welsh devolution settlement, we have witnessed the successful devolution of powers from Whitehall to Wales. The people of Wales have greatly benefited from power, money and decision making being centred much closer to their lives. I tell my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) that people may not mention it on the doorsteps when we knock on doors, but that is a good thing. That is when we know it is working; they mention it when it is not working. Decisions are made by people much closer to home, who have a greater appreciation and understanding of the daily struggles. When the Welsh people enjoy so much control over areas from transport to housing, education and health, it seems to me absolutely ludicrous that justice, the cornerstone of freedom and democracy, should be controlled from London.

I pay tribute to Lord Thomas and all the members of the justice commission, who looked hard and deeply into this issue and came up with a strong report—a landmark report. Let me highlight the most important part of it: the Welsh people are being let down by a broken justice system. Surely a nation that makes and executes its own laws should be policing them.

It is insufficient that the people of Wales do not have the benefit enjoyed by the people of Scotland, Northern Ireland and England of justice being an integral part of

[*Anna McMorris*]

policy making. Policy and spending on justice must be aligned with those areas that are already devolved, such as health and education, but how do we get to the outcome we so need and want in Wales—the rehabilitation of prisoners in the prison system—when the Welsh Government have no control over how that happens in the justice system?

When the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies)—now the Under-Secretary of State for Wales—chaired the Welsh Affairs Committee, we had an inquiry, in which I took part, on prisons in Wales. When we visited prisons in Wales, we saw a broken system in action. Prison officers told us how they could not put in the mental health provision that prisoners so desperately needed because justice was a Westminster matter. We saw that at first hand. I know the Minister saw it at first hand.

To devolve justice to Wales is not radical; it is merely levelling up our devolution settlement to ensure that it matches those of Scotland and Northern Ireland. The commission found that people in Wales feel let down by the system. There are feelings of frustration and alienation from the system, driven in part by confusion about who controls it. We saw that at first hand.

Wales needs a clearer, more pertinent form of devolution to tackle its problems in justice, policing and prisons. I know that in policing, Cardiff is not currently recognised as a capital city and so does not receive the capital city funding for policing that it should, despite holding many large-scale national events every single weekend and facing the terror threats that many other cities, from London to Manchester to Birmingham, also face. If justice were devolved, the people of Wales would be able to properly allocate those resources where necessary and appropriate.

Craig Williams: I have followed the speeches by the hon. Members for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and for Islwyn (Chris Evans), and I agree. In fact, the hon. Member for Islwyn spoke with such passion that I was overwhelmed, after those thoughtful contributions, by the belief that this power should remain here. On the point about devolution and the process 20 years on, may I just reflect that I am not sure that the people of Wales have any faith that devolving more is always a solution? As someone who is passionate about devolution, I think there is a growing appetite for the Welsh Government to get on and deliver, rather than saying, “More powers.” It is wonderful to watch the Labour party present such a united message on this particular point.

Anna McMorris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but what he is missing here is real life—real life in prisons, with prisoners being let down by that broken justice system. What is being called for here and within the judiciary and legal system is the devolution of those powers to Wales. That is what is being called for and that is what I am hearing. There is no reason why Wales should not enjoy the powers that have been enjoyed by Scotland and Northern Ireland, especially in solving the challenges that Welsh justice will face, requiring tighter, more localised and more regional powers.

The commission report also challenges Wales’s brilliant law schools to work more effectively together, to recognise the place of Welsh law in legal education and to ensure

that teaching materials are available in both languages. We have some fantastic law schools; I must declare an interest there, as my daughter has just started at the brilliant Swansea University School of Law.

In conclusion, I welcome the announcement from the First Minister for Wales that he will establish and chair a new justice committee of the Cabinet to look at the commission’s recommendations. It is beyond time that our devolution settlement was levelled up. Wales should have the freedom and control to shape and mould the justice system so that it works for us, the people of Wales.

At the moment, a fair, effective and accessible justice system is simply not possible in Wales. We should not allow anything less than a strong, good, devolved justice system. The devolution of judiciary powers should be seen not as an exception, but as something that should have been carried out many years ago.

5.43 pm

Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (SNP): I concur with the point made by the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) and others. I am contributing here not because I am a nationalist Member, but because this is about the best contribution to the administration of justice in Wales. I have great sympathy with my colleagues in my sister party, Plaid Cymru, but I am not commenting on that basis. The irony is that I am commenting because I was asked to contribute to this particular commission’s report. It was thought that the points and the experience that I have, having been Justice Secretary of Scotland for almost seven and a half years, would be of benefit.

I was happy to contribute, because there are lessons to be learned. There are things that we have done right that Wales can follow and emulate, and there are pitfalls that Wales can avoid. There are also mistakes, which hopefully Wales will not replicate. No system in any Administration is perfect, and it is very hard to deal with challenged and challenging people, because they frequently make irrational decisions despite the best endeavours of those trying to look after them. There are lessons and there are similarities, because the demographics are similar. The challenges in many instances are the same: alcohol abuse, deprivation and inequality, all of which are the drivers of criminal offending.

We have to recognise that a small minority in every society in every country in the world are career criminals. They make a decision to break the law, and prison is an occupational hazard. The only way we can deal with them is through law enforcement—through the offices of the police and the courts, and thereafter by the prison service. Thankfully, they are few. The overwhelming majority of people who come into the clutches of the justice system, if it can be called that, do so because they face challenges and are challenged; they are often with difficulties. That does not obscure or condone what they have done, and it does not mean that they should not pay a penalty for it, because people have to be held to account.

One of the most significant points I made to the commission was to address the issue of alcohol. In Scotland, Wales and, indeed, England, as night follows day, as strong drink is taken to excess, issues arise. There is sense in having a symmetry and an assimilation of powers because, at the end of the day, the overwhelming

majority of the people we are dealing with—whom we are required to deal with, as our citizens—come from our communities where services have failed, or where the services that look after them are based. They are accountable to the Government of Wales, in many instances.

We also have to remember that those who are incarcerated—other than a few who will not again see the light of day, but they are very few; a handful in Wales and a handful in Scotland, thankfully—will return to our communities, and they have to be dealt with in our communities. On that basis, the best way to administer justice for them is on a more local basis.

A great comment was made by the hon. Member for Cardiff North (Anna McMorris) about symmetry with Scotland. There are still challenges, because Scotland is on a journey itself. As Justice Secretary, I had, in the main, responsibility for all aspects of justice. I was rarely down in these parts until I was elected last month. I first came down to meet Jacqui Smith when she was Home Secretary, and I returned finally to meet Theresa May when she was Home Secretary. I met Justice Ministers and other Home Secretaries in between, but I did not really have a great deal of requirement, other than for the odd meeting with Jack Straw or Ken Clarke. That does not mean that there were not issues.

The Justice Secretary every week—as Government Ministers will do—signs off warrants for interception and covert surveillance, which are invariably related to firearms or narcotics. It will come as no surprise that responsibility for both of those is reserved to Westminster, which brings challenges. We had to seek the devolution of powers to address, for example, the licensing of air weapons, which have been welcomed in our communities. Similarly, as we seek to tackle alcohol abuse, we sought the devolution of powers over the alcohol limit for drivers. There is a journey there, but I was happy to make that comment.

Equally, I can also say that I was asked for a meeting by the Police Federation, brokered by the Scottish Police Federation, about a move towards a single police service in Wales. I know that that has not been greatly touched on in the commission's report, but I was happy to say in the presence of the Scottish Police Federation, which supported a single Police Service of Scotland, and to the four Welsh forces representatives, that it makes sense. Not only should justice be accountable in Wales in terms of the legal services, but the police should be accountable there too, so it would make sense for a police service of Wales to exist, rather than having individual constabularies.

There are challenges. Police numbers have dropped significantly. One way to address that is to try to preserve frontline forces and reduce the back-office services and all the accommodation that goes with having four chief constables. That on its own is not a sufficient remedy, but it would be much better to do that, by creating a police service of Wales, than to strip those constables' powers and pass serious organised crime to the National Crime Agency, leaving the police as some glorified security service patrolling housing schemes, whether in the valleys or the cities.

Those are the issues needing to be addressed. Structural change is necessary. Bringing those elements together is essential, but there are other issues that are touched on through policy. Legal aid is challenging. Scotland is not

perfect by any means. I have to say that I was a legal aid practitioner for 19 years, and it shames me that I had to preside over cuts, but there was no alternative. It was not so much the implementation of swingeing cuts, and certainly not the abandonment of core services, because we tried to protect them, but it has been challenging under austerity.

I do not say that things are perfect in Scotland, but we have tried to ensure that legal aid is not simply for those in extremis and not simply for those involved in criminal justice. Some of the solution has to be evidentiary changes. Until such time as we can reduce the drain on the legal aid fund from the criminal expenditure, it will be difficult to protect the civil cases that are fundamental. Scotland has done much better in preserving the rights of people to apply for legal aid on immigration and employment issues, which matter in communities. There are challenges. No legal aid lawyer will jump up and say, "Whoopie! Kenny MacAskill was fantastic, and his Government did a wonderful job." They will say that there are issues, which there are, but we have managed to protect the system and provide some integration, so that it is not about criminal justice alone.

The hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) was correct to raise the issue of female offenders. They are a distinct group with challenges that do not apply in the main. That is not to say that women should not go to jail. We do not take that position in Scotland. Sadly, a ladette culture has come about and, in extremis, women do bad things for which at the end of the day they must go to prison, because no other tariff is available. However, far too many women go to prison—even in Scotland, although we are reducing the numbers—for offences that occur because of their circumstances. As the hon. Gentleman eloquently said, the fact of the matter is that there are knock-on effects, which do not relate to male prisoners, such as children going into care, resulting in an escalation down through the generations and those who have suffered continuing to suffer.

I always remember the money we poured into—

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Order. I know the hon. Gentleman is newly elected to the House. Normally in these debates, the Scottish National party spokesperson has five minutes. Because we have time, I have been generous, but I would be grateful if he focused primarily on the topic of the debate, namely the Commission on Justice in Wales.

Kenny MacAskill: My apologies, Mr Stringer. Legal aid and the position of women was touched upon in particular by the commission, because there are serious issues there. That must be addressed. Their needs are distinct, the challenges are different, and we must deal with that if we are to break the cycle of offending down through the generations.

Equally—this is why it comes back to the requirement for synergy and, indeed, the devolution of powers—serious violence has been mentioned. Violence is a culture. That is why alcohol abuse must be addressed. The proposal of the commission must be supported. At the end of the day, these issues must be pulled together. The lack of education suffered by many, the failure of social workers to pick up the needs and challenges of individuals, and the inability of people to obtain work are all issues we must bring together. Not all those issues are devolved to

[*Kenny MacAskill*]

the Welsh Assembly at the moment, but many are. If we are to have a successful justice policy—something that all parties and Administrations seek, because it is their fundamental duty to secure the safety of their people—we must bring all this together.

To conclude, there is merit in seeking the devolution of these powers not for devolution's sake, but for the better administration of justice for the people of Wales.

5.53 pm

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I thank the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) for securing the debate, and I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), for Islwyn (Chris Evans) and for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) for their passionate speeches regarding their concerns about what is happening in Wales.

I welcome the report and commend the Welsh Government on commissioning it. It is a thorough, detailed piece of work with many excellent recommendations for the Welsh Government and central Government. The report found that, despite excellent work on the ground and hard work by staff across the country, the justice system is all too often mismanaged and underfunded. That closely aligns with my experience as the shadow Justice Minister.

In a balanced assessment, the Thomas commission makes it clear that the justice system in Wales is in urgent need of proper, substantive reform. The conclusion that people in Wales are being let down by the system in its current state is damning. In too many areas, precisely where responsibility is located and who exactly provides the funding is opaque.

The report lists complicated reasons for the problems, as well as some very simple ones. The United Kingdom Government's spending on the justice system in Wales has fallen by a third since 2009-10. Members of Parliament will be familiar with many of the issues through casework, when people come to them to talk about the devastating impact of cuts to legal aid and the inevitable hardship caused by court closures.

The report found that the Welsh Government have had to spend their own funds on advice services, which they should not have to do. That is not the proper way forward. They cannot be expected to cover the funding gap that has been created by Government cuts to legal aid. The position is therefore not sustainable. The Government need to invest, and spend more money on justice issues in Wales.

I was not surprised to read that courts and tribunal closures have left many people in parts of rural and post-industrial Wales facing long and difficult journeys to their nearest court. Amid the frenzied cost-cutting, the Government appear to have forgotten the deep social value of local justice. The report also states that the advantages of digital technology have not yet been fully realised in Wales. It is not just Wales that has that problem; recently I visited a few Crown courts in London, and the technology there broke down as well.

The report also advocates the establishment of problem-solving criminal courts as well as family, drug and alcohol courts in Wales. We in the Labour party have

been calling for such courts for some time—that includes our manifesto—and we are very strong advocates of them. Some FDACs have been trialled in England, but we need to ensure proper coverage so that everyone has access to them.

Calls to establish alternatives to custody for women are sensible, evidence-based policy. The emphasis on greater provision of domestic abuse services and funding for women's centres is also welcome. I hope that the Government will have the sense to provide the necessary funding.

The report also engaged thoroughly with the Lammy review, asking difficult questions in the process. Far too little action has been taken in response to the excellent work by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy). I hope the Government will ensure that his recommendations are now dealt with. I have raised the implementation of the Lammy review a number of times at the Dispatch Box.

Those shared issues come alongside problems that are unique to Wales, and which emerge from an excessively complex system and a convoluted devolution settlement that leaves the centralised justice system struggling to co-ordinate with the devolved Department. It is totally unacceptable that the report found that gaps in the provision of the bilingual system are preventing people from accessing justice. No one should be hindered in seeking justice based on the language that they speak.

The commission also found that Wales is the only place in the world where different legislatures make different laws on the same subject, but all within the same body of law. Of course, it is not for me to advocate a particular distribution of power between Wales and Westminster, but it is clear that the current approach is not working. A settlement must be found that facilitates a far more integrated, co-ordinated relationship between different Departments and the agencies they work with. The Government must recognise that the tone-deaf centralised approach is having a deeply damaging effect.

All too often, reports such as these are ignored by the Executive, who encourage them to sink without a trace. I hope that does not happen in this case. When the Minister responds, I hope he will recognise that the report proves yet again that justice cannot be done on the cheap, and that proper funding is required to ensure that people have access to justice. It is not right for the Welsh Government, who already have a tight, limited budget, to have to spend money on this area as well when it is not in their power or remit. Will he commit to working with the Welsh Government to explore and implement the report's recommendations?

6.1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Chris Philp): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I add my congratulations to those from the shadow Minister for the right hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts)—I hope I pronounced that correctly—on securing today's important debate. I thank the hon. Members for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), for Islwyn (Chris Evans) and for Cardiff North (Anna McMorrin) and the SNP Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for East Lothian (Kenny MacAskill), for their eloquent contributions to today's debate.

Chris Bryant: You pronounced Cardiff North right.

Chris Philp: That is good. Clearly, I need some lessons in Welsh pronunciation. The right hon. Member who moved today's motion made a case for what essentially amounts to the full devolution of justice functions to Wales in line with the recommendations of the report that Lord Thomas recently published. I respectfully disagree with her conclusion that the wholesale devolution of justice to Wales would be in the interests of Wales for, broadly speaking, two or three different reasons.

I will start with the right hon. Lady's argument that there should be congruence between the Parliament of Wales and the justice jurisdiction of Wales so that the justice system matches the laws. That argument—to avoid the “jagged edge” that Lord Thomas refers to in his report—is not wholly valid, because many or most laws that apply in Wales are reserved matters that have been legislated on in this Parliament. In fact, if we look at the laws that have been passed in the 11 years since 2008, the Welsh Parliament has passed 62 new laws and this Parliament has passed 600, the vast majority of which also apply to Wales. Looking at the law on reserved matters, legal principles such as criminal responsibility, incapacity, mental elements of offences, criminal liability, sentencing, the law relating to homicide, sexual offences and offences against the person—the very fabric of the legal system—are all reserved matters where England and Wales law applies.

Devolving justice in the context of a body of law where the majority of it applies to England and Wales would actually exacerbate or worsen the jagged edge problem the right hon. Lady referred to, because it would then apply to these reserved matters, which are far larger in number than the matters that have been legislated for separately at the Welsh level. Indeed, it would be further exacerbated because the Thomas report, interestingly, does not recommend that the legal profession, its regulation and its qualifications be separated, but instead that they remain the same. If we were to devolve justice to Wales, we would have a further incongruity in that we would have a single legal profession with the same qualifications across two different systems. That would be a further exacerbating jagged edge.

Some Members speaking today have referred to the interface between justice and other devolved matters, in particular education and health. I put the question to a senior official working in the Ministry of Justice's Welsh department who deals with day-to-day justice matters. Their view was that whether justice was devolved or not would make no real difference to the interface between justice and education and health. Whether education and health were being run in Wales and talking to an England and Wales MOJ or a Welsh MOJ, that interface between Departments would still exist, whether the MOJ sat under an England and Wales umbrella or a Wales-only umbrella.

Liz Saville Roberts: At the same time, the probation service in Wales has been specifically set up to reflect the fact that education, health and housing are different in Wales in relation to probation. We have not been able to do justice to this report in the time we have had, but my one specific ask, if I may press the Minister, is when will his Department respond in full to the recommendations

of this report? I understand that it has already been indicated that it will. When will that occur, and will the Department respond to all the recommendations in turn?

Chris Philp: I was going to come to that point at the very end, but I will answer it now, since the right hon. Lady has raised it. This report was commissioned by the Welsh Government, by the previous First Minister of Wales. It was not commissioned by the UK Government, so there is not an intention to produce a full and formal response to the Thomas report.

However, we are of course going to discuss in detail with the Welsh Government in Cardiff the issues that it raises, to see where we can constructively improve our working relationships across some of them. The right hon. Lady has touched on a couple of those already. We want to improve the level of co-operation we have with the Welsh Government. We want to ensure that, where there is joint working and an interface with, for example, the health system, which many Members have mentioned, that interface works as well as it can, and that we are co-operating and reflecting some of the unique circumstances in Wales. Those conversations will certainly happen, and we will approach them with a constructive and an open mind.

As I said a moment ago, however, I am afraid we do not agree with the conclusion that we should wholly devolve justice and create a Welsh jurisdiction. One reason for that is the second point I was about to come on to before the intervention: cost. The Thomas report does not talk about the cost at all; perhaps the reason is that there is a very significant cost.

The Silk commission, which reported a few years ago—I think in 2014—did cost the establishment of a separate Welsh jurisdiction. It estimated, adjusting for changes that have happened since, that the extra incremental cost of creating a separate jurisdiction would be about £100 million a year. That is £100 million that could be spent on more probation officers, more police and all the things we have been talking about, and we do not feel that the imposition of that extra cost is at all justified.

For example, we would have to replicate the Ministry of Justice's functions at the Welsh level. Wales does not have a women's prison, which itself is an issue, or a category A prison. All those issues would have to be addressed. The MOJ is currently hugely upgrading its IT systems, and there are obviously economies of scale. If a Welsh Ministry of Justice had to do that itself, it would be extremely expensive. We do not believe that that cost of £100 million a year can be justified.

Thirdly, and perhaps unusually, I concur quite strongly with some of the analysis offered by the hon. Member for Rhondda, who asked us to concentrate on outcomes and how our systems work in practice, and on improving those rather than endlessly talking about process and arguing about where powers get exercised. In many ways, it is slightly sterile to argue over who holds the pen and exactly where a power is exercised. Our collective energy, ingenuity, creativity and everything else are better directed at trying to improve the services that are being delivered, so I embrace the point that he made.

Chris Bryant: While the Minister is embracing my views, I wonder whether he will look at the issue that has been experienced in Cardiff jail, where there has

[Chris Bryant]

been a really good programme screening new prisoners arriving in the prison for brain injury. That is an area where there is a clear overlap between the health service, which will be working with the individuals, and the Ministry of Justice. I know that that programme has been extended, but I wonder whether we could keep it running on a permanent basis. It is a simple fact that if people do not get the proper neuro-rehabilitation for a brain injury, the likelihood is that they will end up reoffending.

Chris Philp: I am glad the hon. Gentleman mentions Cardiff Prison, which had a fairly positive inspector's report last July. The programme that he is describing is not one I am hugely familiar with, because my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State is the Prisons Minister. However, it sounds like an extremely worthwhile programme. I know that, in general, the Government are keen to encourage closer work between the justice system and the health service, in order to treat health conditions where they exist, and that programme sounds exactly like the kind of programme that should be continued. I undertake to raise it with my hon. and learned Friend, and I will urge her to consider extending the pilot indefinitely, because it sounds like exactly the kind of thing we should be doing. I will make representations along those lines.

Devolution in itself is no panacea; it does not automatically solve problems. For example, that has obviously been well documented in education, where per capita spending in Wales is much higher than in England, that educational outcomes in Wales are none the less worse than in England. So the idea that devolving something somehow automatically makes it better does not necessarily hold up.

I turn now to the tragic death of Conner Marshall, which was mentioned earlier. Of course, we extend our heartfelt condolences to his family. There were failings in the probation service, which have already been referred to. Therefore, it is right and appropriate that Wales was the first part of England and Wales to have the community rehabilitation companies wound down and wholly replaced by the National Probation Service. It is very welcome that Wales has seen that happen first. Clearly, the Conner Marshall case underlines why that move was so important, and I am glad that we made it.

More generally on the question of resources in the probation system, substantially more money will go into the probation system in the next financial year. Across England and Wales, we will also recruit 800 more probation officers, many of whom, of course, will go to Wales.

The issue of imprisonment rates was raised. The rate of imprisonment for offenders in Wales is very similar to that in England. It is fractionally higher in Wales—it is about 6.5% in England and 6.85% in Wales. So, as I say, the rates are very similar.

Regarding sentencing policy and the implications for the prison population, the Government's approach is that we want to see very serious offenders, including terrorist offenders, receiving longer sentences and serving more of those sentences in prison. In fact, that is the purpose of the statutory instrument being laid today, which moves back the automatic release point for standard

determinate sentences for serious sexual and violent offences that qualify for a life sentence, and where the sentence is over seven years, from halfway to two-thirds of the way through the sentence.

We want to see the most serious criminals serving longer sentences and serving them in prison. However, for less serious offences, and in particular where there is a health problem associated with such offenders, which the hon. Member for Islwyn mentioned earlier, I want—as the Minister with responsibility for sentencing—to see a greater emphasis on treatment, which is the point the hon. Member for Rhondda made a moment ago. I would like to see more community sentence treatment requirement orders being made, so that people who have a mental health problem, a drug addiction problem or an alcohol addiction problem receive treatment for that health problem, rather than serving a short custodial sentence, because the evidence is that short custodial sentences are not very effective.

We will address that area through the sentencing review and the sentencing White Paper, which we will publish a little later this year, and then through the sentencing Bill, which will be introduced subsequently. It is an area where there is more work that we can do to treat the causes of offending, particularly where they are health-related, rather than imposing short custodial sentences.

The issue of court closures was raised. As in England, there have been court closures in Wales, as we try to run the court system more efficiently and effectively. The utilisation of the courts in Wales prior to the start of this programme, which was about nine years ago, was 54%. That is extremely low. The utilisation rate in Wales is now 67%, which is clearly higher.

Regarding attendance in court, which was mentioned, there is no evidence that the rate of attendance at court by defendants or witnesses has declined as a consequence of the programme. In fact, in terms of disposing of cases, in Welsh magistrates courts—where the vast majority of criminal cases in Wales are heard—78% of cases are dealt with in less than six weeks. The equivalent figure for England is 68%, so the Welsh magistrates courts are 10% more effective at quickly dealing with cases that come before them than their English equivalents.

Even after the closure programme that was referred to, 97% of the Welsh population can get to their nearest magistrates court in less than two hours, which is comparable to the equivalent figure in England. The digitisation process is well under way to allow people to access court services digitally. Making civil money claims, probate applications, uncontested divorce applications and entering minor pleas can now all be done online.

We do not concur with the Thomas report's principal conclusion that justice should be wholly devolved, but we will work closely with the Welsh Government to ensure justice policies are aligned and to take into consideration distinct Welsh needs. For example, the recent transfer of probation services in Wales to the National Probation Service is a clear example of distinct justice policy in Wales, which can be achieved under the current settlement. Joint Ministry of Justice and Welsh Government blueprints on youth justice and female offenders were published last year—a successful example of co-development of strategies across the devolution boundary. Welsh prisons perform well when compared

with their counterparts in England, and Welsh law firms benefit from being part of a world-renowned justice system. The justice landscape in Wales is faring well.

That said, we absolutely agree that the administration of justice in Wales requires regular review to ensure the needs of Wales are being met. In addition to ensuring that justice policies are designed with Wales in mind, we regularly evaluate the wider arrangements to ensure they are fit for purpose. Hon. Members will be aware that, during the passage of the Wales Act 2017, the Government committed to undertake a regular review of justice in Wales. An advisory committee was established in 2018, comprising the judiciary, the legal profession, legal regulators, operational deliver arms, and members of the Welsh and UK Governments. The committee published a report in July last year, which made a number of recommendations about the justice system in Wales, particularly around accessibility of law and the management of divergence. We are taking those recommendations forward.

The Welsh Government's decision to commission Lord Thomas to undertake a review was founded on their belief that there was

“unfinished business from the Silk Commission”.

On the contrary, the decision by the Silk commission that Wales should continue to be part of the single jurisdiction was reached after careful consideration of the merits for and against devolution, and it is our firm view that the current settlement works best for Wales.

6.17 pm

Liz Saville Roberts: I welcome certain of the Minister's comments, particularly his commitment to close working. However, I note that, although he referred to the sentencing review, the health intervention is, in essence, devolved in Wales. In that respect, if there is additional expectation from Westminster, I can only presume that the funding to enable that will follow.

I also mentioned the serious violence Bill. Again, there is an opportunity to reflect the structures that exist in Wales to ensure that it is better proceeded with in Wales, but that was not referred to. Even when I was working on the Domestic Abuse Bill, the fact that there are different structures in Wales was not thought about; it was not even an afterthought—it was not remembered.

That is a weakness in governance, and goes back to how these things affect the people of Wales and the quality of the services that they receive.

Of course, the current joint work is not done with transparency, and we do not effectively have the means to compare what is for England and Wales in its entirety with what is happening in Wales. I hope that there will be a commitment to continue with the crime survey for England and Wales, so that we can have a proper picture and talk about crime not in the abstract, but as it is experienced by real people in the real communities of Wales, to make that comparison properly. This report has endeavoured to emphasise that justice is not an island; it is not isolated from the services that support the victim on the one hand or that punish and rehabilitate the offender on the other hand.

I will conclude with that old “Encyclopaedia Britannica” trope: “For Wales, see England”. The nagging question for this Government is whether, when it comes to Wales, they see only England. *Diolch yn fawr.*

Chris Bryant: On a point of order, Mr Stringer. I am sorry to be a pain, but some of us were a bit confused about the timing this afternoon. Obviously, we have had votes and so on, which have interfered with the system, and I know that the second half of the day is three hours, but I wonder whether, in future, when there has been an afternoon such as this, there might be a means of making the House generally aware of when each of the new debates in Westminster Hall is going to start.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Thank you for that point of order. As Chair, I probably should have made it clear at the start of the debate that the time gained on the first hour-and-a-half debate was carried over. I apologise to hon. Members for not having made that clear.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the report of the Commission on Justice in Wales.

6.20 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 22 January 2020

CABINET OFFICE

Veterans Strategy

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Oliver Dowden): In November 2018, the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments jointly published the “Strategy for our Veterans” (CM 9726) setting out a shared commitment to support veterans across the whole of the UK. As the Secretary of State set out at the time, this was the first time the Governments had agreed shared aims and outcomes, and the collaboration has since been praised by our external partners. In order to complement this, each Government separately consulted on how to implement the strategy within their areas of responsibility.

The UK Government consultation (CM 9727) sought public views on how to achieve the outcomes in the strategy. Over 2,000 responses were received from individuals and organisations from across the public, private and charity sectors, as well as from veterans themselves, including through a number of face-to-face meetings.

I am today publishing the UK Government’s response to that consultation. This sets out further steps we will be taking to improve support to veterans, address the challenges that some veterans face and promote the outstanding contribution they make to the UK. The Office for Veterans’ Affairs will be responsible for co-ordinating the delivery of this action plan, working closely with Government Departments. This includes ensuring that veterans and their families know what existing support is already available and how they can access it, a step for which many consultation responses called.

In the Queen’s Speech, we set out the Government’s commitment to legislate on the armed forces covenant and to bring forward proposals to tackle vexatious claims and provide certainty for veterans. Our manifesto also committed to introducing a veterans’ railcard, reducing national insurance contributions for employers of ex-service personnel and guaranteeing job interviews for veterans applying for public sector roles. The Department for Transport is already able to report progress in delivering the veterans’ railcard today. I have also asked the civil service to be an early adopter of guaranteed interviews for veterans.

All of these actions and commitments reflect the step change the UK Government intend to deliver in how we support veterans across the United Kingdom. We will forge a path to making this country the best place to be a veteran anywhere in the world. We will continue to work closely with the devolved Governments, who are publishing their own separate consultation responses today. We will work together to achieve this shared objective and ensure veterans receive the support they deserve in all parts of the Union.

The consultation response is available on gov.uk. A copy of the consultation response will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS50]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Funding 2020-21

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has today laid before the House the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2020-21 (HC 51) for the approval of the House. The report sets out my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary’s determination for 2020-21 of the aggregate amount of grants that she proposes to pay under section 46(2) of the Police Act 1996. Copies of the report will be available in the Vote Office.

Today this Government have laid in Parliament the police funding settlement, which sets out the biggest increase in funding to forces since 2010. This includes £700 million for the recruitment of 6,000 additional officers by the end of March 2021, which represents an almost 10% increase on the core grant provided to forces last year. Assuming full take up of council tax precept flexibility, overall funding to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) will increase by £915 million to £13.1 billion next year. This would represent a total funding increase of up to 7.5%.

This people’s Government are determined to strengthen our police service and tackle the unacceptable levels of crime, particularly violent crime, across our country. This Government will deliver on their commitment to recruit 20,000 additional officers over the next three years to protect the public and keep our families, communities and our country safe. We have already invested in this uplift programme, providing £45 million of additional funding in 2019-20 to ensure the programme gets off the ground. The 2020-21 funding settlement gives the police the investment they need to deliver on that promise. Taking all funding from the Government and PCCs’ precept raising power into account, up to an extra £1.1 billion will be available for investment in the policing system in 2020-21. This would represent an increase of 8% funding on top of 2019-20 levels and is the single biggest increase in Government investment in policing for some time.

The Chancellor confirmed in his September 2019 statement to the House on the 2020-21 spending round that Government funding to policing will increase by £750 million next year. £700 million of this money will go directly to PCCs in England and Wales in order to support the recruitment of the first wave of up to 6,000 additional officers by the end of March 2021. These extra officers will be in addition to those leaving the service annually, and represents the biggest recruitment drive in decades. Over 75% (£532 million) of this funding will be paid to PCCs directly through core grant funding. To manage the uplift, and to ensure best possible use of this unprecedented investment, the Government are creating a ringfenced grant for the remainder of the funding (£168 million). Forces will be allocated a portion of this £168 million in line with their funding formula allocation, and will be able to access this as they progress against their recruitment targets.

[Kit Malthouse]

This settlement also contains details of other areas of Government funding, including Legacy Council Tax Grants, National and International Capital City Grants, Welsh Top-Up Grant and Precept Grant.

We also propose enabling PCCs to raise further funding through precept flexibility, subject to confirmation at the final Local Government Finance Settlement. We propose to empower PCCs to increase their Band D precept by up to £10 in 2020-21 without the need to call for a local referendum, the equivalent of less than 20 pence per week. If all PCCs decide to maximise their flexibility, this would result in up to an additional £248 million of funding for local policing next year. It is for locally accountable PCCs to take decisions on local precept and explain to their electorate how this additional investment will help deliver a better police service.

In this settlement the Government will also allocate £153 million to cover additional pension costs. This amount is held flat compared to 2019-20 figures and will be reconsidered at the next spending review. This will ensure that the additional funding forces are receiving will be spent on recruiting additional officers, rather than covering existing costs.

As announced earlier this week, funding for counter-terrorism policing will total £906 million in 2020-21. This is a significant additional investment in the vital work of counter-terrorism police officers across the country. PCCs will be notified separately of force-level allocations, which will not be made public for security reasons.

National priorities

This Government will also continue to support PCCs and forces through investment in national policing priorities. This settlement will increase spending on national (resource) policing priorities by £91.7 million (staying flat as a percentage of overall police funding), which will benefit all forces across England and Wales. This increase is in line with the total increase in the overall settlement and includes £50 million to ensure delivery of the police uplift programme.

From this increased funding for national policing priorities the Government have prioritised £150 million of funding for serious and organised crime in 2020-21, for new capabilities to tackle illicit finance, keeping the public safe and protecting vulnerable people. Organised criminals have been quick to adapt and make use of emerging technology, exploiting the vulnerable and threatening the fabric of our society by fuelling crime and violence.

We will tackle this threat by ensuring law enforcement have the resources they need. We will strengthen the National Crime Agency (NCA) through funding investigative tools needed to keep pace with the rate of technological change and globalisation of criminal networks. We will invest in tackling county lines drug dealing, fraud and cyber-crime and continue our investment in bearing down on online child sexual exploitation and abuse. To achieve this, funding will be allocated to local police forces, as well as the NCA and regional organised crime units to drive transformational change in our law enforcement response.

In 2020-21, £119 million will be spent on reducing serious violent crime. This includes dedicated funds to target county lines and funding for violence reduction

Units which form a key component of our action to tackle the root causes of violence. This targeted money, combined with the overall increase to police force funding, represents a significant investment in the police's capabilities to drive down violent crime.

The Government are also committed to tackling neighbourhood crime. We will allocate £10 million, alongside a £15 million contribution from the Chancellor, to bring the Safer Streets fund to the £25 million total pledged last year. The fund will support areas in England and Wales that are persistently and disproportionately affected by acquisitive crimes such as burglary and theft to invest in well evidenced prevention initiatives such as home security and street lighting.

This Government will continue to support the completion of national transformation programmes delivering enhanced capabilities across policing. We will bring the Police Transformation fund to a close and invest £60 million of funding next year for a programme of work to support the Government's priorities of increased digitisation in policing. This will include: further development of a national data analytics capability to support preventative policing interventions; delivery to forces of the Single Online Home policing website to provide more effective engagement with the public; providing productivity tools supporting collaboration and cyber-security to protect forces; support improvements to how fingerprint and digital forensics are used, helping forces to deliver a fully accredited, more integrated and sustainable service; and an uplift to forensics, including digital forensics, to build capability across policing and for new officers.

We will support the police to make use of the latest technologies, such as biometrics and analytics. This needs to be on the basis of good evidence and the best understanding of science. For that reason I am pleased to announce that there will be funding made available for a Police Chief Scientific Adviser and dedicated funding for investment in science, technology and research. We will work closely with the National Police Chiefs Council to develop this role.

I will also establish and chair an ambitious Strategic Change and Investment Board (SCIB), which will form part of the sub-governance of the National Policing Board. The board will replace the Police Reform and Transformation Board and will co-ordinate, prioritise and drive investment across the policing system and have greater sight on a range of allocations to meet Government priorities around crime prevention and reduction. The SCIB will also oversee the investment in major technology programmes upgrading critical infrastructure, such as replacing the Airwave communications system with the 4G Emergency Services Network. Funding will also be allocated for the development of the Law Enforcement Data Service, which will deliver an integrated service to provide intelligence to law enforcement and its partners and replace the existing Police National Computer and Police National Database.

Capital funding

Furthermore, this settlement will see funding for capital grant expenditure rebalanced, with £63.7 million to be spent on national priorities and infrastructure. This will allow the Government to provide further support, for example, to police technology programmes, the College of Policing and Serious Organised Crime programmes. PCCs will continue to receive a capital grant worth £12.3 million in 2020-21. With the increase in other

grants to PCCs, which can be utilised to cover both capital and non-capital spend, PCCs will see more funding overall with greater flexibility over how they use it.

Outcomes, efficiency and reform

I have set out how an additional £1.1 billion will be invested in our policing system next year. It is only right that in return the Government hold the police to account on delivering for the public. We will expect the police to achieve measurable improvements across a range of outcomes with the National Policing Board, chaired by the Home Secretary, holding the sector to account for delivering these improvements

This Government are also clear that the police, and all other public services, must continue to focus on improving efficiency and productivity to demonstrate to the taxpaying public they serve that they are getting the most out of this increased funding, and delivering the planned uplift in officer numbers. There are a number of expectations set out as part of this settlement.

The Government have committed £750 million to enable the recruitment of 6,000 additional officers. To manage the delivery of this uplift, we are ringfencing £168 million which will be paid to forces in line with their progress in recruiting the 6,000 additional officers by March 2021, and making the relevant infrastructure improvements needed to recruit the 20,000 additional officers by March 2023. Funding will be released quarterly and in arrears subject to evidence on their progress.

On behalf of the taxpayer, the Government will expect to see continued efficiency savings in 2020-21. Policing are on track to deliver £30 million of cashable savings from procurement in 2019-20, on top of the £40 million delivered in 2018-19. Through continued collaborative procurement policing will deliver another £30 million of cashable savings in 2020-21. Having delivered last year's condition to continue developing a new model for police procurement, policing have agreed the business case for BlueLight Commercial, a new national model for police procurement and commercial functions. BlueLight Commercial will embed and enhance future collaborative procurement, making best use of policing's buying power, increasing standardisation and improving value for money. BlueLight Commercial will apply strategic procurement approaches to areas such as vehicles, estates and equipment including uniform, to deliver annual savings of £20 million in commercial efficiencies once it has been fully established, which can be reinvested in the frontline. It will also develop an approach to reduce cost variation in back-office services such as payroll. The Home Office will work with HM Treasury to develop a plan for further efficiency savings in future years.

Forces must continue to drive productivity through digital, data and technology solutions, including mobile working. Forces should make best use of the products developed by the national police-led Frontline National mobility programme in 2019-20. This will ensure the benefits of mobile working are maximised including through a new benefits tracking tool, increased use of guidelines, sharing of best practice and innovation and collaborative procurement. This means that all forces will be able to fully exploit mobile technology and that benefits can be rigorously tracked and driven, to improve the tools police officers have to be able to tackle crime wherever they are. Forces like Avon and Somerset are driving a digitally enabled culture, driving up usage of mobile digital working by withdrawing paper-based forms. South Yorkshire are using mobile devices to capture and access data in real time, allowing them to check the identity of potential suspects more quickly and capturing evidence to help secure convictions.

We also expect forces to work with us to develop an approach to drive best value from the millions of pounds spent on police technology, by building on existing engagement

with regard to both sector-led and Home Office programmes such as the APCC and NPCC's Digital, Data and Technology Strategy (launched earlier this week), of which the Home Office will continue to support delivery and drive forward. The strategy's emphasis on convergence, stripping out duplication, consolidating applications, decommissioning non-essential infrastructure and moving to more interoperable solutions is crucial to achieve the best value for the taxpayer from technology investment. The Home Office will work with the police service to develop a detailed implementation plan and support early activities during 2020-21. Existing police-led programmes are already increasing effectiveness and improving service delivery through, for example, supporting forces to adopt cloud based productivity tools, the use of data analytics to support crime fighting and driving efficiency savings in the replacement of legacy IT systems, and building the Single Online Platform that already provides a digital policing front counter to 56% of the population in England and Wales. Investment in these systems will be driven and managed by a Ministerial chaired Strategic Change and Investment Board, which will monitor the development of new capabilities by law enforcement and ensure they are built in the most efficient and effective way possible.

We will be engaging police leaders to discuss how these improvements will be delivered and continue working together on our ambitious longer-term plans for the next spending review period.

This people's Government have clearly set out their commitment to backing our police service, putting 20,000 extra police officers on the streets, and putting violent criminals behind bars for longer. We continue to pay tribute to our police forces and police staff around the country for their exceptional bravery, dedication and hard work. We are determined to give the service the resources it needs to crack down on crime, deal robustly with the criminals exploiting the vulnerable and to improve outcomes for the victims of crime.

I have set out in a separate document, the tables illustrating how we propose to allocate the police funding settlement between the different funding streams and between Police and Crime Commissioners for 2020-21. These documents are intended to be read together.

It can also be viewed online at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2020-01-22/HCWS51>.

[HCWS51]

TRANSPORT

Rail Update

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):

Under the Railways Act 1993, the Secretary of State for Transport has a legal requirement to ensure services that passengers depend on continue in any circumstance.

South Western Railway's (SWR's) recent financial statements have indicated that the franchise is not sustainable in the long term. Poor operational performance, combined with slower revenue growth, has led to the financial performance of SWR to be significantly below expectation since the franchise commenced in August 2017.

SWR have not yet failed to meet their financial commitments and my Department will ensure that SWR are held to their financial obligations under the current franchise. However, as a precautionary measure, my Department must prepare suitable contingency measures, under the Railways Act 1993. Such options include a

[Grant Shapps]

new short-term contract with SWR, with tightly defined performance requirements; or transferring the operation to the Operator of Last Resort (OLR), a public sector operator wholly owned by the Department. My Department has issued a request for proposal to the SWR franchise owners (FirstGroup plc and MTR) and to the OLR, and will evaluate the responses to determine how best to secure the continuation of passenger services on this part of the network.

This will not impact on the railway's day-to-day operations. The business will continue to operate as usual with no material impact on SWR services or staff.

Parliament will be kept informed of developments.

Across the country a number of franchises are failing to provide the reliable services that passengers require and there are legitimate questions on whether the current franchising model is viable. Keith Williams—who is leading an independent review into the railways—has already stated that franchising cannot continue in its current form. His review will propose sector-wide reforms which aim to put passengers at the heart of the railway.

Modernisation of the railways must come with reciprocal modernisation of the way the railway is operated. Passengers on SWR have already suffered significant disruption from industrial action by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), and this week the RMT are balloting for further strikes.

These strikes are not about safety, accessibility or helping passengers. Driver controlled trains are perfectly safe, and have been operated elsewhere on the network for many years. These trains allow the guards to devote much more time to looking after passengers, which is of great benefit to those who need help with travel, like the disabled and the aged. This modernisation is essential if the future needs of this railway are to be met.

Whoever operates SWR services, I will remain committed to modernising services and improving support for passengers.

The railway is a public service. People rely upon it to support their way of life, livelihoods, education and healthcare, and it is why this Government have committed to introducing minimum service levels during times of strike action.

[HCWS49]

Veterans' Railcard

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):

Our military personnel are rightly valued throughout their service in HM armed forces. They make sacrifices and put themselves in danger to protect and serve our country. It is only right that we continue to show how much we value their efforts once they leave the armed forces too.

In our manifesto we promised to introduce a railcard for veterans. I am delighted to announce that we will make it available from 11 November this year. This railcard will extend discounted train travel to the more than 830,000 veterans not covered by existing discounts.

We expect our service personnel to live and work all over the country, moving wherever they are needed to serve our great country. This often leads to service families, and former service families, living far away from friends and family and the communities they grew up in.

Therefore, I believe it is important that our veterans have access to this railcard, supporting their access to vital work prospects and retraining opportunities, and making it easier for former members of the armed forces to stay in touch with friends and relatives.

This railcard will also allow their family to travel with them, potentially saving military families hundreds of pounds a year.

I am sure that you will agree with me that this is a welcome measure, alongside a much wider set of commitments which are being announced by the Minister for the Cabinet Office today in the Government's consultation response to last year's consultation on the strategy for our veterans.

This new railcard is one of the first parts of this Government's commitment to make the UK the best place to be a veteran anywhere in the world. My Department is pleased to be supporting this ambition through this new railcard.

[HCWS52]

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**not later than
Wednesday 29 January 2020**

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