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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Monday 10 February 2020

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Family Reunion

1. **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): What plans she has to maintain the legal route to family reunion for refugees and asylum seekers in the EU with family in the UK after the transition period. [900673]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): The UK has a long and proud tradition of offering protection to vulnerable people who are fleeing war and persecution, and this Government take the welfare of vulnerable children extremely seriously. We support the principle of family unity wholeheartedly.

Liz Twist: If the Government are as committed as Ministers have repeatedly said they are to maintaining children's ability to join family members in the UK, then rather than waiting for the outcome of negotiations, will the Home Office not get on the front foot and make some much-needed changes to domestic legislation? The changes could be made tomorrow and provide certainty for the many hundreds of families who can currently be reunited through the Dublin regulation.

Priti Patel: The hon. Lady will be more than aware of the work that we do to provide safe and legal routes for family reunion, and for vulnerable persons and children. She has heard me say that we are fully committed to supporting the most vulnerable children and the principle of family reunion. It is a fact that we are about to negotiate with the European Union. I set out the Government's position clearly in communications and correspondence with the European Commission at the end of last year, and that is the route we will be pursuing.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The Home Secretary will be aware of the conditions that many refugee children endure in refugee camps all over Europe. She will also be aware that the public do not want us to let these children down. Will she confirm that unless law and practice are changed, we run the risk of breaking up families and leaving children abandoned with no relative to care for them?

Priti Patel: The right hon. Lady has touched on a very important point, namely the conditions that children and families endure in refugee camps outside the United

Kingdom. That could be in Europe, but also in countries outside Europe. It is important that we reflect on the priorities and standards that we, as a country, provide for those refugees through our work in international development and aid. We should not overlook the fact that there are a great deal of associated issues—reunion, the protection and settlement of refugees, and vulnerable children—that come together internationally, but we are leading the way on this in the UK.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): Does the Home Secretary agree that by far the best way of reuniting families is to find vulnerable children in refugee camps in Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere, and that by simply accepting those who turn up at Dover, we risk encouraging the vicious people traffickers who thereby make a lot of money? Does she agree with the Archbishop of Canterbury, no less, who said recently:

“The resettlement of thousands of the world's most vulnerable refugees over the past four years is something the UK can be proud of?”

I hope that she is proud of that.

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. The House should be under no illusions; we have a strong and proud record of helping vulnerable children, and we have protected more than 41,000 children since the start of 2010. He is right; there are a number of points here about the criminality associated with illegal migration. I am afraid that we have seen far too much of that, whether people are being trafficked in small boats, in lorries or through other vehicle movements. That is wrong, and it is something that we are also determined to stamp out.

Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given the action that the Government are taking to protect vulnerable children through legal routes, more action needs to be taken to slow down and stop activity on the illegal people trafficking routes, particularly those between Calais and Dover?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mrs Elphicke) speaks with a great deal of knowledge and insight about this issue. We must absolutely clamp down on the illegal routes that are being exploited, many of which are upstream—outside the United Kingdom—and on the appalling amount of human trafficking. There are many safe and legal routes that are supported by the British Government, and we will continue to support them.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Why do we not simply say unilaterally that we will continue to consider take charge requests on behalf of unaccompanied children from Europe? Why should children's rights be subject to negotiations at all?

Priti Patel: The hon. Gentleman must recognise that any future agreement is a matter for negotiation, and it is not within the gift of the United Kingdom alone. We can work bilaterally, but this is about the reciprocal arrangements that we undertake with our EU counterparts. That is the approach that has been outlined by the Government, and it is the right approach.

Terrorism

2. **Virginia Crosbie** (Ynys Môn) (Con): What steps she is taking to help protect the UK from terrorism. [900674]

8. **Dean Russell** (Watford) (Con): What steps she is taking to help protect the UK from terrorism. [900681]

14. **Gareth Davies** (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that (a) law enforcement bodies, (b) police officers and (c) intelligence agencies have the tools they need to tackle terrorism. [900687]

The Minister for Security (Brandon Lewis): Terrorists are a persistent menace to our security and way of life. The nature of the terrorist threat is constantly changing, so our response must evolve as well. The safety and security of the UK is obviously our No. 1 priority, and we are committed to ensuring that our security and law enforcement organisations have the powers and tools they need to keep us safe. To do that, we have provided an additional £160 million for counter-terrorism policing this year, taking counter-terrorism police funding to over £800 million. The counter-terrorism and sentencing Bill, and our emergency legislation, will close further gaps in our ability to combat terrorism.

Virginia Crosbie: Reports suggest that the perpetrator of the recent London terror attack was on automatic early release. Does the Minister agree that we need a robust and tough approach to sentencing for those convicted of terror offences, to prevent them from being able to carry out further atrocities?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is why the Government will be introducing emergency legislation in Parliament tomorrow that will end the automatic early release of terrorist offenders without there first being a thorough risk assessment by the Parole Board. Those still considered a threat to public safety will be forced to spend the rest of their time in prison. The changes will mean that about 50 terrorist prisoners already serving effected sentences will see their automatic release halted. We will not hesitate to take decisive action to ensure that we do all we can to protect the public and keep our streets safe.

Dean Russell: Can my right hon. Friend update the House on the steps his Department is taking to ensure that those who are released from prison after terrorism-related offences face the most stringent monitoring and reporting requirements?

Brandon Lewis: Absolutely. I am pleased to say that in the last week we have announced that we are considering whether new legislation is required to provide additional reassurance when terrorist offenders are released from prison. A range of measures are available, including stringent conditions during post-release licence periods and notification requirements for terrorist offenders, which the Government strengthened only last year. Serious crime prevention orders were extended to terrorist offenders last year. Alongside terrorism prevention and investigation measures, these orders provide the police with strengthened powers to manage terrorists on their release. We will continue to review everything to ensure that we are doing all we can to keep the public safe.

Gareth Davies: Countering terrorism is not just about London and the big cities; it is across the whole country. I welcome the extra £8.6 million of funding for Lincolnshire police. What can be done to prevent people in rural areas from being drawn into terrorist activity?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Overall funding for CT policing will grow to £906 million in 2020-21. That is a £90 million year-on-year increase. The money will support and maintain the record high numbers of ongoing counter-terrorism policing investigations, allowing us to respond swiftly and decisively to incidents, no matter where they take place—and we have to be clear that they could happen anywhere in the UK. It is a significant additional investment that builds on the work we are doing to ensure that we are protecting our communities with 20,000 extra police officers around the country, and the work we do in all communities around the country with the Prevent programme to keep people safe and prevent people from being taken into extremism in the first place.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): The Minister has just referred to the Prevent programme. This week, it is a year since the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019 received Royal Assent. Of course, that Act provided for an independent review of the Prevent programme. In the last year, the Government have appointed one reviewer, who has had to resign from post given previous views that he had expressed about Prevent, and we are left today—a year later—without a reviewer in place. The Minister is talking about decisive action. When will that reviewer be appointed?

Brandon Lewis: As I have outlined at the Dispatch Box previously, the review will go ahead, and it is still the case that it will be completed in the timeframe that the Government outlined—that is, before the end of August this year. We are also introducing emergency legislation tomorrow.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): We face a growing threat from extreme right-wing organisations in this country. The Minister will be aware of incidents in my own community relating to some extreme right-wing groups. Why have the Government not yet proscribed organisations such as the System Resistance Network, the Sonnenkrieg Division and others who are linked to the banned National Action organisation, and what steps will they take to review the situation urgently?

Brandon Lewis: These issues are always under review. The hon. Gentleman is right that we have to be alert to and aware of extremism from any direction, including the growth in right-wing extremism. That is why Prevent is focused on protecting people who are targeted by terrorist recruiters, regardless of their reasoning or where they come from.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Surely we should have a programme giving young people who might be attracted into terrorism other creative things to do in the community. Would the Minister think about diverting some of the tens of millions of pounds flowing from the plastic bag charge into community

action that would involve young people and replace some of the dreadful cuts in youth services that we have seen in recent years?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about engaging with people from communities across the country, particularly young people. We do have funds specifically focused on young people. The Prevent training has already been completed some 1.1 million times. One of the areas where Prevent is so successful is in enabling frontline practitioners, including teachers, to recognise the signs of radicalisation. That is why this programme is so important, as well as the bespoke programmes that we support.

Violent Crime: Young People

3. **Darren Henry** (Broxtowe) (Con): What steps she is taking to divert young people away from violent crime. [900675]

11. **Edward Timpson** (Eddisbury) (Con): What steps she is taking to divert young people away from violent crime. [900684]

13. **Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps she is taking to tackle youth violence. [900686]

15. **Sir David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): What steps she is taking to divert young people away from violent crime. [900688]

19. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What steps she is taking to divert young people away from violent crime. [900692]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): The Government are committed to delivering on the people's priorities by tackling violent crime. We have already invested £220 million in early intervention. Through our serious violence fund, we have committed to funding violence reduction units until 2021. We are also introducing the serious violence Bill, which will put a duty on police, councils and other agencies to prevent and reduce serious violence.

Darren Henry: Ahead of the police and crime commissioner elections in May, will my hon. Friend encourage our fantastic Conservative candidates to make youth diversion schemes a key part of their manifestos?

Victoria Atkins: I thank my hon. Friend for reminding the entire House that we have these crucial elections coming towards us, at which the public will have the right to hold their police and crime commissioners to account. I look forward to working with many Conservative PCCs in future, I hope. I fully support the idea of diverting children who are on the cusp of entering the justice system and putting in place, where appropriate, support that can reduce risk and prevent an escalation in offending. He may wish to know that in his own local area, we are funding Redthread at Queen's Medical Centre—I was delighted to attend its launch last year—and, through the youth endowment fund, two different projects are helping children and young people, and their families and schools, by keeping them safe and diverting them from risk.

Edward Timpson: Children excluded from school are twice as likely to carry a knife. A quarter of young offenders who are serving a custodial sentence of less than 12 months have a history of permanent exclusion. To help turn around the life chances of these children, will my hon. Friend take up the recommendations in my report on school exclusion, published last year, which are aimed at taking a public health approach to crime and tackling the root causes, not just the symptoms, of school disengagement?

Victoria Atkins: I thank my hon. Friend for his meticulous work in his report. He will know that the Prime Minister is taking charge of our response to serious violence, and is indeed holding a Cabinet Sub-Committee on this imminently. I agree that we must tackle the root causes of serious violence. That is precisely why we are bringing forward the serious violence Bill to place a duty on the agencies that can help to address it.

Lucy Powell: I fully support the exclusions review that was just referred to, but, in tackling youth violence, does the Home Office think it is either acceptable or right that the vast majority of young people on the gangs matrix are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds? Being flagged on the gangs matrix brings with it huge consequences for those young people, often separation from families and other issues. Does she think that this approach is appropriate, or that it works?

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Lady is referring to an operational tool used by the police, but it is one of many tools that we are looking at in terms of law enforcement response and these crucial issues about diverting children and young people away from crime in the first place. The causes are manifold, and we must work with communities to address them together.

Sir David Evennett: Can my hon. Friend assure me that the police have all the powers they need to crack down on the scourge of knife crime, which is ruining so many lives across the country, but particularly in London? Could she update the House on what plans she has to target repeat knife carriers?

Victoria Atkins: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who of course brings to the House his experience of representing his constituency on this important issue. We are determined to ensure that the police have the powers they need to tackle this terrible scourge. That is why, in the new serious violence Bill, a new court order will be brought forward that will make it easier for the police to stop and search known and convicted knife carriers.

John Howell: What is the Minister doing to protect young and vulnerable people from drugs gangs, particularly in rural areas such as mine, where they are extremely prevalent?

Victoria Atkins: Drug gangs, or county lines, often involve a horrific form of child criminal exploitation, and we are determined to put an end to it. One of the many ways we are seeking to do that is through further investment in the National County Lines Co-ordination Centre, which has co-ordinated enforcement action across the country, resulting in more than 2,500 arrests and the safeguarding of more than 3,000 vulnerable people.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Last year, Labour attempted to amend the Offensive Weapons Bill to ban the open sale of knives and require shops to lock them behind cabinets, as we currently require them to do for cigarettes. The Government refused those amendments. Last week, Sudesh Amman walked into a shop on Streatham high street, picked up a knife from the display and stabbed two people. This weekend, that shop was still openly displaying knives and machetes by the front door. Will the Government now think again?

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Lady may recall that we said we would keep that under review, because we felt that the measures put forward last year were of a nature that did not target areas that have a particular problem with knife crime. We will keep it under review, but I make the point again that it is the responsibility of shop owners to make sure that if they are selling items such as that, they display them appropriately and, if necessary, keep them under lock and key.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): Good youth services are the frontline against youth violence, but this week we see yet another local government settlement that means there is a decade's worth of erosion of funding for youth services. What will the Home Office do differently to encourage the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to properly fund youth services or to put its own money into a good universal offer across all our communities?

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Gentleman will know of the most recent local authority grants, which the House will debate later this week. He will also know that the Chancellor restated a commitment to young people, confirming £500 million of investment through the new youth investment fund over five years, in addition to the £220 million that will be spent over the next 10 years on early intervention projects that can, and I hope will, make a great difference to our young people's lives.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The Scottish Government's CashBack for Communities scheme is about to make a payment of £19 million of money recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to youth projects in Scotland, bringing total payments to more than £110 million since the programme began in 2008. Will the Minister join me in welcoming that as something that can deliver real opportunity for young people in Scotland?

Victoria Atkins: As always, I will work with and commend anyone who is joining the Government's determination to cut down on violent crime and protect our young people.

Families of Police Officers

4. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What steps she is taking to support the families of police officers. [900676]

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): It is often forgotten or taken for granted by many that behind every police officer stands a proud but anxious family. We want to recognise their bravery, commitment and sacrifice by introducing the police covenant. The covenant will be brought forward through

the police powers and protections Bill, placing it on a statutory footing and ensuring that Parliament can scrutinise its progress. We will launch a consultation on the principle and scope of the covenant in the coming weeks.

Fiona Bruce: What steps are Ministers taking to ensure that families who lose a loved one in the line of duty—such as the family of PC Andrew Harper, who was tragically killed last year—receive the support they need?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend raises an extremely important point. The death of Andrew Harper last year on the very edge of my constituency was a terrible and tragic event. She will know that there are already measures in place to assist families in that position, not least the police injury benefits scheme, as well as welfare support offered by particular forces and the Police Federation. But there is always more we can do, and we would welcome submissions to the consultation on the covenant, to address any gaps that may exist.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): One thing that families would quite like to see is prosecuting authorities and the police themselves taking it much more seriously when there are assaults on police officers, even if they are relatively minor ones. Otherwise, there seems to be a sort of acceptance that a degree of violence is in the day job of a police officer, and that must surely be wrong. Why is the legislation introduced two years ago still not being used effectively by the Crown Prosecution Service?

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Gentleman raises an extremely important point. As I have said in this House before, it is my view that anybody who raises a malevolent finger against any emergency service should face the full weight of the law. He is right that there is general concern about the increasing number of attacks on emergency service workers of all types, and we will review what steps need to be taken in the near future to sort that out.

Hampshire Constabulary: Police Numbers

5. **Bob Seely** (Isle of Wight) (Con): What estimate she has made of the number of additional police officers joining Hampshire constabulary during the 2019 Parliament. [900677]

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): The Government's pledge to put an additional 20,000 officers on our streets sends a clear message that we are committed to giving police the resources they need to tackle the scourge of crime. Hampshire will receive up to £366.5 million of funding next year, an increase of up to £26.1 million on the previous year. In this year alone, the county will benefit from 156 more police officers.

Bob Seely: I welcome the increase to Hampshire—and Isle of Wight—constabulary. Does the Minister agree that the increase will enable police in both Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, as well as in other areas of the UK, to follow up lower level crime? It causes great concern to all our constituents, but in recent years the police have been under pressure not to investigate it, due to police numbers.

Kit Malthouse: It is obviously an operational matter for chief constables to address where and how they allocate their resources, but I would certainly hope that an increase in the number of police officers will allow them to spend more time on the sort of crimes that assail both my hon. Friend's community and mine in the county. They perhaps do not attract the attention of the headlines, but nevertheless cause consternation in the communities we represent.

“Migration: Helping Scotland Prosper”

6. **Stephen Flynn** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): If she will hold discussions with the Scottish Government on their report “Migration: Helping Scotland Prosper”, published on 27 January 2020. [900678]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): Immigration is and will remain a reserved matter. This Government will introduce a points-based immigration system that works in the interests of the whole of the United Kingdom, including Scotland. Applying different immigration rules to different parts of the UK would significantly complicate the immigration system.

Stephen Flynn: The Australian Immigration Minister stated last November that regional visas “can play an important role in helping to address regional skills gaps and grow local economies.”

As migration is the only reason Scotland's population continues to grow, does the Minister agree that Scotland would benefit from this Australian approach to immigration, rather than the one-size-fits-all one of this UK Government?

Kevin Foster: We have asked the independent Migration Advisory Committee on several occasions to look at the case for applying different immigration arrangements to different areas of the UK. It has consistently recommended against this, and I think Members in this House will realise why it would make no sense, for example, for a plumber from Gretna to be unable to take on jobs in Carlisle.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): New Zealand, Switzerland and Canada are just some of the other countries that, like Australia, operate a tailored regional immigration system without any need for internal borders, so what possible rationale is there for claiming, as the Prime Minister did last week, that to operate a Scottish visa would require a hard border between Scotland and England?

Kevin Foster: Again, we have made it very clear: the independent Migration Advisory Committee has set out in its report why it does not recommend this type of approach. Ultimately, we do not want to see borders at Berwick just to satisfy a separatist obsession. Our goal would be to have a system that works and drives success in Scotland, and that means being part of a wider, stronger United Kingdom.

Joanna Cherry: I think the only people satisfying a separatist obsession at the moment are those on the Conservative Benches with their hard Brexit.

Let us try again on this mythical hard border, shall we? The United Kingdom has an open land border and shares a common travel area with the Republic of Ireland, which operates an entirely distinct and independent system. That does not necessitate a hard border, so why should a modest Scottish visa mean a hard border between England and Scotland? Let us have an answer to the question for a change.

Kevin Foster: Let us be very clear: the Migration Advisory Committee has advised against such a system. It would create complexity, with businesses having to work out which staff were on one visa and which were on another. Ultimately, we will be guided by independent advice, but I will be absolutely clear: this Government will create a migration system that works for Scotland and drives success in Scotland, but will not drive separation for Scotland.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): Can the Minister confirm that this Government will indeed design and implement a new, fit-for-purpose global immigration system that works for all regions and nations of our United Kingdom, and that, of course, Members on the SNP Benches have as much right as any Member in this place to work with the Government to help to achieve that?

Kevin Foster: Absolutely, and the suggestion from the Scottish Government that it would be implemented via the Scottish tax code is rather defeated by the fact that Scottish Members of Parliament are on the Scottish tax code but work across our United Kingdom, and rightly so. So, yes, we will work with interest groups across Scotland to make sure this system works for Scotland as part of our United Kingdom, on a points-based basis. Again, we will focus on what works and what is successful, not on what pleases the separatist grievance agenda.

Police Officer Numbers: Lancashire

7. **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): What recent assessment her Department has made of the adequacy of the number of police officers in Lancashire. [900680]

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): We believe that the entire country, including Lancashire, could do with a boost in police numbers to address the changing nature of crime, and as a result we have provided enough money to recruit 6,000 police officers over the next year. Of that, Lancashire will benefit from 153 more.

Cat Smith: I am sure, Mr Speaker, you will wish to join me in paying tribute to Lancashire police, who responded over the weekend to the devastating effects of Storm Ciara, alongside all the other emergency services.

The Minister points out that Lancashire is to receive 153 officers under this core grant allocation-style funding, but Lancashire has lost 750 police officers since 2010. On that pattern, we will not regain the total number of officers lost, whereas Surrey, which has lost eight officers since 2010, looks to be gaining hundreds of officers under this funding formula. Can the Minister explain to my constituents why that is fair?

Kit Malthouse: The funding formula has been in place for some time, and there is obviously consternation across the House about the impact it may have, along with a number of the other formulas on which we allocate resources. We will keep this under review, and will do so on this formula, but for the moment the quickest and most efficacious way for us to share out this huge uplift in the number of police officers across the country was using the existing formula, and I hope those 153 officers will be put to good use.

Points-based Immigration System

9. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What plans she has to introduce a new points-based immigration system; and if she will make a statement. [900682]

17. **Dr Jamie Wallis** (Bridgend) (Con): What plans she has to introduce an Australian-style points-based immigration system. [900690]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): The Government will introduce a points-based immigration system that works in the interests of the United Kingdom, and that is fair and prioritises the skills people have to offer wherever they come from.

Michael Fabricant: I for one welcome this, particularly the fact that we will be able to get the brightest and the best not only from Europe but from other nations as well, such as the US, Australia and New Zealand, and Canada. But Lichfield is a rural constituency—a particularly beautiful one, I might add—and we have a need not just for people with great skills but for part-time horticultural workers. What can my right hon. Friend do to assure people they will come to the UK?

Priti Patel: Without wishing to compete with my hon. Friend's beautiful rural constituency, I, too, have one. Of course, in order to take back control we are effectively bringing in these changes, and with that I am doubling the number of people who can go through the seasonal agricultural workers scheme, and more information will follow on that in due course.

Dr Wallis: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that such a points-based system will take account of the needs of communities across all regions of the United Kingdom, including my Bridgend constituency in Wales?

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for his question on the applicability of the points-based system, including to his beautiful Bridgend constituency, and of course he is absolutely right to raise that. We want the brightest and the best; we want to control immigration, but of course we want to bring that equalisation so that anybody from around the world—not just from the EU—who wants to come to the UK, including Bridgend, and has the skills to offer will be welcome.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State provide some clarification regarding the proposed immigration system? It has been called Australian-styled, but the Minister will be aware that the Australian system is actually a permissive system designed to encourage migration, and as the hostile environment rages on surely that is not what this Government aim to do—raise

migration. So will the right hon. Lady clarify exactly what the system is, and confirm whether the Government will scrap the net migration target, which was dreamed up without evidence and has never once been met?

Priti Patel: I thank the hon. Lady for her question, and of course she will know that the hostile environment, as she called it, dates back to previous Governments. The point about the points-based system is of course that we want a simpler, faster, firmer, better system—one that fulfils our promises to the British people, where we seize that once-in-a-generation opportunity to take back control of our borders and end free movement, which I appreciate Opposition Members simply do not want. We will restore democratic control of our immigration, which is effectively what the British people voted for.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It is important to remember that it was the Labour Government who introduced a points-based system. It is important to remember, too, that many of the workers we need in this country cannot come in under the immigration cap of £30,000. The Home Secretary has looked at that for some professions, but will she widen it to ensure we get the workers we need?

Priti Patel: Immigration legislation will come before the House in due course. With regard to the labour market and the skills this country needs, decisions on the points-based system will be based on the needs and skills that this country requires. That is incredibly important, so that no Member is deceived under that. It recognises the fact that we need good people with the skills our economy needs, which will enable and facilitate growth in our economy. We want to encourage the brightest and the best to come to this country not just from the EU, but from outside the EU.

Criminal Justice System

10. **Dr Kieran Mullan** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): What steps she is taking with the Attorney General and the Secretary of State for Justice to help ensure that people have confidence in the criminal justice system. [900683]

22. **Rob Roberts** (Delyn) (Con): What steps she is taking with the Attorney General and the Secretary of State for Justice to help ensure that people have confidence in the criminal justice system. [900696]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): The Government are looking at all aspects of the criminal justice system to ensure it works for victims, witnesses and the most vulnerable. We all have a part to play in that—this is not just a Home Office matter—and today the Cabinet's new committee on the criminal justice system will meet to look at how we can drive better integration across government.

Dr Mullan: As part of that work, I welcome the review of sentencing we are undertaking. We need to ensure that sentencing reflects the severity of the crime. I ran a survey for residents in Crewe and Nantwich to tell me what they think and they overwhelmingly back what we are doing. They also tell me that the term “life sentence” is not fit for purpose. I do not understand

why someone whose loved one has been murdered might hear that the person responsible has been given a life sentence but see them walk out of jail, while they are still serving the true life sentence of living with a lost relative.

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend makes some very valid points about victims, sentences and the criminal justice system. I had the privilege of meeting some of his constituents when I visited his constituency during the election. It is fair to say that the work we are doing with regard to changes to sentences and working with the criminal justice system will ensure that sentences will fit the crime and that we can therefore restore public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Rob Roberts: In the Flint area of my Delyn constituency, violent and sexual assaults made up 47% of crimes committed in the second half of last year and antisocial behaviour 21%, yet for all crimes committed across the board only 7% went to court, 31% are still being investigated and 55% were closed with no action. What can my right hon. Friend do to assure my constituents that the Government will ensure that offenders are brought to court in a timely and efficient timeframe?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight those appalling figures and statistics, which go to show that victims are not being served and justice is not being given to the victims of those crimes. In terms of what we should do and are doing, there is now clear financial uplift to the Crown Prosecution Service. We are pressing the CPS and working with it closely to address many of the failings and inadequacies in the system. We must eradicate such delays and ensure the perpetrators are brought to justice.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is not just in the CPS that there are delays and bottlenecks. The Home Secretary will know that in the court system, too, there are very significant delays exacerbated in some cases by the lack of access to legal aid, which means defendants having to represent themselves. Will she say what discussions she is having with her counterparts in the Ministry of Justice about speeding up the courts process?

Priti Patel: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to highlight the issues about access to justice. The work that has taken place and will be taking place through the new Cabinet Committee on Crime and Justice, and the work that I am undertaking in addition with the Ministry of Justice, very much shine a spotlight on that. We have to support individuals as they go through the legal process, the court process and the court systems. The Government have announced a royal commission into the criminal justice system, where some of those issues will be addressed.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): One group of people who often do not have confidence in the criminal justice system are those with autism and their families. They often get caught up in the criminal justice system inappropriately. Will the Home Secretary agree to work with Ministers in other Departments and perhaps set

up a cross-ministerial working group to ensure that people with autism are not unnecessarily caught up in the criminal justice system?

Priti Patel: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments, and the new committee that the Prime Minister has established seeks to do exactly this. We have to look across Government. No one Department has the answers to any of the challenges not only with the system but in terms of how we can protect victims and individuals. Cross-government working is absolutely crucial, and I am very happy to work with individuals and people who have experience of this.

County Lines: Exploitation of Children

12. **Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con):** What steps she is taking to stop county lines drugs gangs exploiting children. [900685]

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): The Government are determined to stop the terrible exploitation of children and rid our streets of criminal county lines gangs. That is why we are augmenting significant police activity with an extra £25 million of targeted investment across the next two years to uplift the law and enforcement response to county lines and increase the support available to children, young people and their families.

Joy Morrissey: In Beaconsfield, the Thames Valley police have been working tirelessly to protect and prevent child exploitation, particularly from county lines. Will the Minister update the House on what preventive tools the police can use to protect children and young people who are at risk of being criminally exploited through the county lines network?

Kit Malthouse: One of the most significant deterrents that we think will be available to us is differential sentencing. A judge, on giving a sentence to somebody who is involved in county lines, can already take into account culpability factors, such as the use of children. My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that the Sentencing Council is currently reviewing those guidelines, and we hope and believe that the most severe penalties will be meted out to those who exploit children in this way.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): With no statutory definition of “child criminal exploitation”, different safeguarding agencies and police forces understand the risks differently, but county lines exploitation is everywhere. In order to comply with Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary’s recommendation that we need a unified definition in law of child criminal exploitation, when can we expect such an announcement so that we truly safeguard these child victims?

Kit Malthouse: The co-ordination of the effort across Government and indeed, across all the arms of government, including local government, will be one of the primary tasks of the new Cabinet committee that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has established. The hon. Lady is right that dealing with this phenomenon, which spans force and local authority boundaries, will take a united and concerted approach, and we will be doing so over the next few weeks.

Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con): According to Hampshire police, every town in our county has been targeted by county lines drugs gangs, and in Fareham we had some recent arrests of drug dealers. Will the Minister reassure me that Fareham will not get overlooked in the allocation of police officers as part of the new recruitment wave?

Kit Malthouse: In her usual manner, my hon. Friend fights hard for resources for her constituency and I do not blame her, but, as she knows, the allocation of police officers—not least, new police officers—in a specific force area is a matter for the chief constable. However, as a Hampshire MP myself, with a town that has also been preyed upon by county lines drug dealers, she can be assured that how we as a county, and indeed, as a country can combat this scourge is at the front of my mind.

21. [900695] **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): What discussions is the Minister having with other Departments about what we do when young people have been identified as having been caught up in county lines? It is very important, in some cases at least, that they are treated as victims, but that means getting them away from the scenes where they are vulnerable, and many times they are not found until they present at hospital because they have been stabbed. What are we doing about rehousing them or finding them a safe place to go, so that they do not get caught back up in the gangs again?

Kit Malthouse: As I said in answer to an earlier question, co-ordination of the effort against county lines in terms of enforcement and intervention, and then rescuing young people who are involved in it, will take a huge amount of effort. The Cabinet committee that the Prime Minister has drawn together will look specifically at this. The hon. Lady will be pleased, however, that the Cabinet Office has been leading on cross-government work, looking at what more we can do to make sure that we deal with this problem.

Domestic Abuse: Victim Support

16. **Stuart Anderson** (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): What steps she is taking to support victims of domestic abuse. [900689]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): The landmark Domestic Abuse Bill was announced alongside the Queen's Speech on 19 December last year. The Bill and an accompanying non-legislative package will protect and support victims of domestic abuse across England and Wales and bring perpetrators to justice.

Stuart Anderson: In the west midlands, over 60,000 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes were recorded by the police in the year ending March 2019. Will the Minister ensure that in the forthcoming domestic abuse Bill these victims and their children, who as a result of their ordeal have been made homeless, are prioritised during the allocation of safe and permanent housing for victims of domestic abuse in Wolverhampton and across the country?

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Government are committed to supporting domestic abuse victims and their children. Statutory guidance already makes it clear that in allocating social housing councils should consider giving additional preference to those who are homeless and require urgent rehousing as a result of domestic abuse. We strongly encourage all councils to give appropriate priority to victims and their families who have escaped abuse and are being accommodated in a refuge or other temporary accommodation.

Knife Crime

18. **Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): What steps she is taking to reduce knife crime. [900691]

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): We are determined to tackle the scourge of knife crime. We are recruiting 20,000 more police officers, increasing police funding, making it easier for the police to use stop-and-search, and ensuring that more perpetrators go to prison for longer. We have legislated through the Offensive Weapons Act 2019 and knife crime prevention orders to help take more knives off the street. We are also introducing the serious violence Bill, which will put a duty on police, councils and health authorities to prevent and reduce serious violence.

Mrs Murray: Last month, a young man tragically lost his life in Liskeard after being stabbed. What action is being taken to get knives off our streets in towns and rural areas?

Kit Malthouse: First, I offer my condolences to the bereaved family. It is a terrible event to happen and I know it will have shocked everyone in the town. Happily, I understand that an investigation is ongoing and an arrest has been made, and we await the outcome of that investigation. As my hon. Friend, who has fought hard for resources for her constituency, will know, Devon and Cornwall police will receive more funding next year and will be able to recruit 141 additional officers in the first year, as part of the 20,000 police officer uplift. I hope they will be put to good use to prevent exactly this sort of incident.

Topical Questions

T2. [900699] **Sir David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): Last week, we were shocked and appalled by another terror attack on the streets of London. I pay tribute to the brave members of our police and emergency services who responded immediately. It is our duty to keep the people and public safe, and it is only right that the Government are now introducing emergency legislation to put a stop to these terrorist offenders being automatically released early with no checks or review.

Since I last addressed the House, Britain has made history by leaving the European Union, delivering on our promise to the British people. This is the dawn of a bright new future for our country. With that, I am also delighted to announce that our hugely successful EU

settlement scheme has received 3 million applications. This will embrace an exciting new chapter in our history together.

Sir David Evennett: What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to attract highly skilled scientists and engineers to come and work in our country and contribute to our successful future?

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend is right to point out that through our points-based system we are introducing new routes to attract the brightest and the best. Our fast-track immigration scheme will facilitate entry to the UK for more people with skills, including scientists, researchers and mathematicians. This is just the first phase of our reforms to send a signal that the UK intends to remain at the forefront of research and innovation.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Does the Home Secretary appreciate the widespread concern about the Jamaican deportation flight due tomorrow? Is she aware that Stephen Shaw, in his review of detention, suggested that we should not be deporting people who came here as children, but that many of the proposed deportees came here as children and have no memory of Jamaica? Does she accept that these deportations constitute double jeopardy, because the persons have already served an appropriate sentence for their crime? Is she aware that more than 170 Members of Parliament from all political parties have written to the Prime Minister calling for the deportation flight to be halted?

Priti Patel: I am sure that the right hon. Lady is aware that under the UK Borders Act 2007 a deportation order must be made in respect of foreign criminals sentenced to 12 months or more in prison. Every person on the flight was convicted of a serious offence and received a custodial sentence of 12 months or more. That means that, under the Act, which was introduced by the Labour Government in 2007, a deportation order must be made.

T3. [900700] **Virginia Crosbie** (Ynys Môn) (Con): I have received significant online abuse, intimidation and threats. I believe that that kind of abuse on social media, directed at me and others, is simply unacceptable. It puts off people from making a difference in public life. I have received considerable online support from many of my constituents, and for that I should like to show my appreciation. What are the Government doing to protect people who would want to stand for public office?

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting and shining a spotlight on some of the most corrosive and abusive behaviour that people in public office—public servants—witness and experience online. That is simply unacceptable. The Government's Online Harms White Paper makes it clear that we will absolutely tackle such corrosive behaviour: we will pull it off the online media, and we will introduce a regulatory regime to ensure that that kind of hatred cannot continue online.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): On Friday the deputy chair of the local Conservative association was jailed for nine weeks for menacing communications, including these threats against me:

"I am already organising her to be hurt. Amazing what crackheads will do for £100. I'm gonna get her beat up."

The chair of the local association wrote to me today expressing regrets and apologies for what he describes as the grave and unacceptable actions of its member, who has since been expelled. I welcome that letter and that support, but it concerns me that, thus far, no similar condemnation or sense of regret has been expressed by the national party. The national chair's letter to me in response to the issue said nothing stronger than "intimidating behaviour has no place in our politics."

I am also disappointed that the neighbouring Member of Parliament chose to give a very positive character reference for that individual, without contacting me first. I have raised that with her directly, but I know that she was unable to be in the Chamber today.

I am still concerned about the fact that although I raised this case with senior members of the national party, the individual was still able to be at the general election count after he had been summonsed. May I therefore ask the Home Secretary to condemn these threats in the strongest terms, to look into her party's response, and also to show leadership by urging all political parties to come together and draw up a new joint code of conduct against intimidation? Violent threats must have no place in politics in all parties.

Priti Patel: I thank the right hon. Lady for presenting to the House the horrors of what she has endured, and for making the case, very strongly and robustly, that there is no place for threats and intimidation in society or in public life. Let me say now, on the Floor of the House, that that is categorically unacceptable and wrong. There is no place at all for intimidation in public life. As for the national party's response, the right hon. Lady can take it from me, right now, that I am hugely apologetic for what she has had to put up with. It is simply unacceptable, and that is also something of which we should all be mindful, as representatives of major political parties. None of this should be tolerated.

The right hon. Lady referred to my colleague in the neighbouring constituency. My understanding is that her comments were in support of securing the help that that individual needed in terms of access to mental health. However—[*Interruption.*] I see that the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) is chuckling away. This is a very serious matter. It is not a laughing matter.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): We are laughing because you are being insincere. [*Interruption.*]

Priti Patel: I think it is fair to say, given that remark, that the insincerity sits with the hon. and learned Lady. The fact of the matter is that it is right that we come together. [*Interruption.*] Yes, we will see. It is a fact that it is this Government who are trying to deal with this type of issue. Members have already heard me speak about dealing with online harms and trolling, and have heard me call this unacceptable. I am absolutely sincere in my remarks, and I am so sorry—actually, I think it is shameful—that the hon. and learned Lady is herself being quite insincere in respect of the case that I am putting to her.

T4. [900701] **Anthony Browne** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): My constituency has one of the fastest-growing populations of any constituency in the country, partly

because it is such a wonderful place to live, but police numbers, which are partly based on lagging population figures, have not kept pace. Will my hon. Friend tell me what the Government are doing to increase police numbers in Cambridgeshire?

The Minister for Crime, Policing and the Fire Service (Kit Malthouse): We have provided up to £10.6 million more funding, which will allow the police and crime commissioner to recruit another 64 police officers for the county. That is the first instalment of Cambridgeshire's share of the 20,000 police officers. I hope that the good people of Cambridgeshire will reciprocate by electing a very good police and crime commissioner in May.

T5. [900702] **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): When will the Home Office announce the immigration status of the EU students who are due to start courses here in 2021?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): We will shortly confirm our policy on migration, and we will of course continue to have discussions across Government with the European Union to determine future status here in this country.

T8. [900705] **David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that Neighbourhood Watch is a vital asset to the detection of crime? Will he join me in putting pressure on the Mayor of London to continue to support Online Watch Link—OWL—the online system that is used by more than 100,000 London Neighbourhood Watch members and that has secured more than 1,200 hours-worth of sentences for criminals in my council ward in my constituency alone?

Kit Malthouse: I am more than happy to endorse my hon. Friend's remarks. He has been a champion for his part of London for a long time before coming to this House. He is quite right to have high expectations of the Mayor of London, whose efforts on crime have sadly disappointed during his time as Mayor thus far.

T6. [900703] **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Glasgow has had plans for a medically supervised drug consumption room since 2016, and the evidence worldwide points to the efficacy of such rooms, so when the UK Government hold their drugs summit in Glasgow later this month, will they act on the evidence and bring in solutions for urgent change, or will it be more of the same from this Government?

Kit Malthouse: I am sure that the issue of drug consumption rooms will appear in the discussions during the drugs summit, but I repeat what I have said to the Scottish Affairs Committee on this matter, which is that the Scottish National party's obsession with drug consumption rooms is a distraction from the major effort that can be put into this issue. The irrefutable evidence from across the world is that treatment is by far and away the best way to prevent drug deaths. However, it is no surprise that the SNP should seek to distract in this way, not least because the SNP Government have cut drug treatment funds in Scotland over the past few years.

T9. [900707] **Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Over the weekend, a large number of illegal migrants were detained trying to cross the channel. Last summer, the Prime Minister warned migrants crossing the channel that the United Kingdom would "send you back". I have read that few of these migrants are actually sent back, because they have claims for asylum, but surely if they leave a perfectly safe country such as France and try to enter our country illegally, they should not be able to claim asylum. Will the Home Office get a grip and send these people back, in order to stop this illegal trade?

Kevin Foster: I share my right hon. Friend's concerns, and we have been clear that people should make their asylum claim in the first safe country they reach. We work under the Dublin regulations and we will continue to discuss our future participation in that regard, post Brexit, but we will be tackling this because we want to end the scourge of trafficking that puts so many lives at risk.

T7. [900704] **Shabana Mahmood** (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): In the west midlands, violent crime is up 27%, the homicide rate is rising and, in Birmingham, drug crime is at a six-year high. The Home Secretary admitted last week that some communities had been "neglected and left behind". Given the rises in violent and drug crime in Birmingham, will she accept that her comments include my city, and will her Department finally step up to the plate and do something about this?

Priti Patel: I had the privilege of visiting the west midlands two weeks ago and participating in an early-morning drugs raid. The scourge of serious and violent crime is absolutely one that we have to deal with, and this Government are fully committed to that. We are providing all the necessary resources—the money, the equipment and the powers—to the police to enable them to get on top of this.

Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con): Just this weekend I received a report of masked intruders on a farm in my constituency. Could my right hon. Friend update the House on what is being done to tackle the intimidation of farmers and rural crime such as fly-tipping and theft, and could she also reassure my constituents that preventing and prosecuting rural crime will be a focus of this Government?

Priti Patel: I reassure my hon. Friend that we absolutely view rural crime as totally unacceptable. It blights communities and, whether it is fly-tipping or organised crime related to waste crime in particular, she and all other Members who represent rural communities know that it has to be tackled. We are currently working on that through our serious organised crime strategy and across Government.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): How many EU citizens who have been living here for more than five years, entirely legally, and have applied for settled status have been given only pre-settled status?

The Minister for Security (Brandon Lewis): Pre-settled status is granted to people who have not been in the country for five years. By definition, an EU citizen who has been living in the country for five years or more and can evidence that will be granted full settled status.

For clarity, according to the most recent set of official figures, I think only five people have been refused status, all on the grounds of criminality.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): When a secular psychopath threatens to run amok and kill indiscriminately, we treat him as criminally insane and detain him indefinitely in a high-security psychiatric unit. Why do we not do the same for a religious psychopath who threatens to do exactly the same thing?

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend raises very important issues. The Government will address them in tomorrow's emergency legislation and the forthcoming counter-

terrorism Bill, which will consider appropriate sentences for people who seek to do a great deal of harm to our country.

Mr Speaker: I just want to reassure the House that, in fairness to the Home Secretary and me, we took very seriously threats made against MPs and candidates during the last election, so much so that we were constantly in touch to make sure that support was being given. That support will continue to be available to all MPs. Please, if a threat is made to any MP, make sure that you report it. The House and I and the Home Secretary will ensure that your safety comes first. Please do not shy away from reporting any incidents.

Point of Order

3.32 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I will be brief. Before the 2017 general election, Amnesty International carried out research into abuse against female MPs. The results showed that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) was the most abused female MP in the United Kingdom, by a country mile. I was the second most abused female MP in the UK, although very far behind my right hon. Friend, who has had a lot to put up with. That was the perspective from which I made my comments, in exasperation, during the last exchange. I simply want to put on the record that that was the context in which I made my comments, and to say that the level of abuse that I have continued to receive has taken its toll on me, my girlfriend, my family and my friends. I really do hope that the Government are going to tackle it in this Session.

Mr Speaker: I want to reassure the hon. and learned Lady. Nobody should suffer abuse in the way that we have seen. It has happened to many other MPs as well. I want to make sure that that does not happen and to ensure your safety. Please, if you are getting abuse, we will ensure that the House supports you and we will take people to court. I have done a witness statement on behalf of every MP, which will be used to back you up and to take some of the threat away from you.

Deportation Flight to Jamaica

3.33 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Home Secretary, as she leaves the Chamber, if she will make a statement on the suppression of the Windrush lessons learned review and its implications for the deportation flight that is set to leave the country on Wednesday.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): Righting the wrongs suffered by the Windrush generation has been an absolute priority for this Government. People who arrived in this country as little more than infants, and who built lives and raised families here, were told they were no longer welcome. That should never have happened, and it was a terrible mistake by successive Governments and by the Home Office.

Since these injustices came to light, the Government have moved swiftly to give those affected the certainty they need. That is why we set up a taskforce to help people confirm their status. I can confirm that over 8,000 people have been granted some form of documentation, including over 5,000 grants of citizenship, under the scheme.

We have also launched a compensation scheme to address the financial hardship suffered by those left unable to work or unable to access other support systems. To ensure nothing like this ever happens again, the previous Home Secretary commissioned an independent lessons learned review.

In recent days, news coverage has referenced extracts of a draft report, which were leaked in June 2019, in the context of a planned deportation charter flight to Jamaica. I am not going to comment on leaks, but let me be very clear that the lessons learned report has not been suppressed. The report has yet to be submitted to Ministers by the independent adviser, Wendy Williams. It will be for the Home Secretary to publish her report once it has been received.

It is vital that we allow Wendy Williams the time and space to produce her report without political interference. When it is available, the Home Office is committed to publishing it as soon as practically possible and will take its findings and any recommendations very seriously.

With regard to tomorrow's charter flight, the Home Secretary is required by law to issue a deportation order for anyone who is a serious or persistent foreign national offender. It does not matter what part of the world they are from. Whether it is the United States, Jamaica, Australia or Canada, it is criminality, not nationality, that counts.

That legal requirement is set out in the UK Borders Act 2007, which was introduced under a Labour Government, and I remind the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) that he was a member of that Government and did not, as far as I can recall, raise objections at the time to the Act's provisions.

We cannot breach the Act, and we will not allow foreign nationals who are convicted of the most serious offences, including rape and child sexual abuse, to remain in Britain. Tomorrow's flight is about keeping the public safe, and it cannot and should not be conflated with the wrongs suffered by the Windrush generation.

Mr Lammy: I regret the tone with which the Minister has responded to this urgent question. It is two years since there was consensus in this House on how the Windrush generation had been treated in this country. This is a generation of people, thousands of them, who came to this country after the second world war and gave so much but took so little.

Let me just remind the Minister: 164 people were detained and deported, which the Government say they got wrong. On the back of that, 5,000 people were denied access to public services, healthcare, pensions and education—all that they were entitled to. Against that backdrop, he is correct that the Government rightly set up the independent lessons learned review led by Wendy Williams. In the wake of that, they suspended flights to Jamaica. The question today is why have the Government resumed those flights?

In light of the scandal of people who arrived in this country as children, how can the Minister guarantee to the House that there are not people on this flight who are actually British nationals? In the wake of the leak, in which Wendy Williams herself says Ministers should not deport people under the age of 13, can he confirm that there are people on that flight who arrived in this country aged two, three, five or 11? He gives the House the impression that they are murderers and rapists, but he knows that many of them were convicted of non-violent offences.

We in this House cannot condemn county lines and those who would pimp young black children in this country and, at the same time, send those same children back to Jamaica for such drug offences. So I ask the Minister: when will we see this lessons learned review? It was promised in March last year. It was then delayed until September. We are almost two years on now, and people watching see the way in which this Government hold in such disrespect the contribution of West Indian, Caribbean and black people in this country. When, when will black lives matter once again?

Kevin Foster: Let us start with the review and when it will come. Ultimately, this is an independent review and the timing is in the hands of the reviewer. Ministers cannot compel it to be produced by a particular date. Let us be clear: on the status check, there are no British nationals on that flight. Let us also be clear that the foreign national offenders on the flight have been sentenced to a total of 300 years in prison. As we said, the offences relate to everything from sex offending to serious drug trafficking offences, violent offences and firearms offences. That is what is happening in this instance and, aside from two cases, it is based on legislation passed under a Labour Government, in 2007. To define the Windrush generation by this particular group of offenders is truly wrong. The Windrush generation should be defined by the midwife who delivered hundreds of babies; the person who travelled thousands of miles, worked hard and provided for their family for decades. The line being adopted by the Opposition now is remarkable: that somehow that generation is defined by serious or persistent criminal offenders who are being deported from this country. Many listening to the exchanges this afternoon will think that the Labour party not only lost an election, but lost the plot as well.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that the views and feelings of victims of crime are taken into account in our criminal justice system and how it operates?

Kevin Foster: Yes, I do. Given the provisions of the law that have been in place for the past 13 years, many will expect that when someone is convicted of a type of offence that many of those on this flight have committed, deportation may well proceed. Let us be clear: drugs are not a victimless crime; we need only look at the death rates, particularly the tragic figures we had last year in Scotland, to see their impact. As I say, the law is there and the law is clear, and it is not a “might”, a “may” or a “could”; it was legislated in 2007 that it was a “must” issue a deportation order.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The public will note the very dismissive attitude that the Minister has taken to the serious urgent question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy). One problem with this deportation flight is that it is not clear how many people on it came to this country as children. The Minister said he will not comment on leaks from the Windrush lessons learned review. Will he accept that the Stephen Shaw review of detention suggests we should not deport people who came here as children? Is the Minister aware that some of the proposed deportees have, in effect, been held incommunicado because of problems with the mobile signal in their detention centre? Is he aware that one thing the Windrush scandal teaches us is that, when we deport people in this way, we need to be absolutely certain about their immigration status? Clearly, none of them is of the Windrush cohort, but some of them may be the children and grandchildren of the Windrush cohort, which would have made it difficult for them to establish their nationality. Is the Minister aware of the very real concern in the community about this mass deportation flight? His dismissive attitude suggests an altogether dismissive attitude to the concerns of the community and what is problematic about this mass deportation flight.

Kevin Foster: I agree with the shadow Home Secretary that it is right that extensive checks are made before people are listed for deportation on a flight such as the one we are discussing. Let us be clear: these are offenders who have been through the courts and sentenced. There will have been opportunities to make representations against their removal and, as the right hon. Lady will know, there are exemptions in the 2007 Act that apply in respect of, for example, the refugee convention or the European convention on human rights. Those matters have been considered and many of the offenders have lodged appeals. Again, I am clear that the public would look at this debate and say that these are persistent or serious criminal offenders. The law is clear and it is a statutory “must” that the Home Secretary make a deportation order. The law is applied based on the criminality, not the nationality, of the offender. There are regular deportations to many other countries around the world. We will consider the review, but we will also be clear that victims and the public have a right to be protected from serious criminals.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I should tell the House that I am aiming to run the urgent question for around 45 minutes.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Surely voters throughout the country for all parties would expect serious and persistent offenders to be deported in accordance with the law. Will my hon. Friend tell the House the minimum threshold at which somebody becomes classified as a serious and persistent offender, so that we can understand the criteria being applied to put people on these flights?

Kevin Foster: Normally, the definition of a serious offence would be one that has attracted a sentence of 12 months in prison. On persistence, the nature of the offences would be considered. There is not a particular number that somebody would have to hit; it would be about the nature of their offending patterns. As my hon. Friend says, the public would expect serious or persistent offenders who are liable to be deported under the 2007 Act to be removed from this country unless the exceptions apply.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I agree that it is hugely troubling that the lessons learned review has not yet been published. It is totally unacceptable that this charter flight could proceed before all the lessons of Windrush are learned. Windrush should change everything; instead, the Home Office carries on as if nothing has changed.

Will the Minister admit that the flight will include people who were entitled to British nationality—including one individual who was in the care system—but could not access it because of complicated and expensive nationality procedures? When will access to British citizenship finally be made affordable and simple? Does the Minister accept that many on the flight have a far stronger connection to Britain than to Jamaica? As Stephen Shaw would put it, many are more British than they are Jamaican. Will the Minister confirm that the flight will leave 41 British children separated from their fathers and nine British citizens without partners or husbands? Is it not time to look at the legislation again?

Finally, written answers confirm that the Home Office has taken absolutely no interest in what happened to the people on its last charter flight to Jamaica. Is that not the height of irresponsibility?

Kevin Foster: Again, I am clear that we have checked that there is no one on the flight who would be eligible for British citizenship or nationality. We would not be able to deport them if they were. The cases have been through the courts. Again, I should make it clear that the law is very clear, the offences committed are very clear and we are very clear that the Home Office applies the rules based on the criminality, not the nationality, of the offender.

Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con): Does the Minister agree that shrill virtue signalling and faux outrage ignore the political and legal realities of the issue? My parents emigrated to the UK from Commonwealth countries in the 1960s and could have been caught up in the Windrush issue. Thankfully, they were not. The Government have apologised for this issue and are taking remedial action on it. Will the Minister confirm that British citizenship

is a privilege, not a right? Those foreign national offenders who abuse their time here need to face the full force of the law.

Kevin Foster: Clearly, those with British citizenship would not be liable for deportation, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right. We should not define the Windrush generation by a group of people who have committed serious offences or been persistent criminal offenders. The Windrush generation is the midwife who delivered hundreds of babies, the person who worked hard to provide for their family—that is who defines that generation, not serious offenders.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): The Minister's tone and his response to this urgent question have been quite shameful. My constituent came here from Jamaica when he was five years old and all of his family lives here. He is set to be deported on this flight tomorrow, having served a seven-month custodial sentence in 2015. Given the leaked "lessons learned" review issues, is it not right that the Minister, the Home Secretary and the Government take stock and halt this flight just to make sure that they do not inflict any further harm? This mistake has been made before—people were deported and they ended up dead.

Kevin Foster: Yes, we do want to make sure that we prevent further harm—further harm to future victims of crime that may be committed by the persistent or serious offenders who are on this flight. As I have said, the law is very clear. It is rather strange that a Conservative Minister should come under this type of attack, as we are defending and outlining legislation that was actually pushed by the Labour party.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What is the most trivial offence that has been committed by those who have been put on this flight?

Kevin Foster: It would not be right for me to go into the details of the offences that individuals have committed, yet I can say that those on board include people who have been convicted of rape—rape of children—firearms offences, and serious drug offences. As I have said, the legislation is clear about what the exceptions are, and, again, those will have been assessed before the final deportation notices were issued.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants says that it has become aware that potential victims of trafficking have also been served with removal directions. Will the Minister please confirm with a clear yes or no whether there will be victims of human trafficking on this flight?

Kevin Foster: Any claims made for the protection routes will have been assessed, but, again, we are talking about a plane full of people who have been sentenced to a total of 300 years in prison and have committed serious offences. Decisions are based on the exceptions under the UK Borders Act 2007, and that is the law with which we will comply.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): A number of my Chelmsford constituents have written to me about this case. I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware of the court

case that was heard in Chelmsford last year regarding protesters against a previous flight. With that in mind, and given that we do have a legal duty to deport persistent and serious offenders, can he assure me that he personally has looked at each individual case, and that each one involves a persistent or serious offender?

Kevin Foster: Yes, I have been through the manifest, but it would not be appropriate for me to discuss individual cases on the Floor of the House. Let me be clear: the decisions on all these cases will have been based on professional assessments, on the law and on where they fall around the exceptions, including things such as the right to a family life under the European Court of Human Rights.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): “Never again” we were told by those on the Government Benches when they were dragged to this place over the first Windrush scandal. Now we are hearing that lessons learned in that report are again falling on deaf ears. Ultimately, we on the Labour Benches know that this Windrush case is state-sanctioned racism, and it has given permission to racists across this country to attack people day in, day out. When will the Minister understand that this flight must be stopped, or on his head be it?

Kevin Foster: Well, I do listen to some of the comments from those on the Opposition Benches. It would be on our head if we stopped the flight because we would not be complying with our legal duties. We would be seeing persistent and serious offenders remain in this country when they should have been deported under an Act passed by a Labour Government. I must say that many people listening to this will agree with this Government that it is the criminality, not the nationality, that should be determining what happens in this case.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the legal duty on the Government to do the right thing to keep the public safe by removing serious criminals from this country is completely separate from our duty to do the right thing by the Windrush generation who helped to rebuild this country after the war?

Kevin Foster: I could not have put it better myself. The Windrush generation has made a huge contribution to this country, and it is absolutely unbelievable that some on the Opposition Benches want to define them by a group of foreign national offenders who have been sentenced to a total of 300 years in prison. It is truly remarkable.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): A number of those facing deportation tomorrow were found guilty of drug-related offences and have served their time. Meanwhile, we have a Prime Minister who has said that he took cocaine, which is a class A drug. Is it one rule for some and another for others?

Kevin Foster: No, it is a law that looks at the criminality, not the nationality, of the offender. It is safe to say that possession would not meet the threshold for deportation set in 2007, with the support of some Members sitting opposite me.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the people on the flight tomorrow are not only serious or persistent offenders, but all adults who were convicted as adults and not as young offenders?

Kevin Foster: One of the exemptions under the Act to having to make a deportation order is where the offender was under 18 when they were convicted, but there is no one under 18 on the flight tomorrow.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Will the Minister provide the House with some facts, in particular the individual sentences and the offences of those on the flight; the age at which they came to this country; and whether any of them were affected by the lack of mobile phone coverage, which the Home Office recognises was an issue?

Kevin Foster: The offences all meet the threshold for deportation set under the 2007 Act by the Government the right hon. Lady was a member of. Their cases, including whether there are ECHR rights that apply, have been considered by the courts. We are clear that they have committed serious offences or been persistent offenders, who qualify under the Home Secretary’s legal duty. This is within the law, and, as we say, it is about criminality, not nationality.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Is not the point that there is a difference between foreign nationals who come to this country, who make a contribution and who are law abiding and those who are serious or persistent offenders? Can my hon. Friend confirm that the offences committed by those on the flight include manslaughter, rape, drug dealing and robbery? These are serious and persistent offenders.

Kevin Foster: Yes, these are all serious or persistent offenders. The offences committed by those on board include rape of minors, rape of adults and serious drugs offences. That is why we are required to issue a deportation notice.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): How many of the people scheduled to go on the flight have had their mental state assessed? A number of them are vulnerable. After what happened in the Windrush scandal, does the Minister think it is fair to continue to treat people in this way?

Kevin Foster: Anyone entering immigration detention is assessed as part of our adults at risk policy where there is a concern, but let me be clear: these are people who have been through the criminal justice process, some on a number of occasions; they have completed sentences and are now liable under the law to deportation. They have been judged on their criminality, not their nationality, but there are exemptions provided for in the 2007 Act.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Parliament in 2007 passed legislation to require the Government to deport those guilty of serious or persistent offences. In those circumstances, does my hon. Friend agree with me that, were the Government not to do it, they would be liable to judicial review?

Kevin Foster: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. As he said, we are under a legal duty to make the deportation order based on the criminality, not the nationality. Potentially, we would have to answer to future victims if we adopted the policy that is advocated by Labour Members now but not supported by some of them when their party was in government.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) noted, in the Windrush scandal British citizens have been wrongly deported. Why will the Minister not consider the possibility that the deportations should be suspended until the lessons learned review has been received and considered?

Kevin Foster: We have considered whether any of the people involved would benefit from protections under the Windrush scheme. The answer is no, none of them is a British citizen or British national. Ultimately, we have a legal duty to remove serious or persistent criminal offenders, some of whom have committed appalling crimes in this country. I recognise the legal duty this Government have, as does the Home Secretary, and we will fulfil it.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): I thank the Minister for confirming that all those set to be deported are not British nationals. Does he agree that it is right that we can deprive foreign offenders of British citizenship when they harm and endanger our communities? Drug offences are not some unconscionable crime, they are serious—look at the scourge of county lines. Can he confirm that the majority of foreign offenders are in fact deported to the EU?

Kevin Foster: It does have to be said that the majority of deportations are to the EEA, and, as I touched on in my initial answer, we deport criminals who meet the thresholds regularly every week to a range of countries. As we keep on saying—I will say it again—it is the criminality, not the nationality that determines the outcome in each case.

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): One of the individuals facing deportation tomorrow came to the UK aged five. He committed a crime aged 17 and did the time many, many years ago. Is it fair to punish people for mistakes they have already paid for?

Kevin Foster: When Parliament passed the UK Borders Act 2007, under the proposals of the then Government it would have considered whether it is appropriate to apply deportation orders to those who are serious or persistent offenders as part of the penalty for the crime. I believe the vast majority of the public think that is right.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that attempts to play party political games with the Windrush scandal are shameful, especially given the fact that a National Audit Office report recognised that the hostile environment dated back to 2004 under the previous Labour Government?

Kevin Foster: I think it is extraordinary to see people wanting to conflate a group of foreign national offenders who have been sentenced to a total of 300 years'

imprisonment with a generation who have made such a huge contribution to this country. The Home Office will be guided by the law, not party political points.

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that if the lessons learned review that was leaked is correct, in deporting 50 people tomorrow the Government will be going against their own recommendations in their own report, which has reportedly stated that those who have lived in the UK since childhood should not be deported?

Kevin Foster: No.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the Opposition should focus on the appalling criminal behaviour of the perpetrators, and not on the Government for simply implementing the law?

Kevin Foster: I thank my hon. Friend for that point, and I think many people across many constituencies will be stunned by the attitude that some Labour Members are taking today.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm that 50 people are booked on the flight to Jamaica tomorrow, and will he tell us how many of those have been in the UK since childhood?

Kevin Foster: I will not get into individual cases or numbers, but I am clear that all those due for deportation meet the legal threshold supported by the House in 2007.

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): I think we need to clarify that we are in a situation where Opposition Members are seemingly campaigning against Labour policy, so does my hon. Friend agree that foreign nationals who have committed serious crimes in Britain should be in no doubt about our intention to deport them?

Kevin Foster: Absolutely. Those committing criminal offences in this country should have no doubt that I and the Home Secretary will ensure that they face the penalties prescribed by law, and they will be judged on their criminality, not their nationality.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on immigration detention, I am deeply concerned by some of the implications of this flight. The Minister did not answer the question from the Chair of the Select Committee, so can I ask whether he is aware of the outages of phone signal at Harmondsworth and Colnbrook immigration removal centres exposed by Detention Action, and whether all the people on the flight had access to functioning mobile phones so that they might access legal representation?

Kevin Foster: It has to be said that one of the people on the flight did a TV interview this morning, so there is provision for communications. Again, we have met the legal thresholds and the legal test. Ultimately, this is about whether we wish to deport serious or persistent offenders who have committed a range of offences. Many people will be watching with astonishment the attitude on the Opposition Benches.

Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Lab): Can the Minister tell us whether any of the people scheduled for deportation tomorrow have had access to legal advice and representation?

Kevin Foster: As I have touched on, they have all been through the criminal justice system. Many have had quite extensive legal provision afterwards, and they have been assessed on everything else. I say yet again that we are complying with the law set in 2007. The hon. Lady can shake her head, but it is the law that her Labour predecessors voted for.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): What reassurance can the Minister give us that those who needed legal aid had access to it, given the background of cuts to legal aid over the last 10 years?

Kevin Foster: In the criminal process, there would have been opportunities to access legal aid. We have met our legal duties, and we have met the appropriate assessment around whether any of the individuals meet any of the exemptions. Ultimately, these are serious or persistent criminal offenders who, in some cases, present an ongoing threat to people in this country. We will put our legal duties first and protect the public, despite the calls from the Labour party.

Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): I deeply regret the wilfully obtuse attitude taken by the Minister and others on the Government Benches regarding this issue. He should not hide behind the 2007 law on deportation when he knows full well that our concerns relate to our expectation that the independent review will say, when it is published, that those who came to this country as children should not be deported. This flight should not go ahead before that review and its recommendations are officially published in full. Surely he can see that that is the only way we will know that we have not deported our own citizens.

Kevin Foster: I repeat that there is no British citizen on that flight, and the potential eligibility for Windrush protections has been checked. As a Minister I remember that not so many months ago we were getting lectures from the Opposition about following the law and the rule of law, but now we are hearing the argument that

we should not. We are not hiding behind the 2007 law; it is our duty to implement the 2007 law. It is really quite extraordinary to see the reactions from the party that brought it in.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Will the Minister describe to the House exactly how the Government have carried out their duty under section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 to ensure that any child affected by an immigration decision has their welfare properly considered? Does he know how many of those who are leaving the country on this flight have the care of, responsibility for or close family relationships with children in Britain?

Kevin Foster: When matters have been raised around family or dependent children, they have been professionally assessed before the decision has been taken to put someone on a deportation flight. Of course, when that is done, the nature of the criminality and the offences of some of those involved will be taken into account.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The problem with all the Minister's answers is that he is asking us to trust a Department and a system that have been found to have had repeated and costly failures. He admitted to me himself in answer to a written question just a couple of weeks ago that the Home Office had wrongly detained 312 people at a cost of £8.2 million in compensation in just one year, 2018-19. That was up from 212 cases, costing £5 million, in 2017-18. He still refuses to give us the statistics on wrongful deportations and the costs associated with them. When will he come clean about how much money the Department has paid out for wrongfully deporting people—including, as it has done in the past, one of my own constituents?

Kevin Foster: Let me be clear about the facts of tomorrow's flight, which are: a total of about 300 years of sentences of imprisonment for those on board, the nature of the offences committed and the existence of the legal duty. The Government will follow the law. Our system is based on criminality, not nationality. Ultimately, the real failure would be if we left the public to face the consequences of our not removing some persistent and serious criminals.

Flood Response

4.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Theresa Villiers): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement about the significant flooding caused by the heavy rain and severe gale force winds brought by Storm Ciara.

First and foremost, I extend my condolences on behalf of the whole House to the family and friends of the individual who lost his life in Hampshire earlier today; our thoughts are with you.

I also express my support and sympathy to all those whose homes or businesses have been flooded over the weekend. Flooding can have appalling consequences for each individual affected, and I want to provide the assurance today that the Environment Agency, local government and the emergency services are working hard to keep people safe in all the areas affected by this devastating storm.

Storm Ciara brought rainfall ranging between 40 and 80 cm in 24 hours across much of northern England. The highest levels were recorded in Cumbria, with 179.8 cm of rain falling over the course of the day. Particularly severe impacts have been felt along the River Calder in Yorkshire, along the River Ribble in Lancashire, along the Irwell in Greater Manchester, and on the Eden in Appleby. Regrettably, four of these communities—the Calder valley, Whalley and Ribchester, the Rossendale valley and Appleby—were flooded in 2015.

The current estimate is that more than 500 properties have been flooded, but this number is expected to increase as further information is collected. The latest number of properties confirmed to have been flooded are 40 in Cumbria, 100 in Lancashire, 150 in Greater Manchester and 260 in Yorkshire. Defences in Carlisle have held. There is local road disruption across the affected areas, and a shipping container is stuck under Elland bridge. One severe flood warning was issued over the weekend to communicate a “risk to life” along the River Nidd at Pateley Bridge. This has now been removed; flood defences were not overtopped and no properties were flooded. Our coastal communities have also been affected, in parts of the south-west and north-east of England, where high tides, large waves and coastal gales have occurred.

The weather is expected to remain unsettled, and 97 flood warnings are currently still in place. Although river levels in West Yorkshire and Lancashire are now receding, we must expect high river levels further downstream in South Yorkshire over the next few days, so we urge people in at-risk areas to remain vigilant, not to take unnecessary risks and to sign up to receive Environment Agency flood alerts. Some coastal flooding is probable tomorrow, but it is not expected to be in the more serious category.

Extensive work is taking place in the affected areas, including clearing debris that can block up river flow. Environment Agency teams have been deploying temporary flood barriers where necessary. I pay tribute to all the dedicated professionals who are working so hard on the emergency response to the situation—operating flood defences, supporting communities and keeping people safe. That includes the hard-working staff of the

Environment Agency, along with local authority teams and, of course, the police and fire services. I also thank all the volunteers who are part of local flood action groups that are helping with the response effort.

Every effort is being made to keep people safe, and I can confirm that the Government are today activating the Bellwin scheme, which will provide significant financial support to the local authorities in the areas affected by Storm Ciara, helping them to fund the cost of recovery. I encourage councils in the areas affected to consider applications to the Bellwin fund.

In a changing climate, we all want our country and our communities to be better protected from flooding, and more resilient when severe weather occurs. In the areas hit by flooding over the weekend, at least 25,000 properties and businesses have been successfully protected by flood defences. But we know that more needs to be done, and we are determined to deliver.

Since the events of Boxing day 2015, we have been taking action on a range of schemes to strengthen defences and improve resilience. We are investing more than ever before in these defences through a £2.6 billion programme up to 2021 to manage flood and coastal erosion risk. This will enable better protection of over 300,000 properties. Early in 2016, we committed an unprecedented £35 million to improve flood protection for homes and businesses in Mytholmroyd, Hebden Bridge and across Calderdale. Construction in Mytholmroyd is progressing and we expect the defences there to be completed in the summer. We have built 25 new flood defences in Cumbria and Lancashire, protecting 23,100 homes, and 59 new flood defences in Yorkshire, protecting 13,200 homes. In the autumn, I announced an extra £60 million to boost flood schemes in the north, including £19 million for Calder valley. Our manifesto commits us to a further £4 billion of new funding in the five years up to 2026.

In 2016, we introduced the Flood Re scheme to make insurance cover for flooding more affordable and more accessible. Following the flooding in November, I announced an independent review of the data on insurance cover to ensure that that scheme is working as effectively as possible. Since the incidents of 2015, we have strengthened and improved our system of flood warnings, and we have established a flood recovery framework to prepare for and guide flood recovery schemes.

This Government are determined to maintain and enhance our readiness to respond when extreme weather hits our country. Our swift activation of the Bellwin scheme today, and our investment in the biggest ever programme of flood defence improvement, illustrates that determination. We stand ready to help communities to recover from flooding. We are investing in the defences needed in the warmer, wetter, less predictable climate that the scientists tell us we must expect in the years to come. I commend this statement to the House.

4.16 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of her statement. I join her in sending our condolences to the family of the man who died in Hampshire.

On behalf of the Opposition, I thank the emergency services, the Environment Agency, local councils, volunteers and communities who have worked tirelessly to protect homes and businesses, and to rescue people and animals

from rising waters, fallen trees and debris, as well as all those who have worked to reinforce flood defences, not forgetting the RNLI and our coastguard too.

The reality of the climate crisis is that more extreme weather will happen more often and with more severe consequences, especially for those who live and work in areas of high flood risk. As the climate breakdown escalates, we are seeing an increase in the frequency and intensity of deadly weather patterns. Much more needs to be done to prevent flooding, to alleviate carbon emissions through habitat restoration, and to return flood plains to a natural state. Building homes on flood plains must stop.

The Government need to ask themselves: since Parliament declared a climate emergency, what are they doing differently on flooding—on protecting our communities? Austerity has had a devastating impact on our environment. There have been unprecedented cuts to our local authorities across the country, including the councils that have been most affected by the increased flooding and increased risk of flooding. The Environment Agency has seen its staffing levels fall by 20% since the Government came to power. I want Ministers to look afresh at what can be done now that Parliament has declared a climate emergency. A new plan for flooding should recognise the realities of the climate crisis, reverse the cuts to our frontline services, invest in comprehensive flood prevention, promote land use change, encourage habitat restoration, and acknowledge in the funding settlements for councils the higher risk in areas that face flooding so often.

I recognise that some new flood schemes have been delivered, but the list that the Secretary of State gave out is of what she has done, not what she will do, in response to this flooding. Will she accept that a comprehensive plan for flooding is now needed? Is it now time for Ministers to recognise that requiring match funding for some flood schemes means that poorer communities lose out compared with richer areas? The Environment Agency said only last year that it needs £1 billion a year to protect our communities, and a new approach on flooding. When will Ministers listen to their own Government agency and fund flood protection properly?

Does the Secretary of State have a date for the much-trailed flood summit that the Prime Minister promised last year? Will the trials of the new environmental land management scheme be targeted at the areas where flooding has been most severe this time? What action is she taking to ensure that homes and businesses that have been denied insurance and are still outside the current Flood Re scheme get the affordable protection that they so deserve?

Water is incredibly destructive and can destroy homes, businesses and livelihoods. Many of those flooded this time have been flooded before. Can the Secretary of State give them an assurance that the warm words and Government press releases this time will result in more action than they saw the last time they were flooded?

Theresa Villiers: Where those on the two Front Benches completely agree is on the urgent need to tackle the climate crisis, because inevitably our changing climate leads to more extreme weather. This Government have the most ambitious programme in the world to decarbonise our economy. We are decarbonising faster than any

other G7 economy, and we were the first major developed economy to make the legal commitment to net zero. I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman that habitat restoration, nature-based solutions, peatland restoration and tree planting are all a crucial part of our programme to tackle climate change, but they can also play a critical role in mitigating the impact of flooding. We are determined to deliver on those programmes, which is demonstrated by the revolutionary Environment Bill we have put forward.

I agree that the planning system must take into account flood risk, and there are important principles in the planning system to ensure that it does so. In relation to council funding, I reiterate that the Bellwin scheme was opened this morning by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, and I encourage local authorities to submit their applications as soon as possible.

With regard to Environment Agency funding, we are absolutely committed to investing in ensuring that our flood defences are as strong as they can be and that we become more resilient to flooding. That is why our manifesto commits a further £4 billion over five years. We do have a comprehensive plan for flooding, and those investments will be made over the coming years.

The shadow Secretary of State is concerned about match funding, but one of the successes of the funding programme is that we have managed to draw in sources of funding for other areas, to maximise the impact we can have on flood defences. He makes a valid point in relation to environmental land management. We certainly would want to involve a range of locations in our tests and trials, and I very much hope that some of the areas affected by flooding today can be part of that.

Finally, Flood Re has significantly improved access to insurance, and it has kept the costs much lower than they would otherwise be. Virtually 100% of people now have the option of quotes from at least two companies when choosing insurance, but we recognise that there was concern in South Yorkshire after the November flooding incident, so we are reviewing the scheme independently to ensure that it is working as effectively as possible to help people insure in these circumstances.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): Fast-flowing torrents of water damaged homes and businesses across my constituency over the weekend, with communities such as Milnsbridge, Linthwaite, Marsden, Slaithwaite, New Mill, Brockholes and many more suffering at the hands of Storm Ciara. Does the Secretary of State agree that we must get councils clearing culverts and drains of leaves? Does she also agree that, when it comes to housing developments, we must stop this tarmacking and paving of our green fields, which gives no space or capacity for rain run-off when we have severe storms such as these?

Theresa Villiers: I want to take this opportunity to express my support and sympathy for all my hon. Friend's constituents who have been affected by the very severe weather at the weekend. I certainly agree that it is important for local authorities to undertake appropriate drain clearance as part of their efforts to mitigate flood risk. I also believe that it is important for our planning system to recognise the value of maintaining gardens and green spaces as part of our overall strategy to prevent flooding and mitigate its impacts.

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for giving us advance sight of her statement. I would like to associate myself and my colleagues with the condolences expressed by the Secretary of State to the family and friends of the gentleman in Hampshire who so sadly lost his life, as well as to those who have seen their properties and businesses affected. I would also like to give our thanks to the volunteers and the many in the public services who have worked so hard over the past 48 hours to keep people safe.

Of course, climate change means that extreme weather events of the kind we have seen in the last 48 hours will become more and more frequent, as will the kinds of statement that the Secretary of State has sadly had to make today in consequence. What steps will her Government take to further improve the resilience of the transport network to cope with events such as we have seen, and will she undertake to be engaged with all the Governments in this island as the aftermath of Storm Ciara is dealt with?

Theresa Villiers: Our £2.6 billion of investment in flood defences up to 2021 has a very strong emphasis on ensuring that our transport networks are more resilient. I would also emphasise that on those matters and many others we are keen to work with the devolved Administrations to the mutual benefit of all our citizens.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): Many of my constituents who were flooded last year watch severe weather warnings with dread, expecting to be flooded again every time they see them, and many of them have not been able to apply successfully for Flood Re insurance or for resilience funding. What can the Department do to communicate to councils the importance of working with the people affected—the victims of flooding—to enable them to access this resilience funding?

Theresa Villiers: I would certainly encourage all local authorities to engage with residents affected by flooding in particular areas and with the various schemes that are available.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): I cannot begin to convey the sense of absolute devastation across Calderdale that, for so many residents, we are in the same position again, having been flooded in the Boxing day floods in 2015. To update the Secretary of State, we are now looking at 400 residential properties flooded, 400 businesses, eight schools and two care homes, and two bridges have sustained damage. I have written to her today with a number of asks. Will she agree to meet me and representatives from Calderdale Council to go through those in detail so that we can start the recovery? Will she commit to making available the flood grants that came so quickly after those 2015 Boxing day floods, so that we can start that process straight away?

Theresa Villiers: I want to extend my sympathies to all the hon. Member's constituents—it has been devastating for many of them—and I would be very happy to meet her and representatives from her constituency to discuss what has happened and how we can help in the future.

Philip Davies (ShIPLEY) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for her time yesterday, for making herself available and for the support and help she gave. As I

have told her, many of my constituents who were flooded over the weekend are exactly the same people who were flooded on Boxing day 2015, which really is completely unacceptable. Can she assure me that the flood defence programme the Government have in place will ensure that my constituents in Shipley will not have to suffer this fate yet again?

Theresa Villiers: I am afraid there can be no absolute guarantees on flooding, but I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government are determined to press on with their major investments in our flood defences to better protect thousands of homes and businesses across the country. Certainly one of the things we will do as a result of what has happened over the weekend is take a fresh look to make sure that everything possible is being done to keep those flood defence projects on track for delivery.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): There are two essential railway lines in Dwyfor Meirionnydd: the Conwy valley and the Cambrian coast lines. Neither has trains running today, following river and sea flooding. Given that the rail infrastructure of Wales is reserved to Westminster, what is the Department doing to work alongside the Welsh Government and ensure that essential communication links in Wales are resilient in the face of climate change?

Theresa Villiers: My Department has very extensive contacts with the Welsh Government on a range of issues. Obviously, in circumstances like this, it is essential that there is excellent working between the devolved Administrations in relation to the transport network. That is what is under way, and it will continue.

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in paying tribute to the hard-working staff of the Environment Agency in West Sussex and nationally, who have been working diligently at antisocial hours, not just over this weekend, to protect life and property, but in many cases since the flooding in mid-December? I also thank her for making the link between the planning system and the incidence of flooding.

Theresa Villiers: I certainly join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the hard-working staff of the EA and all those involved in the response to this emergency. They do a tremendous job, and they need our support in very difficult circumstances.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): May I say to the Secretary of State that three months on from the floods that hit my constituency in November, many people are still suffering and are still out of their homes, and I am afraid Government help for those particularly without insurance, despite promises made, is inadequate? May I direct her to the issue of matched funds, raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) on the Front Bench, because what this means in South Yorkshire is that, although the Government have said they are making up to £1 million available—itself a measly sum compared to the need—that money is not being released because £600,000 has been raised from local businesses and people, but it does not reach the £1 million? This is penny-pinching, narrow-minded

and wrong, so may I ask the Secretary of State to look at this again because it is just wrong for the people in my constituency?

Theresa Villiers: I am more than happy to look at this, but I would emphasise that there are many successful examples of where funding has been sought from a range of sources, including businesses, which has led to very successful results, including in Sheffield and South Yorkshire.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): The recent flooding incidents show very clearly that there is a need for better resilience and better planning for flooding events. May I ask the Secretary of State to look closely at the bid submitted by Humberside fire authority, along with Hull university and North Lincolnshire Council, for a national flood resilience centre at a site in Scunthorpe?

Theresa Villiers: Yes, I am happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance, and I understand that DEFRA officials have been engaging with the people putting forward the bid, which will be looked at very seriously.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): Kirkstall in my constituency was devastated by floods on Boxing day 2015, and we were on high alert all day yesterday. In many ways Leeds had a close escape yesterday, but there remains a £23 million gap between what the Government have committed to flood defences in Leeds and what is needed to protect us against the floods we experienced just four years ago. We had a lucky escape yesterday but may not be so lucky next time. When will the Government release that £23 million so that Leeds gets the flood defences we need?

Theresa Villiers: As I have said, we have an extensive programme that we are in the course of delivering; we are determined to do that to ensure that many more homes and businesses are protected from flooding.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Brigg and Goole and the Isle of Axholme is probably the most flood-prone constituency in the country. We are grateful for the hundreds of miles of flood defences that protect us and for Governments of all parties over the last decade and a half announcing more money for flood projects after events, but the problem at the moment actually is not so much accessing funding for capital projects but ongoing maintenance, which is absolutely vital to ensure our ditches and dykes are free to take the water. I urge the Secretary of State to continue the excellent work on capital funding, but to look at what maintenance funding has been made available to drainage boards, local authorities and the EA?

Theresa Villiers: My hon. Friend makes a very valid point. In many areas, capital spending is not effective unless it is accompanied by resource spending to ensure that appropriate maintenance takes place, and nowhere is that clearer than in relation to floods. That, no doubt, will be considered at the Budget and the spending review.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Promises broken and programmes undelivered: tomorrow morning at five o'clock the River Ouse is likely to rise to the same

level as under Storm Desmond, yet we have seen a lack of delivery on issues such as insurance, upper catchment management and even putting in resilience in the city itself. Will the Secretary of State not only expedite action but meet me to discuss the threats that flooding causes my constituents in York?

Theresa Villiers: I will be very happy to meet the hon. Lady. The situation in relation to the Ouse is indeed still very serious, but I reassure her that significant numbers of flood defences have been built over recent years. As I said in my opening statement, we fully recognise that there is more to do, particularly as the climate is changing and extreme weather events become more common, but a huge amount of effort has gone into delivering flood defences, and more is on the way.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): Recent months have led to a very difficult start of the season for many farmers, particularly arable farmers forced into exceptionally late drilling. Given that farmers are likely to be very badly affected by these latest floods, what reassurances can my right hon. Friend give me that farmers will receive the support and assistance they need?

Theresa Villiers: So often, farmers are the victims of flooding and the providers of heroic help to others who are also affected by flooding. We will be working closely with the farming community in the days ahead to see what assistance can be given.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I, too, want to pay tribute to the emergency services, who have responded so well. My heart goes out to the families and communities who have yet again been hit by this disaster.

There is no denying that the climate emergency causes such extreme weather events. Planting millions of trees is one part of responding to the climate emergency. Indeed, the right hon. Lady's party has pledged to plant millions of new trees every year. Do the Government have a plan for where those millions of trees will go, and when will it be published?

Theresa Villiers: The Government are already running a range of schemes to promote the planting of trees, including the urban tree challenge fund, where we announced successful bids at the weekend. We will publish further details in our tree strategy for England, which will come out in a few weeks' time.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I am sure the Secretary of State and many Members will have seen the dramatic pictures from Hawick in my constituency, where Sonia's Bistro and the Bridge House bed and breakfast collapsed into the River Teviot. That was devastating for the business, but thankfully nobody was injured. May we pay tribute not only to the emergency services but to the Hawick flood group and all the other volunteers who made sure that that building was evacuated, and kept many other communities and people safe from what could otherwise have been a disaster?

Theresa Villiers: I am very happy to do that. The Hawick flood group volunteers deserve our praise and thanks, as do so many volunteers in similar groups around the country.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): I join the Secretary of State in praising all agencies, including the Environment Agency, local authorities, police and volunteers. Will she also recognise the enormous contribution of our fire and rescue services in dealing with recent flooding? In order that they are properly resourced, equipped and trained for these responsibilities, as a one nation Conservative will she agree to extend a statutory duty on flood response to fire and rescue services in England, in line with the duty that already exists in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?

Theresa Villiers: I very much join the hon. Gentleman in paying a warm tribute to the fire and rescue services for their efforts in this situation and in so many others around the rest of the year. I will certainly give consideration to the other matters he raises regarding the duties relating to flooding.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): Many of our coastal communities, which are vital to our economy, will be particularly badly hit by Storm Ciara. Will the Secretary of State assure me that she will do everything in her power to ensure that those communities receive the support and assistance they need at this critical time?

Theresa Villiers: We will be doing that. We appreciate the really difficult circumstances that our coastal communities have faced over recent days. We will be doing our best to support them in the days ahead.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): As a Hull MP, may I add my support to the comments made by the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft) on basing a national flood resilience centre in the Scunthorpe area?

I want to ask the Secretary of State about Flood Re. What is her advice to those who are not covered under the present scheme—leaseholders, homeowners who live in properties built after 2009 and businesses, particularly microbusinesses or businesses run from home—and are finding it very difficult to get any insurance?

Theresa Villiers: These matters will be considered in the independent review, which is under way. I am also happy to raise them directly with Flood Re.

James Daly (Bury North) (Con): Parts of my constituency have been underwater since yesterday, particularly Redvales and Ramsbottom. Redvales has benefited from the £40 million Radcliffe and Redvales flood defence scheme—the Government provided £7 million—for which we are grateful. It has mitigated some of the problems that we saw yesterday, but Ramsbottom does not have its own flood defence scheme. Will my right hon. Friend meet me and other relevant agencies to ensure that Ramsbottom has a flood defence scheme at the earliest opportunity to protect local residents and businesses?

Theresa Villiers: I would be very happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the situation and see what more can be done. I reiterate to him and all Members whose constituents have been affected by flooding my sympathy and support for those going through this extremely difficult time.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): Along with my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker), I was in Brighouse yesterday, where I am a councillor, helping some of the businesses affected by flooding. He is still in Calder Valley helping with the relief efforts and discussing the response with the Under-Secretary. The Government's response to the devastating floods in 2015 was excellent. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the same support package will be offered to householders and businesses who have been affected once again?

Theresa Villiers: We will be looking at the appropriate response. I emphasise that there are plans for improved flood defences for Brighouse, on which we hope work will start very soon.

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con): I am sure that the thoughts of the whole House will be with all those families who suffered as a result of the storm and floods over the weekend. Penrith and The Border was hit very hard and my thoughts go out especially to the communities in Appleby. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that she will mobilise efforts across the whole Government to ensure that we can support these people as quickly as possible?

Theresa Villiers: I can give him that assurance. The DEFRA emergency operating centre has been activating. We are leading cross-government efforts to make sure that everything possible is done to ensure that people are kept safe in these difficult circumstances. I convey my sympathies to those in Appleby who are facing the trauma of flooding.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in thanking the contractors for Worcestershire County Council who have been clearing all the fallen trees from our roads? In Worcestershire, we have the River Severn, the River Avon and the River Teme, so we experience frequent river flooding. Six new flood defence schemes have been built in West Worcestershire, but we still need more. How much of the £4 billion—the increase in flood defence funding she has announced—has already been programmed?

Theresa Villiers: The Environment Agency has a fairly long pipeline of flood defence improvements, but it will be important to consider the representations that my hon. Friend made in future decisions on the allocation of that £4 billion fund.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): My right hon. Friend has twice mentioned the planning system. In my view, too many houses are still being built on floodplains, causing problems not only for them but for houses downstream from them. Will she work with colleagues from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government so that where the local authority planning decision is overturned on appeal the Planning Inspectorate always encloses a condition that the local authority must approve a satisfactory drainage system?

Theresa Villiers: My hon. Friend raises very important points. It is vital to ensure that our planning system properly takes into account flood risk, and I will continue to engage with colleagues in MHCLG on how we ensure that takes place.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Flooding in urban areas such as Dudley South is often made worse by overflowing drains, often caused not by blockages in the drains but downstream in the water waste pipes. Will my right hon. Friend keep pressure on water companies properly to maintain waste water drainage pipes to ensure that our local communities do not suffer an unnecessary risk of flooding?

Theresa Villiers: I will certainly maintain the pressure on water companies to act responsibly on flooding and to play their part in mitigating it, as is the case with the pressure that we apply to them to improve their record on pollution.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I offer my sympathy to all those who have been affected and my praise to all those who have played such a significant role in trying to ensure that everyone is safe. On a visit to North Yorkshire, I saw at first hand the damage that flowing water can do in the small gullies that, under normal circumstances, hold virtually no water, and to the small rural communities whose houses dot the side of the gullies. Huge stones and mud ripped down the hillside, undermining the homes. Who do these people go to in order to get that fixed and ensure that in years to come their homes are literally not swept off the hill?

Theresa Villiers: It is crucial that we support rural communities as part of our programme to improve flood defences. We have seen on our television screens in recent days the potentially devastating impacts of severe weather. No system can protect everyone in all circumstances, but flood defences will be an important part of our agenda to level up all parts of the country, including rural areas.

Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con): For too many homes, businesses and villages in Rushcliffe, flooding is a recurring issue. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to reconsider what support we can offer to areas that repeatedly flood and how we can encourage the many different agencies and organisations involved in preventing and responding to flooding to better work together to prevent it in the first place, because it is a very complex landscape for residents to navigate?

Theresa Villiers: A huge amount of cross-government and cross-agency work is being done on resilience and flood programmes, but I am sure that more can be done. We will want to learn lessons from the events of recent days.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for her responsiveness to the flooding over the weekend. On this occasion, the issues in my constituency were minor, but I have been told by residents that those affected by flooding from the River Weaver in Nantwich in November have still not had the support they deserve to help them to recover and get their homes and businesses back on track. Will she meet me to see what we can do to make sure that the Environment Agency and Cheshire East Council work together to look after residents affected since November?

Theresa Villiers: Yes, I will. It is very important that people affected by the flooding in November can access the package of support that was introduced. I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend to talk about it.

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): My beautiful constituency is not immune to flooding, and neither is it immune to the reckless growth ambitions of the Labour-led council. We must take steps to look after the houses that are already there. Will my right hon. Friend reassure me that the Government remain committed to protecting an extra 300,000 houses from flooding?

Theresa Villiers: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. Our £2.6 billion programme is designed to protect 300,000 properties and give significant protection to agricultural land and the transport system. It is a record level of investment. We are investing more in flood defences than any previous Government, because we know how important that is in the context of a changing climate.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Flooding is not only caused by heavy rain. Coastal areas in my constituency regularly experience flooding when heavy storms coincide with high spring tides. This can result from storm damage to harbour walls or coastal erosion. Will the Secretary of State make sure that our future plans include funding to build resilience into our coastal regions?

Theresa Villiers: Supporting our coastal areas is an important element of our plan for improving flood defences, so I can give my hon. Friend those assurances. I should take this opportunity to highlight to everyone that we are not out of the woods yet, and that difficulties in coastal areas could continue, so people should try to avoid taking unnecessary risks in those areas.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in paying tribute to Buckinghamshire County Council, the emergency services and volunteers who worked tirelessly to clean up wind-blown rubbish after the flooding at the weekend? Will she consider community payback schemes using ex-offenders to help with dredging and other things we need to prevent flooding in the future?

Theresa Villiers: I am happy to reiterate my support and thanks to those involved in the relief effort in my hon. Friend's constituency and across the country. On getting ex-offenders involved in such programmes, I should note that much of this work is quite specialist, so I am not sure how that would work, but I welcome her suggestion.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I thank the Secretary of State for the conversation I had with her yesterday as I was inspecting flood damage in Ribchester and Whalley in the Ribble Valley. I am extremely grateful.

BILLS PRESENTED

Mr Speaker: As the House can see, we have a good many Bills to be presented today. In order to save time and so that we can get on with today's main business, I will accept private notice of the dates of the Second Readings. Those dates will be minuted accordingly in *Hansard and Votes and Proceedings*.

ANXIETY IN SCHOOLS (ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision for guidance to schools about reducing anxiety about environmental concerns among pupils and staff; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 January 2021, and to be printed (Bill 30).

DECARBONISATION OF ROAD TRANSPORT (AUDIT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision for independent audits of the costs and benefits of the decarbonisation of road transport, and of the regulation of the sale and production of petrol, diesel and hybrid cars; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 31).

NET ZERO CARBON EMISSIONS (AUDIT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision for an independent audit of the costs and benefits of meeting the requirement under the Climate Change Act 2008 for net United Kingdom carbon emissions to be zero by 2050; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 12 June, and to be printed (Bill 32).

ANXIETY (ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to place a duty on the Secretary of State to reduce anxiety about environmental concerns among the general population; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 33).

HOUSING ACT 2004 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to amend Part 3 of the Housing Act 2004 to provide that any selective licensing scheme for residential accommodation extends to social housing.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 34).

CARAVAN SITES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to amend the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 to remove planning permission requirements for caravan site licence applicants; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 12 June, and to be printed (Bill 35).

MOBILE HOMES ACT 1983 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to amend the Mobile Homes Act 1983; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 12 June, and to be printed (Bill 36).

PUBLIC SECTOR EXIT PAYMENTS (LIMITATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to limit exit payments made by public sector organisations to employees; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 13 March, and to be printed (Bill 37).

STUDENT LOANS (DEBT INTEREST) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to limit the rate of interest chargeable on outstanding student loan debt; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 10 July, and to be printed (Bill 38).

LOCAL AUTHORITIES (REMOVAL OF COUNCIL TAX RESTRICTIONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to make provision for the removal of restrictions on principal local authorities in England to set levels of council tax; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 10 July, and to be printed (Bill 39).

HEALTHCARE (LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision about the local accountability of clinical commissioning groups; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 40).

HUMAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to require persons bringing claims or proceedings under the Human Rights Act 1998 to satisfy a test of reasonableness and equity; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 41).

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTERS (PRIVATISATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision for the privatisation of the British Broadcasting Corporation and Channel 4; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 10 July, and to be printed (Bill 42).

BBC LICENCE FEE (CIVIL PENALTY) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone, Philip Davies, Sir Mike Penning and Sir Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision to decriminalise the non-payment of the BBC licence fee.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 10 July, and to be printed (Bill 43).

TAX RATES AND DUTIES (REVIEW) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to require the Government to publish an annual review of the net yield to HM Treasury of tax rates and duties levied, including estimates of the impact on yield of changes to rates of those taxes and duties; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 January 2021, and to be printed (Bill 44).

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (CO-FUNDING AND CO-PAYMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to make provision for co-funding and for the extension of co-payment for NHS services in England; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 April, and to be printed (Bill 45).

VALUE ADDED TAX BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to enable the maximum turnover threshold for exemption from the requirement to register for VAT to be raised; to make provision for the exemption of certain goods and services from liability to VAT; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 10 July, and to be printed (Bill 46).

DEREGULATION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision for the reduction of burdens resulting from legislation for businesses or other organisations or for individuals; to make provision for the repeal or amendment of regulations; to make provision about the exercise of regulatory powers and functions; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 January 2021, and to be printed (Bill 47).

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION (OFFENCES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to create offences in respect of persons who have entered the UK illegally or who have remained in the UK without legal authority; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 April, and to be printed (Bill 48).

BORDER CONTROL BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision about requirements for non-UK citizens seeking leave to enter the United Kingdom; to make provision about a process for the removal from the United Kingdom of non-UK citizens, in certain circumstances and on the basis of established criteria; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 April, and to be printed (Bill 49).

FOREIGN NATIONALS (CRIMINAL OFFENDER AND PRISONER REMOVAL) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision for the removal from the United Kingdom of foreign national criminal offenders and prisoners; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 April, and to be printed (Bill 50).

FREE TRADE (EDUCATION AND REPORTING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to impose duties relating to the provision of public education on free trade; to require regular reports from government on trade arrangements with other countries; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 January 2021, and to be printed (Bill 51).

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE (DEFINITION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision about the definition of international development assistance; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 January 2021, and to be printed (Bill 52).

SCHOOLS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to enable schools to select pupils on the basis of published criteria; to allow schools to determine maximum class sizes; to remove restrictions on the expansion of the number of pupils in schools and on the creation of new schools; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 53).

BAT HABITATS REGULATION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision to limit the protection for bat habitats in the built environment where the presence of bats has a significant adverse impact upon the users of buildings; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 13 March, and to be printed (Bill 54).

GREEN BELT PROTECTION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to establish a national register of green belt land in England; to restrict the ability of local authorities to de-designate green belt land; to make provision about future development of de-designated green belt land; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 13 March, and to be printed (Bill 55).

INTERNATIONAL PAYMENTS (AUDIT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision to require cost-benefit analysis and independent audit before payments are made by the Government to a foreign country or international organisation; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 12 June, and to be printed (Bill 56).

LOCAL AUTHORITIES (BORROWING AND INVESTMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision about the acquisition of land and property by local authorities in England outside their own local authority boundaries; to limit the power of local authorities to invest in commercial risk-taking enterprises; to limit public borrowing by local authorities for non-core activities; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 12 June, and to be printed (Bill 57).

BENEFITS AND PUBLIC SERVICES (RESTRICTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision to restrict the entitlement of non-UK citizens to publicly-funded benefits and services; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 12 June, and to be printed (Bill 58).

PUBLIC SERVICES (AVAILABILITY) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision about the availability of public services during weekday evenings, at weekends and on bank holidays; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 12 June, and to be printed (Bill 59).

WORKING TIME AND HOLIDAY PAY BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision for the expiration of the Working Time Regulations 1998; to provide for regulations governing working time; to make provision about holiday pay for employees; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 12 June, and to be printed (Bill 60).

LOCAL ROADS (INVESTMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision about the maintenance and repair of roads by local authorities in England; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 12 June, and to be printed (Bill 61).

ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES (REGULATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision for the regulation of the sale and use of electronic cigarettes; to exempt electronic cigarettes from UK law derived from the Tobacco Products Directive; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 12 June, and to be printed (Bill 62).

MOBILE HOMES AND PARK HOMES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to require the use of published criteria to determine whether mobile homes and park homes are liable for council tax or non-domestic rates; to make provision in relation to the residential status of such homes; to amend the Mobile Home Acts; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 63).

SUBLET PROPERTY (OFFENCES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make the breach of certain rules relating to sub-letting rented accommodation a criminal offence; to make provision for criminal sanctions in respect of unauthorised sub-letting; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 10 July, and to be printed (Bill 64).

STUDENT LOANS (DEBT DISCHARGE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision about the forgiveness or discharge of student loan debt in certain circumstances; to make provision about the treatment of student loan debt in bankruptcy proceedings; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 10 July, and to be printed (Bill 65).

STAMP DUTY BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision for the reduction of stamp duty rates on residential property.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 10 July, and to be printed (Bill 66).

SPEED LIMITS (ENGLAND) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to prohibit permanent derogations from a 30 mile per hour speed limit in built-up areas in England; to make provision for the circumstances in which speed limits below 30 miles per hour may be introduced; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 10 July, and to be printed (Bill 67).

JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS AND RETIREMENTS
(AGE LIMITS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to repeal provisions for the compulsory retirement of holders of judicial office on the grounds of age; to remove upper age limits for appointment to judicial office; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 16 October and to be printed (Bill 68).

DOMESTIC ENERGY (VALUE ADDED TAX) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to reduce Value Added Tax on domestic energy bills; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 69).

CRIMINAL FRAUD (PRIVATE PROSECUTIONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Mr Peter Bone and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision about private prosecutions in cases of suspected criminal fraud in certain circumstances; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 16 October, and to be printed (Bill 70).

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Sir Christopher Chope, presented a Bill to amend the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 to make provision about the number and size of parliamentary constituencies in the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 27 March 2020, and to be printed (Bill 71).

VOTER REGISTRATION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Sir Christopher Chope, Philip Davies, Nigel Mills, Henry Smith, presented a Bill to prohibit persons from being registered to vote in Parliamentary elections at more than one address; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 15 May and to be printed (Bill 72).

HOSPITALS (PARKING CHARGES AND BUSINESS
RATES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Philip Davies and Henry Smith, presented a Bill to prohibit charging for car parking at NHS Hospitals for patients and visitors; to make provision for NHS Hospitals to be exempt from business rates; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 27 March, and to be printed (Bill 73).

GENERAL ELECTION (LEADERS' DEBATES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to set up a commission to make arrangements for debates between leaders of political parties during a General Election; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 15 May, and to be printed (Bill 74).

PRIME MINISTER (TEMPORARY REPLACEMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Philip Davies, Henry Smith and Nigel Mills, presented a Bill to make provision for the carrying out of the functions of the Prime Minister in the event that a Prime Minister, or a person temporarily carrying out the functions of the Prime Minister, is incapacitated; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 26 June, and to be printed (Bill 75).

PRIME MINISTER (ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE HOUSE OF
COMMONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to impose duties on the Prime Minister relating to accountability to the House of Commons; to require the Prime Minister to be available to answer questions in that House on at least two occasions during a sitting week except in specified circumstances; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 26 June, and to be printed (Bill 76).

BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION
(OVERSIGHT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Sir Christopher Chope, Philip Davies, Henry Smith and Nigel Mills, presented a Bill to create an independent body to monitor broadcasting impartiality at the British Broadcasting Corporation; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 September, and to be printed (Bill 77).

HOMELESS PEOPLE (CURRENT ACCOUNTS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Philip Davies and Sir Christopher Chope, presented a Bill to require banks to provide current accounts for homeless people seeking work; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 15 January 2021, and to be printed (Bill 78).

ELECTORAL CANDIDATES (AGE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to allow a person who is age 18 or older on the day of a parliamentary or local election to stand as a candidate; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 September, and to be printed (Bill 79).

CHILD SAFETY (CYCLE HELMETS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Sir Christopher Chope and Nigel Mills, presented a Bill to require children under 16 to wear a safety helmet when riding a bicycle on a public highway; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 15 January 2021, and to be printed (Bill 80).

HUMAN TRAFFICKING (CHILD PROTECTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Sir Christopher Chope and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to make provision for the creation of secure safe houses for children that have been subject to human trafficking; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 September, and to be printed (Bill 81).

ISHAM BYPASS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to impose duties relating to the completion of the Isham Bypass; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 30 October, and to be printed (Bill 82).

NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE (URGENT CARE FACILITIES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone presented a Bill to make provision about the restructuring of urgent care facilities in North Northamptonshire; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 30 October, and to be printed (Bill 83).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (GOVERNANCE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Peter Bone, supported by Sir Christopher Chope, presented a Bill to require local authorities to operate a committee system of internal governance; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 30 October, and to be printed (Bill 84).

EVICTIONS (UNIVERSAL CREDIT CLAIMANTS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to place a duty on the Secretary of State to prevent the evictions of Universal Credit claimants in rent arrears; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 27 November, and to be printed (Bill 85).

UNIVERSAL CREDIT SANCTIONS (ZERO HOURS CONTRACTS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens, presented a Bill to amend the Welfare Reform Act 2012 to provide that a Universal Credit claimant may not be sanctioned for refusing work on a zero hours contract; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 27 November, and to be printed (Bill 86).

ASYLUM SEEKERS (ACCOMMODATION EVICTION PROCEDURES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Stephens presented a Bill to make provision for asylum seekers to challenge the proportionality of a proposed eviction from accommodation before an independent court or tribunal; to establish asylum seeker accommodation eviction procedures for public authorities; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 27 November, and to be printed (Bill 87).

Point of Order

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. It has come to my attention that I have again been mistaken for another black MP—this time on parliamentary TV. My name is Abena Oppong-Asare. I would like to know what you are going to do about this, because it is unacceptable.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I think the hon. Lady has made her point, quite rightly, and I am sure that broadcasters and others will take note. I hope that they will pay a lot more attention and ensure that people are properly identified in this House. I thank her very much for her point of order; I appreciate it.

Windrush Compensation Scheme (Expenditure) Bill

4.54 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): I beg to move, That the Bill now be read a Second time.

Members of the Windrush generation came to the United Kingdom to rebuild Britain after the war, and they have contributed so much to our country, our economy and our public services. It is no exaggeration to say that we would not be the nation we are today without the men and women who came here to build a life, to work hard, to pay taxes and to raise families. They included nurses and midwives, and their overall economic contribution helped to rebuild post-war Britain. That is why the whole country was shocked by the unacceptable treatment of some members of the Windrush generation by successive Governments over a significant number of years. They are people who have done so much for our country and who had in some cases arrived on these shores when little more than infants, yet they were effectively told that they were not welcome.

This was a terrible mistake by successive Governments, and the implications will be felt for many years. Some suffered tremendous hardship and indignity as a result of an erroneous decision. They were denied a right to work, or to rent a place to live. Some individuals were even detained or removed, leading to families being broken up and left without parents or grandparents, and it is only right that those who have experienced hardship as a result are offered proper compensation. No amount of money can repair the suffering and injustice that some have experienced, and this Bill is therefore a vital and important step in righting the wrong, but there are still many issues to be addressed.

The Windrush compensation scheme was formally launched on 3 April 2019, and it was designed to ensure that full and proper compensation could be made. The scheme rightly includes a personal apology to each person issued with the award of compensation and, most importantly, it allows those who suffered to avoid court proceedings in the pursuit of justice.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The explanatory notes for the Bill show the full scale of this scandal, and state that the estimated compensation cost based on 15,000 claimants would range from £120 million to £310 million. The Home Secretary was not in the Chamber for my question to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), a few moments ago when I said that the wider issues with the immigration system and the failings of the Home Office, including unlawful detentions and deportations, are also costing millions of pounds. Will she commit to publishing the full cost of the wrongful deportations, outside the Windrush scheme, over the past few years and put that information before the House, so that we can see what has been going on in her Department? She is refusing to give that information at the moment.

Priti Patel: The hon. Gentleman has raised some significant issues here. We are still waiting for the lessons learned review from the independent—

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): When will it be published?

Priti Patel: If the hon. Lady will let me finish instead of jumping up in such a way, I will answer her question. *[Interruption.]* Let me just state this, and I will answer her question if she will bear with me. The lessons learned report has yet to be submitted to Ministers in the Home Office by the independent adviser, Wendy Williams. That is not a shock to anybody, and it is right that she should have the time to undertake her review. It is a fact that the review has been going on for two years, but she will bring it forward in due course and I will receive it when it is ready. It is fair to say—I do not think anybody can question this right now—that we want to know the full scale of what has happened and the background to it, and that is the purpose of the review. At the right time, we will be able to look at everything in the round. If I may say so, this is not about publishing pieces of evidence at this stage. It is important that we look at everything. The report will come to me once Wendy Williams has had the time and space to consider everything, because this is an independent review. It is not for the Home Office to dictate anything around that report. We will wait for that, and then of course we will look at everything that is required.

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the Home Secretary for giving way. I know she is impatient with my impatience, but I am speaking on behalf of constituents of mine who died while waiting for their compensation. They were promised that compensation before they died, and their relatives are still unclear about whether any of this is ever going to be resolved. That is why I am impatient. Can she even tell us how many people have died while waiting for their compensation to be settled?

Priti Patel: Let me say a few things to all hon. Members about not just the compensation scheme but Windrush. Many of us, including me, have made representations to the Home Office on behalf of our constituents. That is a fact and we have all worked constructively in doing so. The hon. Lady mentions being impatient. If I may say so, these cases are complicated, as I am sure she recognises. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady is shaking her head, but the cases are complicated in terms of the provision of information, background, data and evidence, and this will take time. *[Interruption.]* They are complicated cases. They have to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. This is not about providing a *carte blanche* assurance or a cheque to people. It is right that there is due process. We want to get this right and I make no apology for that.

Thangam Debbonaire *rose*—

Priti Patel: I have given way already. If I can just finish, it is important that we do this in the right way, provide the right amount of time and ask people to work with the Home Office to find whatever evidence is required.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Home Secretary for giving way. Some of the cases are, indeed, complicated, but does she agree with me and many of my constituents with whom I have spoken, that her Department has overcomplicated the issue? As she said at the beginning of her speech, we

cannot put a value on some of these things. The approach being taken is arbitrary, but she could apply discretion and make it a lot simpler

Priti Patel: It is a fact that this is not about money. Money cannot compensate for the awful experience and hardship that people have been affected by. We should be very clear about that. *[Interruption.]* An hon. Lady says, “It helps.” There is a scheme and a process, which I will come on to as I make progress with my speech. It is right, however, that we have the right process, and I will explain how we will do that. We should never lose sight of the fact that this scheme has been established. It is difficult but there are ways in which we are going to make this simpler, undo some of the bureaucracy and make swift progress with some of the cases that have been raised.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): A moment ago my right hon. Friend used the word “mistake”, and I think it is right to remind ourselves that the Windrush scandal was not a conspiracy but a cock-up of the most enormous magnitude. Will she confirm that she is confident that her Department and ministerial team are now fully on top of these kinds of issues so that that sort of scandal will not happen again?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend raises issues that go right to the heart of what happened in the Windrush scandal. No Government would want to preside over something so scandalous, and there has to be recognition that responsibility was attributed to successive Governments. It is right that we wait for the review from the independent adviser, Wendy Williams, which will have lessons for us all, including the Home Office and previous Governments. I think it will have plenty of information about what happened. We want to build on that and make sure that we learn the lessons.

Many of the comments made thus far have reflected on the compensation scheme and its complexities and design. I will now focus on its design. The Home Office’s first priority was to ensure that the scheme was accessible to claimants. In doing so, it has considered some 650 responses to the call for evidence and nearly 1,500 responses to the public consultation. The Home Office held several public events across the country to give potential claimants the chance to make their voices heard. Martin Forde QC, himself the son of Windrush parents, has a wealth of experience and complex knowledge of public law and compensation matters, and he was appointed by the then Home Secretary in May 2018 to advise on the scheme’s design. Late last year, Martin and I launched the Windrush stakeholder advisory group and met key stakeholders and community representatives to hear their personal testimonies and views. Ministers and civil servants will rightly continue to work with them, and they will continue to listen to those who have been affected to ensure this scheme works for them. Their personal views and considerations have been taken into account in the development of this scheme, and the House should note that the views of stakeholders have been instrumental to its design. That is why, last week, the Home Office announced the scheme will be extended by two years so that people will be able to submit claims up until 2 April 2023.

The Home Office also announced amendments to migration policy to apply a more flexible approach to the cases under review, and rightly so. The Home Office will now consider all evidence provided on the steps an individual will take or has taken to resolve their situation, which is an important change.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Home Secretary is being generous in giving way.

I welcome the extension for applications to the scheme, but the Home Secretary will be aware that, nearly two years ago, the Select Committee on Home Affairs also recommended a hardship scheme. We were concerned that, in practice, this compensation scheme would take too long for many people who are in urgent need of compensation and some sort of support following these shocking injustices. Our report mentioned four people: Anthony Bryan, Sarah O'Connor, Hubert Howard and Judy Griffith. Shockingly, two of them have still had nothing, despite facing great hardship, and the other two died before they could get any compensation or hardship support at all.

Will the Home Secretary urgently consider a hardship scheme, as well as a compensation scheme, because this affects too many people? I have been contacted about someone today who is currently homeless and still struggling to get any support at all. Will she look at these cases urgently to see what hardship support can be given?

Priti Patel: I will look into those cases. Of course we have the exceptional payments scheme, which should stop anybody falling through—such people should receive those payments.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I was interested to read the updated impact assessment, which reduces the assumption that there will be 15,000 claims to 11,500 claims. Will the Home Secretary explain why that is the case and whether the Bill will cover the 160,000 Commonwealth citizens who could be affected, to which the Public Accounts Committee drew attention last year?

Priti Patel: The numbers were reduced in the impact assessment due to the fewer-than-anticipated claims thus far. I will come on to Commonwealth citizens because, of course, this is not specific to Caribbean nationals.

Even though time has elapsed since individuals may have effectively been caught up in the Windrush issue—experiencing hardship, losing their job and, in some cases, also losing their home—I will, as I said to the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), look into any specific cases that hon. Members would like to raise with me. Our changes may help some people to qualify for a potentially higher award, particularly where it relates to the loss of employment.

“Windrush” has been used to describe what happened to a specific group, but that term and this scheme are not limited to those of Caribbean nationality. The scheme, of course, is open to anyone of any nationality who arrived and settled in the UK before the end of 1988, and to anyone from a Commonwealth country

who arrived and settled in the UK before 1973. The scheme is also open to the children and grandchildren of Commonwealth citizens who arrived and settled before 1973, and to other close family members of such a person who may have been affected. In the cases of those who sadly passed away before compensation could be paid, a claim can be made by their estate.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I welcome the steps my right hon. Friend is taking in this Bill. Will she outline how the measures she has just described are going to be widely publicised, to make sure that everyone who might be entitled to claim under this legislation knows about it?

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. I will come on to this issue, primarily because our stakeholder advisory group has a very important role to play in it and I will explain why that is shortly. Importantly, we will continue to work with third party stakeholders, such as Citizens Advice, and many other groups that we are engaging with. I am very mindful, of course, that we have to rebuild trust with the communities that have been affected.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Priti Patel: If I may, I will finish the point. To rebuild that trust, working with third parties and other stakeholder groups and organisations is vital, and we will continue to do that.

Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): On that point of trust, the phone calls to my office today are about a flight tomorrow to Jamaica, and some of my constituents believe that this Bill is being used as some kind of flim-flam before that flight goes. Will the Home Secretary assure me that she will look carefully at every one of the cases that we bring to her to ensure that only those people who absolutely need to be deported are deported tomorrow?

Priti Patel: Let me make a few points on that. First and foremost, we should not be conflating this charter flight—the criminality—with the issue of the Windrush compensation scheme. The hon. Lady will know that the House has heard the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) respond to the urgent question earlier, and every person on the flight has been convicted of some of the most serious offences and has received a custodial sentence of 12 months or more. That means that under the UK Borders Act 2007, introduced by the Labour Government at the time, a deportation order must be made. These crimes cover manslaughter, rape, violence, the appalling scourge of drug dealing and sexual offences against children, with a total sentence for this group totalling more than 300 years. It is important to say that the suffering of their victims is incomprehensible, and these offences have a real impact on victims and their communities. It is important to recognise that the individuals being deported have criminal convictions, and that this is about the criminality of the acts they have participated in, not their nationality.

Lucy Powell: Actually, this point is not about criminality; it is about whether people are or are not regarded as British citizens. That is the key issue we are discussing this evening, because when the Windrush generation and their descendants came here before 1973, they

[Lucy Powell]

arrived on British passports—they might have said “Jamaica” or “Trinidad and Tobago” on them, but they were British passports. We are now looking at whether their citizenship was valid from that point or not. We are not now deciding whether they are British citizens; we are saying that they have always been British citizens, so whether or not they have committed a crime is irrelevant to whether they are British citizens. If they have committed a crime, it is our problem. They are our citizens, and we need to deal with it. That is the key issue here, and the Home Secretary has completely missed that point.

Priti Patel: I do not think I have missed that point, because this is a charter flight for foreign national offenders—[*Interruption.*] Members are welcome to bring individual cases, but I can give the House the assurance, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary did earlier today, that—

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): The right hon. Lady will understand that one of her predecessors resigned because she assured the House that the people involved were foreign nationals and they were not. I would urge her to tread more lightly if she wants to remain in post.

Priti Patel: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the comments made during the urgent question by the Minister. The facts have been provided. I say again that if individuals wish to make representations to the Minister about cases in their constituencies, they are very welcome to do so.

On the Windrush compensation scheme, simplicity and ease of use has been at the forefront of designing it. Requirements for evidence have been designed to be straightforward and easy to understand and, most importantly, not too onerous for the claimant. Our priority has also been to ensure that payments are made as quickly as possible. The first payment was made in July, within four months of the scheme being launched, and the Government want to ensure that all those who have suffered come forward and apply for compensation.

Abena Opong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Priti Patel: No, I will not give way.

As mentioned earlier, the Home Office is extending the length of the scheme by two years, so people will be able to submit claims up to 2 April 2023.

I have outlined some positive steps, but we need to ensure that the scheme is underpinned by the necessary financial parliamentary authority, which is exactly what the Bill is designed to provide. Payments are currently made under the ministerial direction that was issued in July last year, but the Bill offers Parliament the opportunity to give its legislative authority for expenditure under the compensation scheme. Details of the scheme are set out in the non-statutory scheme rules, which give us freedom to amend the scheme swiftly where required. That freedom proved useful last October when, following feedback

from stakeholders and claimants, the scheme was amended to allow a broader range of immigration fees to be refunded.

For the scheme to be effective, it is vital that awareness is raised, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) pointed out, and that everyone who has suffered is given a fair chance to claim. Through the Windrush stakeholder advisory group, the Government are overseeing how to reach those who have been affected and hurt. There is no simple or straightforward way in which that hurt can be repaired or that trust rebuilt. It is a sorry fact that there are still members of the Windrush generation who do not have the documentation that they need. Some will not even know that they are entitled to apply for compensation. Others have been put off by false claims that funding for the scheme is capped at £200 million, or have been subject to much misinformation about the scheme, which of course needs to be addressed. We will of course work to correct those inaccuracies, rebuild trust through the advisory group and provide the compensation and justice that people deserve. The role of the stakeholder advisory group is to do exactly that and to find the best links to get back into the affected communities. In addition to that, the Home Office has, as I have already indicated, attended and hosted more than 30 engagement events to promote the scheme, and would welcome interest from Members who wish to support community events in their own constituencies.

No compensation can ever hope to undo the injustice of someone being told that they are not welcome in their homeland. Nothing that we can do or say can ever wipe out the hurt and loss that should never have been suffered in the first place, but we hope that the Windrush compensation scheme can go some way towards easing the financial burden endured as a result, and that we can begin to do justice to those who have contributed much to our country. The United Kingdom is making a start on a new era of openness, and it is a home to everyone with the talent and tenacity to contribute to national life. It is only right that we do everything in our power to redress this historic injustice, so I hope that Members from all parties will take an important step forward in doing so and join me in giving the Bill the support that it needs. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.17 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): My mother, like that of a number of Members, was a member of the Windrush generation, so I know as well as anybody in the House the patriotism of the Windrush cohort, their commitment to this country, and their deep sense of hurt about the Windrush scandal. It is a scandal that continues to cast a shadow over our country’s reputation for fairness and for just public administration. Ministers may believe that the Bill will draw a line under the Windrush scandal, but I have got news for them: the Bill will not do that, and I will explain why.

First, though, let me say that the Opposition will not oppose the Bill. It is a money Bill, and it is necessary that some legislation be passed so that the Windrush victims, or at least some proportion of them, can finally receive some long-overdue compensation, however inadequate. We obviously do not oppose the payment of compensation, but through our experiences with our

own constituents we are completely opposed to the way the Government are going about this. It is shoddy and inefficient and it adds insult to injury.

The Windrush compensation Bill will not end the Windrush scandal, as the scandal itself arises because British citizens—people who came here believing that they were British—were treated so appallingly by this Government and their predecessors. It is fair to say that treating migrants shoddily did not start in 2010. On the contrary, there has been discrimination and a denial of rights over the decades, but something new and far worse was set in train by the Immigration Act 2014, which many of those on the Government Benches personally voted for. In fact, there are very few of us still remaining as Members of Parliament who voted against that piece of legislation.

The 2014 Act encouraged the presumption of illegality directed at migrants and, just as some of us warned at the time, that presumption was very frequently and incorrectly directed against those with black and brown skins. It also obliged doctors, nurses, teachers, bank clerks and employers to act as internal border guards—to inform the authorities if they believed that someone was in this country illegally.

Ministers knew that that would lead to a huge wave of false allegations because we told them so at the time, but they pressed ahead regardless. The Government have signalled no intention of repealing the 2014 Act, so it gives me no pleasure to predict that this scandal will not go away. Unless and until that Act is repealed and the Government end their hostile environment, this scandal will grow.

Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way and for all her brave and principled hard work in this area. As has been pointed out in this place and beyond, the Government's divisive, draconian and oppressive hostile environment for migrants is at the core of the treatment of the Windrush generation. Does she agree that although this scandal has disproportionately affected people from the Caribbean, it potentially impacts on all people from across the Commonwealth, including migrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh?

Ms Abbott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention. I was going to come to the point that although people talk about the Windrush scandal in terms of migrants from the Caribbean, it actually affects people from Africa, from south Asia and anyone from a then Commonwealth country who came in at the time. I point out to the House that there is also another, perhaps larger, scandal waiting in the wings. This, too, arises because of the 2014 Act and the hostile environment. I am speaking, of course, about this Government's treatment of the EU 3 million. The EU settlement scheme does not confer new rights, but instead removes them. EU citizens will then potentially risk being charged that they are here illegally, and will face the burden of proof to show otherwise, and the legal status of British citizens now abroad is also bound up with how fairly this Government treat EU citizens here.

I previously stated that the Opposition will not vote against the compensation Bill, because otherwise there will be no compensation paid at all, but we on the Opposition Benches must insist that the Home Secretary

look again at the introduction of a special hardship scheme. There are people who have died. There are people who are still in debt, because of the slowness in dealing with their claims for compensation.

Meg Hillier: My right hon. Friend will have noted in the letter that we have seen from the second permanent secretary at the Home Office that of the more than 1,000 claimants, only 36 have been settled to the tune of just over £62,000. Does she not agree that, although extending it is not a bad thing in one way, it is in danger of delaying the very vital payments that so many of our constituents deserve?

Ms Abbott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention. The amount and the quantity of the payments are pitifully small, and do not show that the Government have administered the scheme well. We on the Labour Benches believe that the entire scheme for compensation should be like the funding for criminal injuries. First and foremost, compensation should be placed on a statutory footing, as that would allow the compensation to be comparable to awards in civil cases—that is reasoned and reasonable compensation.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The right hon. Lady will know of many cases like that of my constituent who, owing to his inability to work because he could not produce a passport, ended up over £50,000 out of pocket. Also, as a result of that, he could not claim employment and support allowance, because he had not made contributions in the previous couple of years. The amounts paid out in compensation come nowhere close to the financial losses individuals have suffered.

Ms Abbott: The amounts being paid out are indeed pitiful. They do not compensate for material loss, or for the misery, the fear and the uncertainty under which too many people have laboured for too long.

There is no justification for the smallness of the amounts payable under the Government's scheme. With criminal injuries, the state has no liability; these are serious injuries done to ordinary citizens by criminals, and we as a Parliament have rightly decided that assistance should be given to the injured. There is clearly Government liability in the case of the Windrush scandal; it was caused by Government policy, but in this case the compensation is lower. What is the rationale for that? Among other things, there should be due compensation for all the legal advice that sufferers from the Windrush scandal may have required. Also, it is wholly unacceptable that people wrongly deported or refused re-entry will apparently not be compensated for that.

We also learn that only slightly more than 1,000 people have applied for compensation. Obviously, that is the reason why Ministers decided to extend the scheme, but what assessment has the Home Office made of the reasons for such low numbers of applications?

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): What struck me is how constituents of mine whose lives have been profoundly affected by this issue are quite nervous about this process, because of all they have suffered. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government

[Jessica Morden]

have to get it right quickly and do far more to reassure people who have suffered such shocking injustices and have little trust?

Ms Abbott: I agree with my hon. Friend that much more needs to be done to reassure people who are, rightly, worried about engaging with the Home Office at all because of previous experiences.

Meg Hillier: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the big problems is that the Home Office systems are not up to scratch? To cope with both Windrush and the potential non-Caribbean Commonwealth applications as well as EU citizens, whom she rightly highlighted, the Home Office systems need to be improved.

Ms Abbott: I agree with my hon. Friend.

Since the previous Government were first obliged to apologise for the scandal, in April 2018, there have been more than 8,000 applications from people seeking the necessary documentation to establish their legality—8,000 applications for documentation, but only 1,000 applications for compensation. What has happened to the other 7,000? Why have they not come forward? Will the Home Secretary tell us what steps her Department is taking proactively to engage with them? Is she aware of any factors that might be inhibiting legitimate applicants? Is it possible that fear of the hostile environment is a factor?

How large is the publicity budget for the scheme? The House would like to know how that budget compares with the £46 million reportedly spent on the “Get ready for Brexit” campaign, which was criticised by the National Audit Office as having not made the slightest difference to public awareness. The House is entitled to know more details of the effectiveness of the publicity campaign. I understand that Home Office officials have visited Afro-Caribbean churches. That is good, but I hope Ministers understand that potential claimants may have difficulty approaching officials about their immigration status if they know that those officials are from the very Department that might seek to deport them, or might have deported someone they know.

Another issue is the extent of the Windrush cohort. As I said earlier, it is not just about people from the Caribbean: it affects all those Commonwealth and former empire citizens who came here legally before 1973, which includes people from west Africa, south Asia and elsewhere. It also includes their daughters, sons, grandsons and granddaughters, because the failure of their parents and grandparents to establish their citizenship may have affected their children’s and grandchildren’s immigration rights. It may be that people who have been rounded up for that flight to Jamaica tomorrow fall into that category. Will the Minister confirm that it is the case that many people originally from south Asia are also eligible for compensation? What will the Government do to ensure that all of them are approached about the compensation they are due?

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way: she has been very generous with her time. Does she agree that it is unclear what the appeals process will be for the compensation

scheme? Can people appeal against a compensation claim being turned down, and if so, can they receive legal aid for that appeal?

Ms Abbott: There are too many things that remain unclear about the compensation scheme, but I am sure the Minister will respond to my hon. Friend’s comments.

In conclusion, the Windrush scandal was seen and noted around the world. The current Prime Minister talks about reaching out to friends old and new in the new post-Brexit world, but unless and until this scandal is actually ended, do not be surprised if friends old and new treat those claims of amity very cautiously. No money can compensate for the sense of humiliation that members of the Windrush generation felt at being told, perhaps for the first time, that they were not actually British. This is not about the money: it is about making good that unhappiness, humiliation and fear. I urge Ministers to listen carefully to what Members say about their individual constituents’ experiences, because it will shed a lot of light on where this scheme is currently going wrong.

5.32 pm

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): This is an essential Bill, and I will be extremely surprised, and indeed ashamed, if anyone rises to speak against it. I am very glad that the Government have extended the deadline to 2 April 2023, for reasons that I will cover in my conclusion. I hope the Bill will go some way to addressing the point that the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) made that we need to recover our reputation for just administration at home and abroad.

I represent a large population of Caribbean descent—about 5,000 people. We are proud to have in Wycombe the largest Vincentian population away from the islands. I want to say that I am sorry. On these Benches, we are extremely sorry that this has happened. It is a matter of shame that it has occurred and that these events have taken place. It will be of no comfort to members of the public who have been affected, or their friends or family, that the explanatory notes go back to NHS treatment charges introduced in 1982 for overseas visitors, checks by employers on someone’s right to work first introduced in 1997, measures on access to benefits from 1999, civil penalties for employing illegal migrants from 2008, and so on. This is a long-standing problem, but it brings shame on us all and I am extremely sorry that it has happened.

Meg Hillier: The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of employer checks. One of the big concerns for many of my constituents is that they are required to have a biometric residence permit, because their little piece of paper from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate—or whichever form of the immigration system it was at the time—is no longer acceptable. The Home Office, crucially, does not write and tell them that, and it is only on a routine check by their employer that they find out. Many of them are then out of work for many months while they wait for their BRP to arrive. Does he agree that that is a scandal that the Home Office also needs to address?

Mr Baker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that, because it gives me an opportunity to mention an important book that I hope Ministers and officials will look at. It is a study by King and Crewe that is rather unfortunately, but necessarily, entitled “The Blunders of our Governments”. The book sets out how, in various instances of what the authors call cultural dissonance—in other words, a failure to appreciate who one is dealing with and how those people approach the measures that the state puts in place—successive Governments, of alternating parties, have blundered. The hon. Lady raises something that the Front Benchers should look at extremely closely. We do not want any more blunders affecting real people.

I pay tribute to the community in Wycombe. My staff were instructed, and we agreed together, to bend over backwards to make sure we found everybody who might have been affected. I am extremely grateful that the community worked with us to find every possible opportunity to reach anyone affected. I cannot say anything about individual cases, because the number of affected people was so very low and I would not want to identify anyone. I will just say that I am thoroughly ashamed that someone was so badly affected in the way that he was.

As someone who for 10 years has represented the diverse community of Wycombe—a place where, as a school governor told me this morning, 48 languages are spoken in one primary school—I have seen how we desperately need greater humanity in our migration system. I suggest three principles, although there will be more: consent, justice and equality. It is not enough to say that we believe in the moral, legal and political equality of every person. The systems we establish and the manner in which we treat people must bear witness to the fact that, in the core of our being, we recognise the worth and the value of every person.

On justice, we have long believed that justice delayed is justice denied, and that is true in immigration, too. Time and again, I have seen people be denied leave to remain but not deported—not forced to leave when they should. However much one might wish to be idealistic, there is no justice in letting somebody stay for 10 years, because they will inevitably fall in love, set up a life, get married, have children and then, 10 years later, find that they have no status at a moment when they need public services. Thank you for letting me dilate on this, Mr Deputy Speaker. It does not relate to Windrush—I am talking about different circumstances—but the point about humanity is the same. We need to take just decisions, and to do so swiftly. That goes to the point that has been made about making payments quickly to people who have suffered injustice.

Carol Monaghan: The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech and showing great humility. With respect, however, the Government have said sorry to these people many times. Some people, like my constituent, have had their mental health so affected by the trauma of all this that they will be unable to hold down a job again. Compensation is one thing, but does he agree that it must take into account not only the physical money that has been lost, but other issues and future earnings?

Mr Baker: Yes. The hon. Lady makes a very good point. I noticed the length of the compensation scheme documentation, which I was going through this morning.

Since she has raised the matter, I want to draw the Government’s attention to the provisions on interim payments. I wonder whether more could be done to make such payments early to try to address some of the points that she has made.

Mr Lammy: The hon. Gentleman is eloquent in his case for speeding up the process. Does he appreciate that some of the people who are due to be deported this week finished their sentences in 2015 and have been waiting five years to be deported? Does he not consider that to be cruel and unusual punishment? If they were to be deported at all, the system should have been much swifter.

Mr Baker: I will make two points in response to the right hon. Gentleman. First, I stand by the comments I made earlier; justice delayed is justice denied, and if people are to be deported, it would be better to deport them swiftly. Secondly—we are ranging a little bit widely, but this point has already been made—the people being deported are persistent and serious criminals, whereas the people we are discussing in relation to the Windrush compensation scheme are people to whom we should all be paying tribute.

Lucy Powell: It’s not a moral judgment.

Mr Baker: If the hon. Lady wishes me to, I will give way to her.

Lucy Powell: The hon. Gentleman is making a very strong argument, and I think that Members on both sides of the House support much of what he is saying. But as I said to the Home Secretary earlier, the issue is about whether criminals are regarded as British citizens or not. We are making a retrospective judgment, instead of making the judgment that we should be making. That is the issue here. We cannot be making a moral judgment today about someone’s right to be here, when they arrived 40 or 50 years ago; they had that right then and it should be acted on now.

Mr Baker: The hon. Lady has been heard on the Government Front Bench, so I am grateful that I gave way, but I am not going to focus my remarks on this issue because we are talking about the Windrush compensation scheme.

I conclude by reminding everyone, including the Government, that the people who have been affected are not pushy and entitled people. Overwhelmingly, in my experience, they are some of the gentlest, kindest, and above all most humble people in our society, who in many cases have been mistreated over the course of decades, often casually and shamefully. In such circumstances, it is incumbent on everyone involved in the administration of this scheme to be scrupulously respectful, to make payments as swiftly as possible, and, frankly—within the bounds of the scheme—to ensure that the payments made are maximised, in compensation for the real injustice that has been suffered.

5.41 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is good to have the opportunity to take part in this debate. Of course we must pass this

[Stuart C. McDonald]

Bill, because the victims of the outrageous Windrush fiasco must be compensated, but it must be done fairly and fully, and compensation must accurately reflect the impact that this scandal has had on their lives. It must happen as quickly as possible, because the process has been slow and drawn out. I concur absolutely with the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee and the shadow Home Secretary about the operation of a hardship fund.

I recognise that a lot of work and consultation has gone into designing the scheme, but although that work is welcome, it does not mean that we have to accept that the design is right. Indeed, the changes to the scheme announced last Thursday illustrate that changes can and should be made. Scottish National party Members think that those changes were steps in the right direction, but that others are required. The Bill gives us the opportunity to air those concerns. I will set out a few examples in a moment, but first it is important to put those concerns into context, and to reflect on what it is that we are compensating victims for and who the victims are.

Windrush must be among the most outrageous acts of negligence by a Government Department impacting its own people in modern British political history. In fact, the word “negligence” probably does not do it justice at all. “Recklessness” would be closer to the mark. As we have heard, the consequences have been disastrous: people wrongly subjected to the hostile environment; homes and jobs lost; and healthcare, pensions and access to social security refused. Some victims were subject to immigration enforcement, including the serious trauma of immigration detention. Some were removed or deported. Some felt compelled to leave. Some were refused re-entry when they went abroad for what they thought would be short periods of time. People were prevented from travelling to visit dying relatives or to attend funerals.

Why do we say that these harms were caused by recklessness on the part of the Government? Quite simply, because the Home Office knew that the implications of their ever more noxious hostile environment policies included that significant groups of people who were lawfully in the UK would be caught up in its tentacles. The Department was warned via inspectorate reports, by the 2014 “Chasing Status” report by the Legal Action Group, by high commissioners, by analysis of the right to rent carried out by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, and by others. The National Audit Office was clear that there were briefings to Ministers about the many thousands of lawful residents who did not hold biometric residence permits from at least 2013. As the NAO said, outsourced hostile environment policies

“predictably carried a risk of impacting on individuals who were, in fact, entitled to residence, but who did not have the necessary documents. The Department had a duty of care to ensure that people’s rights and entitlements were recognised... We do not consider that the Department adequately considered that duty in the way that it introduced immigration policy.”

In short, it seems that all the warning signs were ignored or deemed acceptable collateral damage. People quite rightly ask, “If all these warnings had related to white middle-class people with a louder voice, would those warnings have been ignored?” Instead, it was not until

they were shamed into action by journalists such as Amelia Gentleman that the Government actually started to respond.

We also need to consider who these victims are. In the light of the history, I think it has already been accepted that there is little doubt that Windrush victims will have no trust in the immigration and nationality system or in the Home Office. In fact, they would be entitled to despise institutions that have heaped so much misery upon them. That is not the only thing we need to consider and remember about the victims when we go on to assess the design of the compensation scheme. Speaking to those who are working with and supporting the Windrush victims through the compensation scheme, it is repeatedly pointed out to me that we are often talking about fairly or even very marginalised, and sometimes vulnerable, individuals. Many are poor or not well off; hence there was no need for passports for foreign trips. Vulnerabilities can range from poor literacy all the way through to signs of post-traumatic stress disorder because of the ordeals that people have been put through. Many will have had other experiences of discrimination and racism in housing, employment and criminal justice.

Against that background, the compensation scheme must be generous and comprehensive, and also designed to allow even the most marginalised, terrified and vulnerable to access it. There is a workable scheme on which we can build, but many have expressed concern about its design, and I hope the Government will listen. The Minister has already made changes, and I hope we will continue to consider possible improvements to the scheme.

I will briefly mention a few concerns, many of which we will come back to in more detail in Committee. First, on the independence of the compensation scheme, it would surely be better for it to be operated independently of the Home Office. We are asking people to contact and apply to the same Department that caused them such misery in the first place. If the scheme must remain within the Home Office, then there must surely be strong, independent routes to challenge the decisions that it makes. We are far from convinced that the scheme has that feature.

Secondly, we need to scrutinise the application process. Has enough been done to ensure that it is as simple as possible? The application form declares that the Home Office does not think that people will need an immigration lawyer to complete it, yet question 1 alone asks about lapsed status, settled status, whether people were ordinarily resident, and the right of abode. How many people in this Chamber could provide a coherent description of all those concepts?

That leads me on to a further issue: funding for groups advising and supporting people to make applications. Funding for Citizens Advice is well and good, but it is not sufficient. People should have a choice. For some victims, Citizens Advice was one of the organisations unable to help them to rectify their terrible situations in the first place—not, I should say, through any fault of Citizens Advice. It is welcome that the Government are tendering for advice services, but I hope that it is possible for a range of different providers to be selected and not just one.

Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con): In 2018, the Government appointed Martin Forde, QC, to independently advise them on the compensation scheme, and the

Government have also committed to having an independent adviser to oversee its delivery. Is the hon. Gentleman challenging the views of the independent expert who has made the recommendations, which the Government have largely followed?

Stuart C. McDonald: As I said at the outset, I welcome all the consultation that is happening. I also welcome the role that Martin Forde has played, but we do not have to simply take every chapter and verse of the design that he comes up with. Ultimately, we are the politicians and this is the Government, and we can do things slightly differently if we wish to. The Immigration Minister has already made some changes to the scheme. All I am saying is that there are changes that can make the scheme fairer and more generous, and I will continue to make that case. I absolutely respect the role that Martin Forde has played and I do not mean to diminish it in any way at all.

As we speak just now, lots of folk are having to be helped through the system by pro bono lawyers, volunteers and even students. Not only are difficult concepts of immigration and nationality law involved, but the process of documenting losses and damages is often not easy. Given the significance of these applications to the people making them, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), it is only right that legal aid funding be made available. Ultimately, is it not a bit rich for the Home Office, an institution that completely failed to understand its own immigration rules and laws despite employing an army of policy experts and lawyers, then to turn round and tell victims of those failures that they do not need legal advice? The Home Secretary herself referred in her speech to applications being complicated. That is why legal aid funding should be made available to all the victims.

The fourth issue is the time limit. We welcome the Minister putting the deadline back—the original might even have been capable of legal challenge—but we suspect that there may need to be a further rethink in future. We are also concerned that if a deadline remains, there must be generous provision for those who miss it and a very low threshold for considering reasonable excuses. That is necessary, given the vulnerabilities and isolation that many victims will have suffered. It is also necessary because the Home Office has limited its proactive search for victims to Caribbean countries, despite being told by the NAO that its reasons for not proactively searching for victims elsewhere do not add up. That must be revisited.

Fifthly, we share concerns that many of the limits, tariffs and caps in the scheme are wholly inappropriate. The range of immigration application fees that are recoverable is unduly restrictive, and so too are limits placed on legal fees related to those applications. Some of the lump sums seem surprisingly low. Right across access to social security benefits, housing, employment and education, we cannot accept restrictions on possible total awards. Why is the scheme not aiming to come closer to providing restitution for actual losses, rather than very limited broadbrush payments?

Sixthly, we are concerned about provisions that allow for compensation to be restricted for what essentially seems to be a form of contributory negligence, as well as for serious criminality. On the first point, how can it

be right for the Home Office to say, “If only you’d contacted us, things would have been sorted,” and use that as a reason to reduce compensation? For many, simply looking at the eye-watering application fees would have been sufficient to think that fixing the situation was impossible. Others who did try to contact the Home Office to remedy their status ended up the subject of enforcement action and in immigration detention.

It seems that unsuccessful applicants were automatically placed in the migration refusal pool and therefore were at risk of removal, so who can blame people for not attempting the dangerous and seemingly insurmountable task of proving status and contacting the Home Office? After all, this Department was sending out “Go home” vans, but now we are saying in retrospect that at that same time, people suspected of being here illegally should have got on the phone to the Home Office to rectify their situation. That seems wholly unrealistic. The insistence that people would usually have contacted the Home Office within 30 days bears little resemblance to reality and could have severe implications for significant loss of earnings claims. We welcome the Minister’s announcement that the range of actions that the Home Office will accept as attempted mitigation is to be broadened, but we seriously question whether any such deductions are appropriate at all.

On criminality, we are unconvinced by the appropriateness of the provisions. Part of the guidance on this has been redacted from public view, and another section refers to situations where the

“offending was of such a nature that makes it inappropriate to make an award in whole or in part”,

which is vague and lacks clarity. As a point of principle, the fact that someone has a criminal record surely does not mean that the person is not owed compensation when they are wronged by the Government.

Finally, there is a huge issue over what caseworker guidance says about the standard of proof in certain cases. As a general rule, the guidance states that caseworkers should

“take a holistic view of the claim where there is a lack of supporting evidence and decide the claim on a balance of probability.”

That is welcome and as it should be, but a list of exceptions is then provided, including claims for loss of earnings, reimbursement of private medical fees, reimbursement of international student fees and loss of access to banking. The guidance demands that caseworkers

“must be satisfied beyond reasonable doubt before making an award in these cases.”

That is the criminal standard of proof. I cannot for the life of me see why a loss of earnings claim for a Windrush victim should require to be proved to the criminal standard of proof, rather than the usual civil standard. That seems pretty outrageous, and I look forward to hearing why that is in the guidance. Members have raised various other issues with the scheme, and I look forward to exploring those in Committee.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My hon. Friend has laid out issues with the scheme as it stands and improvements that could be made. There are still ongoing cases with the Home Office where people such as highly skilled migrants have lost huge sums of money, had to fight in the courts to get their status proven and

[Alison Thewliss]

had decisions overturned in their favour. Does he agree that there needs to be a further look at compensation schemes where the Home Office has clearly got it wrong?

Stuart C. McDonald: My hon. Friend makes a perfectly valid point, and I fully support what she says about those individuals.

That brings me nicely to the concluding part of my speech. The Secretary of State was right to say that compensation cannot be an end to the matter. As one victim, Judy Griffith, said:

“I do think that we deserve compensation. But there is no amount that can truly reflect the fear and anxiety, frustration and ill health we have suffered.”

Indeed, the way we respond to what has happened must go way beyond the compensation scheme. It is about completely overhauling the institutions and hostile environment policies that led to this situation in the first place. Instead of defending the right to rent scheme in court, the Government should be scrapping it. It is about asking whether the public sector equality duty, at 10 years old, is working properly, particularly when it comes to making immigration policy; I think it is self-evident that it is not.

It is about listening to concerns that many EU citizens will face an even worse prospect if they miss the settled status scheme deadline; the shadow Home Secretary was right about that. It is about ensuring urgent publication of the Williams lessons learned review and responding. It is about no longer pricing people out of their rights, especially their right to British citizenship. And it is about a full-blown apology—not just for the fact that this all happened, but for the fact that Government caused it to happen.

5.54 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate. There is no doubt that the Windrush scandal is a stain on the history of our country. It should never have taken place, but it should also transcend party politics, because it came about due to a series of administrative failings under a succession of Governments. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) said, it was the result of cock-up, not conspiracy. It was the result of unintended consequences because of the trail of successive decisions and actions of many Governments over many decades. None the less, it needs to be put right, and I welcome the Bill as just one step in ensuring that we put right as much as we are able to the wrongs that were done to the people who suffered.

Meg Hillier: The hon. Gentleman says that it was not intentional, but many of us were raising concerns for some time about constituents who were facing this very situation. The Home Office and Ministers failed to put that together to see that there was a systemic issue. Does he not at least acknowledge that? I hope we would all agree on both sides of the House that the Home Office systems are not, and have not been for some time, up to scratch and need to be improved.

Steve Double: I am grateful for that intervention. If the hon. Lady's point is that something should have been done sooner, I agree. There were clearly warning signs that something was going wrong in the system,

and action should have been taken quicker than it eventually was. But we are at this point today, and I welcome the Bill as one step further down the line to put right what was done wrong.

I want to thank the former Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), and the former Minister for Immigration, my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes). I had a great deal of engagement with them when this situation came to light, and I thank them for the way in which they took ownership of it and sought to put measures in place to provide redress and compensation as quickly as possible.

When this issue unfolded in 2018, I was a member of the Petitions Committee, and I led a debate in Westminster Hall in response to a petition on this issue. Because of that, I had the privilege of meeting many of the petitioners, as well as a number of church leaders who represented West Indian and Caribbean congregations, who expressed their grave concerns about what was unfolding. As I look back on those meetings, I have two abiding memories of things that I learned and that struck me hard.

The first was that the Windrush generation did not come to Britain to become British citizens—they already considered themselves British citizens. They saw themselves as coming to the aid of the mother country; they came here to help this country at our point of need. I will never forget the stories they told me of how they came to the mother country when we asked them to because we needed their help.

The second thing that struck me from those meetings was just how deep mistrust of the Home Office went. There was a deep sense that something was wrong, and they had serious misgivings about the way that the Home Office functioned. That was not just a feeling at that particular time; it had been established over many decades, and there was a deep sense that they did not trust the Home Office. We wait to see what will come out of the lessons learned report, but I really hope one of the things will be to highlight the need for real change in the way the Home Office functions so that we never see something like this happen in our country ever again.

I welcome the fact that the compensation scheme was launched swiftly in April 2018, but I think we would all agree that it has taken too long to get to where we are today. I think we all acknowledge that, over the last couple of years, a great deal has preoccupied Parliament, filled far too much time and taken attention away from far too many other important matters. However, it is regrettable that more progress has not been made and, as hon. Members have already commented, that too few people have received too little compensation so far.

I sincerely hope that the passage of the Bill will enable the Home Office to accelerate this process, and make sure that claims are processed more quickly and, where compensation is due, payments are made in a timely fashion. I ask the Minister to ensure that all the resources needed are given to the Home Office to make sure that these applications can be processed much more quickly and compensation paid much more swiftly. While I understand why Labour Members will have

concerns, I think we need to get this Bill passed, and it would be a mistake in any way to seek to delay it any further.

As terrible and unjust as all that went on during that time is, there is one thing from this whole process for which I am grateful, which is that we have been able to hear the story of the Windrush generation for a new generation in this country. My father was from Ipswich, and although he moved to Cornwall to marry my mother, after I was born we went back to Ipswich several times a year. There were Caribbean communities in Ipswich that we were very much a part of, and at that time I got to know several families who had originally come from the Caribbean. I remember the sense of love of our country that they had and, as I said earlier, the sense that they were coming to help the motherland at that time. I remember with great fondness all those relationships, and all the stories I heard back then.

I am very glad that, because of this tragedy and this unjust thing that has happened, the one good thing is that we can tell their story again and a new generation in this country can hear just how much and how big a debt we owe the people from all over the Commonwealth who came to our country to help us rebuild after the war. We must never forget the price that they paid and all that they gave our country at that time, and we must always be grateful and treat them with the dignity and respect that they deserve because of that.

I believe that, as we have now left the European Union, we have an opportunity to review and reset our immigration policy. That is a positive thing and an opportunity we should grasp, but in doing so we must get it right. I believe there are things we can learn from the Windrush scandal that will help to shape our immigration policy to ensure that we do not ever make these mistakes again. One of the things many of us want to see as we break free from being locked into the European Union's immigration policy is that we can once again build closer relationships with the Commonwealth and strengthen our historic ties with the Commonwealth. However, unless we now get this right and learn the lessons that need to be learned, that is going to be more difficult to do. We have to ensure that our future immigration policy is effective, but also fair and compassionate, and there are clearly lessons that must be learned.

If the reaction is somehow to weaken our stance on illegal immigration or on those who have committed crime, we will be doing a disservice to the British people. There needs to be a change of culture at the heart of the Home Office because the focus has been too much on policy and process, not on people. We must never lose sight of the fact that people are at the heart of these policies—individuals and families—who deserve to be treated fairly, and with dignity, respect and compassion.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that because all this happened—people were asked to leave and were reprieved at the last minute, with the paperwork set before them and the timescales involved—there is a real need for the Government, and the Minister in particular, to restore confidence in the existing process, because only by doing so will we deal with some of the concerns that

people have, and then to work, as the hon. Gentleman says, with all the Commonwealth to restore their confidence as well?

Steve Double: I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Gentleman. Damage has been done through this whole very sad situation, and the Home Office has to learn the lessons not only in righting the wrong that has been done to individuals and families, but in rebuilding and repairing the reputation of the Home Office among a very large proportion of our community in the UK to ensure that trust is rebuilt, confidence is re-established, and justice is being done and is being seen to be done fairly for many people. I agree with the point he makes.

In summing up, I want to see us, as we have left the European Union, build a robust and just immigration system, but one that is also fair and compassionate. I believe there are many lessons that we can learn from what has happened to the Windrush generation and the way they have suffered, for a long time and in many ways, that will help us shape that policy. I urge the Minister and the Home Office to make sure that the lessons learned from this situation are carried forward into our future immigration policy. I very much welcome the introduction of the Bill, as I have said, because I believe it is an important step forward in making sure that we are able to put right what was done wrong to so many from that generation.

6.7 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I am very grateful for the opportunity to speak in this Second Reading debate.

James Blair, a Scottish-Irish MP, owned 1,598 slaves in British Guyana. When slavery was abolished in 1833, he was awarded £83,350 in compensation, a sum worth £65 million today. In total, the British Government paid out today's equivalent of £16.5 billion to compensate some 3,000 families that owned slaves for the loss of their so-called property and investment. At the time, it represented 40% of the Treasury's annual spending budget, and the sum was so large that it took British taxpayers 182 years to pay it off—taxpayers like the children of Windrush who were invited to Britain from Commonwealth countries in 1948. They were the children of the very slaves that James Blair owned, and the children of people who had their British identity thrust upon them centuries ago when they were stolen from their homes and sold as property.

When it was revealed that hundreds of the Windrush generation had been wrongly detained, deported, left destitute and made homeless by the Government, I am sorry to say that the British state did not rush to compensate the victims with the same conviction as they previously did for those who enslaved their ancestors. Originally, the expectation was that the Home Office would distribute between £200 million and £570 million to victims of the Windrush scandal. But just £62,198 has been paid to 36 people from the Home Office compensation pot. These are people who have been denied a lifetime of employment, housing, citizenship, wealth and opportunity.

Many of the victims are still heavily in debt. Glenda Caesar came to Britain legally as a three-month-old child in 1961 from Dominica. She was sacked from her job in a GP practice, and then denied welfare while she remained unemployed. Her daughter, who is deaf, was

[Mr David Lammy]

forced to share her disability benefits with her to get by. How did the Home Office arrive at a compensation fee of only £22,664? Was this meant to cover the loss of earnings over 10 years, the impact on family life, and the distress caused by being wrongfully detained?

For so many people, these petty pay-outs have been nothing short of insulting, degrading and shameful. What does this tell Windrush citizens? It tells them that the British state is more likely to compensate the descendants of slave owners than the descendants of slaves, that the British state is more likely to reimburse those who made a living displacing human beings in the 19th and 20th centuries than those it continues to displace in the 21st, and that they live in a country that thinks the loss of profit from colonialism is more regrettable than the continuation of colonialism itself.

We still do not know how many people were wrongly detained and deported. What we do know is that only 3% of Windrush claimants have so far received compensation. That is a national disgrace. Every day an injustice is not rectified constitutes a new injustice in itself that is committed. That means the Government are only making it more expensive for themselves every day they fail to fulfil their moral and political obligations.

Jim Shannon: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with many that what is lacking is the understanding and compassion that there should be for people who need the help, and that that should be the priority?

Mr Lammy: I respect the hon. Gentleman greatly and understand his point, but I have to say that there are many beyond this House who believe that the state of amnesia the Government are displaying is wilful.

At least 11 people have died before they received any compensation. How many more people will the Government let die in the hope that the outrage dies with them? This is before we have even taken into account those who have yet to apply for compensation they are rightfully owed. The Home Office's own estimates suggest that 15,000 people could be eligible for compensation, yet only 1,108 have applied so far. This is because the "hostile environment" continues to deny victims the support that they need to submit the incredibly complex 18-page application. Many need legal advice to help them apply for compensation, but the Government refuse to provide any financial support whatsoever. Claimants are provided with a 45-page guidance booklet instead.

I am struggling to find a reason why the application process is so arduous, other than to impede people in submitting an application in the first place. It is worth stressing that the application process requires extensive documentary evidence—the kind of evidence that people were explicitly denied because of the "hostile environment" or dissuaded from accessing for fear of alerting the Home Office.

Many people do not want to come forward at all, as they do not want to risk testing their status in case they end up being detained or deported—and who could blame them?

This is an indictment of the Government and the kind of atmosphere they are determined to maintain. When 50 people are about to be put on a plane to Jamaica tomorrow morning, how can we trust the Government?

The Windrush citizens can never be repaid. There is no financial settlement that will restore the dignity that was stolen from them. There is no amount of money that will reverse years of pain from family separation. And there is no reimbursement that will rectify state-sanctioned brutality. But the Government seem to think that the appropriate response is to absolve themselves of any responsibility to compensate altogether.

The Windrush victims deserve much more than mere crumbs for one of the most grievous scandals in this country's modern history. At the very least, the Government should show black British citizens as much remorse as was given to those who enslaved their ancestors. That would be the beginning of a long process of national self-reflection, repentance and justice.

6.15 pm

Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con): It is an honour to follow the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), whose passion on this subject is well known both in this place and—I say as someone who is new to this place and has been a member of the public until recently—outside this place.

The words "scandal" and "crisis" are bandied around far too cheaply these days; their overuse cheapens actual scandals and crises like this one. Windrush was a scandal, and one that should never have happened. The contribution made by Windrush immigrants and their descendants to this country is beyond measure, and what they have brought to this country has shaped the cultural and industrial make-up in a way for which we should always be thankful.

The Government have not forgotten this and are working hard to rectify the wrongs faced by Windrush victims. However, it is important that we recognise these mistakes could not be fixed overnight; they do, unfortunately, as with many of the workings of government, take time. The launch of the Windrush compensation scheme goes to show the work this Government are willing to do to ensure that those who faced the uncertainty that Windrush presented are showed that they are valued.

As many hon. and right hon. Members—many of whom have been in this House much longer than I have—will be aware from previous casework, as soon as the issues surrounding these immigration statuses arose, the Government began to try to right the wrongs that victims had faced. UK Visas and Immigration set up a dedicated team to help those people who previously had no evidence of their right to be here to receive the documentation that they needed. There is now a dedicated contact point tasked with resolving cases within two weeks of evidence being provided, and all documentation awarded comes at no cost to the victim, with their legal and citizenship costs also being covered.

The Government also quickly implemented a five-month consultation period, which eventually attracted over 1,400 responses. This was complemented by a number of focus group sessions in order to truly uncover where the need for compensation rests.

In the Government's response to the consultation released in April last year, on the same day that the compensation scheme opened, they not only fully acknowledged the harm done, but went beyond the Windrush generation

to accommodate anyone who may have been impacted by historical immigration laws, and the cohort of people eligible will be much wider than the Windrush generation itself. The requirements of the scheme, while being set by the Government, come from direct advice from those who took part in that consultation. This shows that the Government are not merely throwing money at the issue, but have taken the advice of those who were impacted, their friends and their families, and that victims are getting a suitable remedy to their individual cases to compensate for the losses they may have experienced due to their past immigration status.

Carol Monaghan: The hon. Gentleman might not be totally aware of all the issues surrounding the Windrush carry-on, as we might call it, because this had been raised repeatedly with many Ministers on multiple occasions before, finally, they were shamed into taking action. That went on for years. I myself had been raising the issue for three years before 2018, when the Government finally decided to take action. I understand that the hon. Gentleman is new to this place and might not know the history of this, but it is not correct to say the Government acted quickly when they became aware of the issue.

Rob Roberts: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. She makes a very valid point. Many issues that have come up were due to measures under successive Governments over many years since the 1980s. I am aware of the points she raises and I completely understand what she says. Perhaps if I continue my speech, the answers to her questions may become a little bit more apparent.

I understand that the Home Office estimates that the compensation scheme will cost between £120 million and £310 million to cover the thousands of claims that are expected to arise. That not only includes primary claimants, but close family members of those affected and, as was mentioned earlier, the estates of deceased members. To say that the Government do not care and are not doing enough to assist victims is just disingenuous and an affront to the efforts they are making to apologise for errors made and to safeguard all those affected. Those who apply under the scheme are also eligible for payments to cover up to eight different areas where their life may have been impacted, with some collective payments having the potential to be in the tens of thousands of pounds, depending on the severity of the case.

Many hon. Members have rightly mentioned the speed with which cases have been processed. Over 1,100 people have submitted claims so far and, yes, only a small number have received some form of recompense for the mistakes that have been made. However, the immediate work that the Government have put into repairing the damage done shows that while many are still waiting for compensation, this is because, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary mentioned earlier, all cases are being treated with the individual attention they rightly require. Some payments are much harder to assess than others, in particular the impact on life reward, which will take a number of different factors into account. No two Windrush cases will be the same and each one will need to be examined and assessed for its own unique level of compensation.

Mr Steve Baker: My hon. Friend reminds me that in exceptional circumstances such as this, Members of Parliament who might have access to the community and people who know the victims could have an additional role to play in helping to administer the scheme, or at least advising those administering the scheme. Will the Minister commit today to writing a “dear colleague” letter to all Members to set out how Members of Parliament can help the victims in a constructive way that is not too burdensome to officials operating the scheme?

Rob Roberts: My hon. Friend pre-empts me; I was about to refer to his speech. Unlike some comments we heard earlier to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), asking what the Home Office will do to help these people, my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) has taken this on, found the information himself and gone about the work directly to try to offer the help his constituents need. I completely agree with him.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): I will keep it brief, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am more than happy to make a commitment to put out a “dear colleague” letter of the nature my hon. Friend describes.

Rob Roberts: I am very grateful to the Minister for that commitment.

As I mentioned earlier in my speech, Windrush was a terrible mistake that should never have been allowed to happen. The fact that people could live in this country for so long only for them and their families to face such daily hardships is undeniably unacceptable, yet the efforts put in by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to ensure that mistakes are being remedied are a great step towards ensuring that those impacted will see the compensation and security they deserve.

In winding up, I would like to echo the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). I admit to my regret that up in leafy north Wales, before this terrible situation was brought to light, I had never heard the term Windrush, but I have over the past few years had occasion to look into these events. As my hon. Friend said, the individuals and families who came to the UK all those years ago came at our request to help us when we desperately needed their help. Their sacrifices and selfless acts deserved much more than we gave them and the events of this scandal have shamed us all. As many Members have stated, today and previously, we unreservedly apologise. I hope the Minister, in his closing remarks, can assure me, and those in my Delyn constituency who may have been impacted by Windrush, that he is planning to take the advice given by the lessons learned review, that he can reassure me that people should not be in any doubt about their status in this country, which they have called home for so long, and that they will, of course, see the compensation that their individual cases deserve.

6.24 pm

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the new hon. Member for Delyn (Rob Roberts).

[Lucy Powell]

As others have said, the Windrush scandal—it is a scandal—has been a shameful blot on our country, and an indictment of our policies and culture over many years. I accept that it has not just occurred under this Government, although it has been exacerbated in recent years by the hostile environment. When the Minister closes the debate, it would be very welcome indeed to those watching our debate from outside this place for that to be recognised. I do not think it was in the opening remarks by the Home Secretary.

I represent one of the largest Caribbean communities in the country, focused particularly in Moss Side and Hulme in my constituency. I had been dealing with a number of Windrush cases a long time before the scandal appeared on the public's radar through the campaigning of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) and those on the Labour Front Bench, and brilliant journalists such as Amelia Gentleman and others. As the scandal broke into the public domain, I decided to hold a number of open surgeries, which I advertised on local radio and elsewhere. At the first surgery, we were absolutely inundated with cases. We were there for over five hours. In total, I have taken on over 70 cases in the past two years.

There are some really heartbreaking stories from the people who have come to see me. Many brought with them their original passports. I have taken many photographs of the passports with which they arrived in this country in the '60s and '70s. They were British passports and that goes to the heart of the conversation we are having. All their passports said on them, "British passport". The passports may have also said Jamaica or Trinidad and Tobago, but they were British citizens who were answering a call to come and work and establish their lives here in this country because we needed them to do that. At the heart of everything we are discussing today and will discuss in the coming months, we have to remember that they have always been British citizens. We cannot, therefore, operate a kind of contemporary or retrospective view on their contribution or status at that time. I will come on to say a bit more about that.

A number of the people I have met over the past year or two through those surgeries have still not actually dared yet to regularise their status here. They are still operating on a Jamaican passport because they are scared to death. They are later in life. They have operated under the radar.

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the majority of those individuals are deeply depressed and traumatised by the experiences they have gone through, and that the Home Office should work with the NHS to provide mental health support for them? Does she agree that the Minister should work with other Ministers to develop a cross-party approach to consider how they can provide mental health support to those victims who have been impacted by the hostile policy?

Lucy Powell: My new hon. Friend makes a very good point. That very much reflects my experiences of trying to coach and support people, navigating them through what are for many very difficult and uncharted waters.

The original Windrush generation—I will come on to their descendants in a minute—are very isolated. If it were not for support networks, for example churches, they would have very little in the way of support services. They are very scared about coming forward.

As I said, it is really important that we recognise that the Windrush generation and their descendants are, and always were, British citizens, and that we are leaving so many people effectively stateless and feeling unwelcome in this country. I could go through many cases with the Minister—I have raised many cases here—but I will not because a lot of other people want to speak. However, the sorts of situations that I have come across include people not being allowed back into the country for one, two or three years, with them, in the meantime, losing their job and their social housing, which meant that their children also lost their homes. I met an individual who had a refusal to have their status regularised in the mid-'80s—I think it was an administrative error at the time—which frightened them so much that they have lived under the radar ever since, never having a job, never accessing public services and never having a home. They have been living among their family networks for their entire life—this is somebody who is now in their 60s. As well as those types of situations, others have been well rehearsed in the media, such as where people have served in the British Army, or worked as nurses or public servants, and have found themselves on the wrong end of this shameful, shameful situation.

As others have said, including the Home Secretary, no amount of money can compensate for the loss of life, livelihood and dignity—of people's whole lives. People have never gone on holiday, and people have lost their home, status and dignity. However, that does not mean that we should not properly compensate them, nor does it mean that, just because no amount of money can compensate them, paltry amounts will do. We need to give people justice and be seen to be giving them justice, and I will say a bit about what that might look like.

The purpose of the compensation scheme has to be, at its core, about restoring trust, undoing some of the damage that has been done and properly compensating people for their losses. It is difficult to see how the scheme, as designed, will help to do those things. The Home Secretary has said that these cases are complicated and of course they are, but the scheme's design has made them much more complicated than they need to be. People do not have the time, the support and, in most cases, the documentation that is being asked of them.

How do we put a price on many of the things that they have lost? How do we put a price on someone not having had a holiday for 30 years, even though they are a working person? How do we put a price on someone not seeing a family member for 30 years because they live in fear of going on holiday? How do we put a price on someone not getting healthcare 20 years ago when they were poorly and that having had a detrimental effect on their life ever since? These things are hard to put a price on. As others have said, there is an undeniable fear of the Home Office, so many people do not want to come forward and make themselves known to it. A lot more needs to be done to overcome that.

I have a few asks of the Minister on the compensation scheme, and then I will talk about a couple of other things before I finish. Others have talked about the

timeline. I welcome that it has been extended by two years, but that still makes it shorter than the amount of time that people had to claim for payment protection insurance compensation. If that is our benchmark, which seems a perfectly good one, we are failing on that. People should have longer to claim for this than they had for PPI.

The documentation has to be made a lot simpler. There will have to be a certain amount of discretion. It is about people looking at an application with common sense and judging it based on the evidence that is before them. As others have said, we need more support services. If it is not legal aid, which I think there is a strong case for, let us at least put some money into the support and advice services that can help people. Can we look again at some flat rates—some amounts of money—for things that we cannot put a price on, so that we can get proper compensation?

There are a couple of other things about the scheme, which I have raised and will continue to raise, even though I know that this is not a particularly popular cause. On proving good character, if we are agreeing as a House tonight that people were British citizens when they arrived, and that their descendants were also British citizens when they arrived, we cannot then apply the legislation from 2006 and 2009 about whether people meet a good character test or not. They are British citizens or they are not. As the Minister will know, I have dealt with a number of cases of people who have had convictions, and I know that Ministers have the discretion to let them apply under the terms of the Windrush scheme.

Ms Lyn Brown: I repeat that Ministers have discretion, and therefore, if they do not use that discretion, we will hold them to account for that for as long as we possibly can—as I will, while there is breath in my body.

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend—my good friend—for that comment. Ministers do have discretion, but I suppose that I am going even further than that: this should not be discretionary, because somebody either is and was a British citizen when they came, and therefore their descendants were, and their right to be here, to remain and to have citizenship is outwith any discretionary decision about their good character, their moral conduct or whether they have a conviction. I know that this might not be as popular as the case I have of someone who served in the British Army, or of someone who was a British nurse for many years—I am talking about people who have been convicted, in some cases of very serious offences—but that is our country's problem, in terms of getting those people to serve their criminal sentence and then rehabilitating them, because they are British citizens. We need to look at that.

There are still a number of issues about Windrush descendants. The same principle needs to apply: if somebody's parents were British citizens when they arrived here in 1969 or 1970, with their British passport that they came over with from Jamaica, their children are also British citizens regardless. They should not have to meet tests that have subsequently come into UK law. They are British citizens and we should apply that as a consistent principle. It is only when we start applying those principles consistently that we will begin to restore trust. It is all very well to paint people as terrible

criminals, which is why they have to be deported, but that still gets the moral argument wrong because they are British citizens—*[Interruption.]* They are. If they are a descendant of a member of the Windrush generation, or are themselves a member, they had a right to British citizenship from the day that they were born and therefore, they are British citizens. The Government are applying retrospectively their moral judgments on that to try to appease some test of being tough on deportations and foreign criminals. I am sorry that this is not perhaps the same publicly appealing call as others, but until and unless the Government recognise the core principle—that somebody is and was a British citizen from the off and that we are trying to get that right in their compensation and by regularising their status—we will not go any way to restoring trust.

The Minister can shake his head all he likes, but I can talk to him now or afterwards about the cases that he or his predecessors and I have discussed, where that principle has been recognised. However, it is still being recognised discretionarily and that is wrong. I am sorry—I know that that is not popular but I will keep banging on about it until we sort it out.

That brings me to my final point. We cannot have these conversations without the lessons learned review being on the table, being debated and discussed. Until then, he and I will continue to argue about whether the deportations are necessary. If lessons are being learnt, everything else should be on hold until they have been understood, absorbed and acted upon. More than the financial compensation, members of the Windrush generation in my constituency, who are angry about what has happened and in some cases afraid, want to know that this will never happen again and that lessons are being learnt for them, for their children and for people thereafter.

6.40 pm

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), who made some very important points.

I welcome the Bill and the Government's recognition that the Windrush compensation scheme is a critical step in rectifying mistakes made and the losses faced by individuals wrongly deported from their own country. I do not have many ethnic minorities on the Isle of Wight, but this is about humanity and the rule of law, and therefore I make no apology for speaking in this debate.

The negative impacts suffered by members of the Windrush generation resulted from their being unable to demonstrate their lawful immigration status. Given the circumstances of their arrival here from 1948 onwards, it is arguable that the burden of proof, which required them to find the documents to support their claims, was set too high. There is a darker implication, however, in that the approach to investigations has involved the systematic targeting of specific groups combined with a failure to handle immigration law with integrity. As someone who is partially an immigrant to this country myself, I am all for having a strict immigration system, but it needs to be fair and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) said, humane. If it is neither strict nor fair but has the appearance of being arbitrary, that is bad for all of us.

[Bob Seely]

I am glad to support this scheme for those who have suffered adverse effects on their lives, including the loss of employment and access to healthcare, housing and education, as well as a negative impact on health, physical and mental. The process of claiming for compensation requires evidence of when folks arrived in the UK. I welcome the existence of a dedicated team working to help people to collate the evidence they need, but there are issues, as we have heard from both sides of the House, about the length of time claimants—British citizens—are being made to wait for their compensation, and it is disturbing that some people are passing away believing themselves to be members of this nation when their state disputes that. Even if that is happening in only a handful of cases, it is a handful too many.

One purpose of the Bill is to restore confidence in our immigration system, and I hope it does, but cases are still being reported of British families being divided. I would welcome Ministers' comments on what can be done proactively to help citizens while they are in the UK, rather than their having to wait until they face deportation or are being deported before they can start to fight their case. Moreover, what of the younger generation of this group who now feel threatened? We need to be proactive and ensure that we encourage people to come forward, be naturalised and make sure that family members' births and histories are recorded legally in this country so as to prevent such destructive mistakes from happening again. I call on the Government to take one more proactive step. I understand that people are still receiving eviction letters and being booked on to deportation flights. We should work with embassies of origin or embassies of countries we are sending people to, as well as with the NHS, landlords, employers, banks and charities, to find the right course of action in individual cases.

Finally—I am being brief because I know other Members want to speak—it is important that we recognise the role of the Windrush generation who came to this country after the war, setting up businesses, working on the buses, in hospitals, and doing really valuable work in our country, bringing with them a new culture and contributing in many different ways to our quality of life. We are talking about many ethnic groups from across the world. It is important to recognise that. It is great that Ministers are getting out there, but can more be done to advertise that we are trying—retrospectively, admittedly—to deal with this problem and to recognise the important things that the Windrush generation did for this country?

6.44 pm

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I want to use today to pay tribute to some of my constituents. Back in the early days before *The Guardian* broke the story of the scandal, several constituents came to see me with the same problem, and I, along with fellow Labour MPs, helped Amelia Gentleman, the journalist, to speak to them and to investigate the pattern that was developing nationwide. That is how the scandal came to light.

We forget that behind the numbers there are real people who deserve justice and proper compensation. One is Richard Stewart. Richard arrived in England

as a British subject from Jamaica in 1955 to join his parents when he was just 10 years old. In the 1960s, he played county cricket for Middlesex as a fast bowler. He paid taxes here for over five decades. He married in London. He had a son and two grandchildren, all British. In 1968, Richard's mother became seriously ill in Jamaica. He visited on a temporary British passport. When she died, he had to stay for the funeral and extend his trip, so he had to get a Jamaican passport to return to the UK. In 2013, the Home Office eventually told Richard that he was not in fact British and had not been since 1962 when Jamaica had declared independence. Richard was one of those whose cases I was able to raise with the Home Office and make a difference to.

When the Windrush scandal was recognised, Richard's case was widely reported. He had been in limbo for decades. When his status was finally resolved and he was finally able to get a British passport, he had one simple wish left. Half a century after his mother had died and after last visiting Jamaica, he wanted to visit her grave again. A quick, hassle-free payment from the compensation scheme would have helped to make that happen. His dream, according to his son, was that his family would go to Jamaica together to see where he was from, but Richard ran out of time to gather all his paperwork. He never completed all the forms. He never got the compensation he deserved. Richard died last June at the age of 74. To his very last day, he was mired in the injustices of the cruel Home Office bureaucracy.

There are so many devastating cases. Lloyd Grant came to England from Jamaica in 1970, aged 11. When the Home Office wrongly told him he could not legally live and work in the UK, his life changed forever. He lost his income and any way of making a living. He has spent many years homeless. He could not get dental work on the NHS for his several missing teeth. His confidence disappeared. I saw Lloyd regularly in my surgery over several years, and I saw how the Government's cruelty damaged a man's life in every respect imaginable. Neither he nor I trusted the Home Office not to illegally deport him. I had to make sure my staff accompanied him when he went to Lunar House so that nothing would happen to him. Lloyd has fought hard to turn his life around with little help from this Government, but I am pleased to report that in the past few weeks I have provided the reference and connections to help him get a little job.

It is not just Richard and Lloyd in my constituency; there is Trevor Lloyd Johnson, Elwaldo Romeo, Anthony Bryan, and thousands more I will never meet around the country. They all have names; they all have lives; they all have families. My constituents have paid the price for this Government's nasty, toxic, racist politics. The least they should be able to expect is compensation that is quick, easy to access and proportionate to the injustice they have experienced. The hostile environment should be over, the disgraceful treatment of the Windrush generation should have finished, but I fear that this failing compensation scheme will just be the next phase of that injustice.

6.49 pm

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): I will be brief, Madam Deputy Speaker.

This has been an extremely painful debate, and, as Members throughout the House have recognised, this is a shameful episode in our country's history. Members are rightly outraged by the injustice about which we have been hearing. I pay particular tribute to the hon. Members for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) and for Edmonton (Kate Osamor), who told us about the individual cases with which they have dealt as constituency MPs. These are heartbreaking stories of injustice: stories of people who have been stranded abroad, who have lost their homes and jobs, who have been denied NHS care, and who have been deported or, in some cases, sadly pushed into emigrating by their fear of the system.

As we have heard from Members in all parts of the House, we are talking about people who had every right to enter and settle in the United Kingdom. They came here because they believed in this country, and because they belonged here. We are talking about people who trusted this country, who took the system at its word when it said that they had settled status, but who were the victims of measures to stop people abusing the system, which they were not doing. People who were here perfectly legally were the victims of measures taken to deter or detect those who came here illegally, and that was wrong.

I fully support the Bill. It is right that there is a compensation scheme, it is good that it is being extended, and I hope that the claims about which we have been hearing will be met quickly. However, we should also think about the future. I look forward to the findings of the lessons learned review, which are expected to be published imminently, but some lessons are surely obvious.

It is right for us to try to prevent people who are not entitled to live here from gaining access to benefits, housing or employment, but that does not mean that we should behave like machines. We need more humanity in our system. How can decades of national insurance records be dismissed as insufficient evidence of the right to be here? Surely there should be a presumption of innocence in the case of elderly people who have lived here, as contributing citizens, for many years. Why did that not happen? And surely there is a wider lesson for our social system in general. We have a culture of box-ticking compliance, which was evident in the removal of caseworkers' discretion that led to the shameful decisions about which we have been hearing.

The Windrush scandal should prompt us to think about the way in which the whole public sector works. We need less centralisation, less bureaucracy and more trust, both in citizens and in frontline staff. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) said earlier, we need a more human system, in respect of migration and throughout our society. That would be a just legacy of this scandal.

6.52 pm

Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): The Windrush scandal represents one of the largest injustices in recent times. The fact that British people were illegally deported, detained and denied their rights owing to a hostile environment policy is a wrong that can never be righted by compensation alone.

The administration of this scheme remains severely lacking, and adds insult to injury. It is vital for us all to remember the human lives that have been so badly

affected by the Windrush scandal. I know that Members on both sides of the House have local experience of helping victims of the scandal, and in recent months my team has reopened cases of those whom we helped back in 2018 as our constituents now battle to secure the rightful compensation for what they went through.

My constituent Tanya Simms was denied a British passport without any explanation, despite having been born in Britain and having parents and older siblings who were all passport holders. That denial meant that she did not have the freedom to travel outside the United Kingdom, and could not produce the passport which would have given her access to many vital services. After many months of fighting for Tanya and her young daughter, who were forced by the Home Office to go through much pain and heartache, I was so pleased when they eventually received their passports after the true extent of the scandal came to light. Given that they had faced a lifetime of discrimination as, effectively, prisoners in Britain, I expected the much-deserved compensation to be easily forthcoming; but, unfortunately, it has been far from easy for Tanya.

I sought to help Tanya to gain access to the Windrush hardship fund to help to relieve the issues that she was facing, but, while helping her with the application, I was told by the Home Office that she could not benefit as she "was not affected" by Windrush, although just months earlier it had accepted that she was indeed a victim of the scandal and had given her a passport. Tanya may not have been deported from Britain, but that does not mean that no injustice was faced by her and her family. The limitations and constraints that she has faced as a result of the scandal have affected her life in ways that most people could never imagine, and because of that, in my opinion, she deserves compensation.

Following this blow, Tanya applied more than seven months ago for the full compensation scheme. However, she is still waiting to hear the outcome, despite many communications to the Home Office from my own office. I accept that it is a complicated process and it is important to proceed correctly, but in this case such a long wait is completely unacceptable.

Another case with which I have dealt, and which I raised in the House a year ago, is not a Windrush case, but it is a constant reminder to me that the environment in the Home Office has not changed. My constituent Victor Mujakachi was detained during a routine fortnightly reporting appointment, and is currently waiting for his appeal to be heard. When he was detained, his blood pressure medication was taken away from him, and he was not assessed by a doctor during his two days of detention, which put his health at great risk. That was completely wrong, and completely against all his human rights. The Home Office wants to deport Victor, although he would be punished by authorities in Zimbabwe for his outspoken criticism of the regime there. They continue to deny him, and a large number of other Zimbabwean asylum seekers, the right to stay in the UK.

The Bill seeks to remedy the vast pain that was felt by far too many in our country. The root cause of that pain was the hostile environment, and I fear that as long as it continues, we will be back here again. It is 652 days since Amber Rudd resigned as Home Secretary, which was, perhaps, the key moment when the Government admitted that a serious wrong had been done to thousands of people. On any reasonable timeline, we might expect

[Gill Furniss]

today to be talking about wrapping up the compensation scheme having concluded payment, but nearly two years after the scandal broke, it is clear that we are very far from that point. As *The Guardian* reported on Thursday, only 3% of claimants have received payment from the scheme in 10 months. That delay is inexcusable, and it further underlines the incredibly low priority that the Government have given the scheme.

The Bill is important, but my colleagues and I have highlighted many issues that remain. I strongly hope that its passage will encourage a transformation of the way in which the scheme is being handled. Every time it has seemed that the Government understand the damage that they have done to British citizens, there is another roadblock, injustice or delay. Let me say this to the Home Secretary: pay what is owed to those who have suffered so much, and put an end to the hostile environment. Do it quickly, and give people the dignity, respect and compassion that they deserve.

6.59 pm

Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): Birmingham is in many ways a Commonwealth city in more than just name, because one in 10 Brummies were born in Commonwealth countries overseas, and I believe that every Commonwealth nation has at least one resident who lives in Birmingham. So as a Birmingham MP, I am horrified that so many people were so badly let down by successive Governments over many years. They are men and women who have given so much to this country through their work, their charitable contributions and their community work, and they will rightly feel hurt and upset by what has happened. That is why it is important that the Bill passes through this House tonight, in order to go some way towards righting that terrible wrong. When the lessons learned document is published, it is important that we look at it properly and take on board many of the lessons that genuinely, seriously need to be learned.

The independent nature of the scrutiny of the compensation scheme is important, because it goes some way towards instilling faith in the scheme. It included the independent QC, Martin Forde, as well as many community groups and people who had been affected by the Windrush scandal, and that is important to ensure that people have faith in the scheme and can see that it is robust. It is really important that we do all we possibly can to ensure that community engagement is central to the campaign for awareness, and it must be real and extensive community engagement that reaches out into many different communities across the whole of the United Kingdom. I acknowledge the work done by people such as Desmond Jaddoo, a community and faith leader in Birmingham. I think it was my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) who said earlier that Members of Parliament could look at ways of engaging community activists such as Desmond, who has done so much work over many years as a campaigner for equality and fairness. Having worked in community groups over so many years, he can highlight where things are going wrong and make a useful contribution to ensuring that the scheme is robust and fair and that it is reaching the people that it needs to.

The second Windrush Day, which will take place on 22 June, is another key occasion that we must use to engage with people to ensure that they are aware of what they are entitled to. The taskforce, which was set up last year, was an important step towards helping the 3,600 people who have now secured their British citizenship. It was important that the taskforce was set up. I am pleased that the Government are continuing their commitment to a national memorial for the Windrush generation, highlighting the importance of the contribution that those people have made over many generations.

I am sorry to see so many Members on the Opposition Benches trying to absolve themselves of all responsibility, because this is an issue that has happened over successive Governments. The hostile environment has been mentioned on a number of occasions, but it is important for Opposition Members to appreciate that the National Audit Office has acknowledged that this issue dates back to 2004. The former Home Secretary, Alan Johnson—

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Gary Sambrook: I will.

Dr Huq: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but does he not recognise that all these things stem from the Immigration Act 2014, which was passed by his Government? He seems to be denying that the Conservatives have been in government for the last 10 years, during which the hostile environment policy has had rocket boosters on it.

Gary Sambrook: I completely disagree with the hon. Lady. It was the former Minister Phil Woolas, who stood up in the Chamber to introduce an immigration Bill, or some kind of procedure, that referenced the hostile environment. This issue has been going on for many years, and too many Opposition Members attempt to absolve themselves of any responsibility for it. It was Alan Johnson, the former Home Secretary, who recognised that the Windrush generation scandal was an administrative decision taken by UK Border Agency. We should be attempting to depoliticise the issue as much as possible and working cross-party as a Parliament to ensure that people across this country get the compensation they deserve, and that we focus on righting this terrible wrong that happened to the Windrush generation.

7.4 pm

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): I am glad to have this opportunity to contribute to the debate. To my mind, the ways in which this Conservative Government have treated the immigrants of the Windrush generation are among the most scandalous actions ever undertaken by the British state. Thousands of people have been denied their lawful right to housing, employment and healthcare by a Government who prioritise their political rhetoric on immigration over the safety and welfare of their citizens. Elderly people were deported—forced to leave the country where there had been educated, worked to raise their families and hoped to retire peacefully, living off the benefits to which they had spent a lifetime contributing—for no better reason than that they had spent a short part of their childhood in a different country.

There is no doubt that the Home Office hoped to meet its deportation targets, set by its political masters, by targeting a highly vulnerable group, and let us be absolutely clear about why this group were targeted. It is because they were from the Caribbean. This was an openly and unashamedly racist policy. The deliberate deprivation of the rights of a targeted group of citizens by their own Government is beyond scandalous, beyond disgraceful and beyond shameful, so I find it quite frustrating that we are here today only to discuss compensation. The question that the Government really need to answer is when are they going to abandon their hostile environment policy?

The various ways in which the everyday lives of our fellow citizens have been inhibited, infringed and made more precarious for having committed no greater crime than to be born in a different country continues to be an appalling scandal. There is no evidence that the Government have changed their fundamental attitude or approach towards deportations. They continue to deprive lawful citizens of their rights and their citizenship. We continue to hear the same political rhetoric from the Conservative Government that led to these shameful deportations, and there is no let-up in the other manifestations of the hostile environment policies. Lawful citizens are still being deprived of their right to seek housing, healthcare and employment, and there are no plans to change Government policy. I am deeply concerned that these restrictions will shortly be extended to European nationals who have not yet applied for settled status or who have had their applications turned down despite years of residence here. I urge the Government to rethink the hostile environment policy without delay, before further outrages occur.

Instead of the urgently required change of policy, we have the Windrush compensation scheme that we are here today to discuss. The Liberal Democrats do not plan to oppose the compensation scheme, and we welcome the announcement on Friday that the scheme will be available to a wider range of claimants, but it is clear from the Bill's accompanying impact assessment that the Home Office still has no clear idea of the extent of the damage it is seeking to mitigate. The assessment estimates the total compensation payments as being somewhere between £20.5 million and £301.3 million. That is an extremely wide range, and it raises worrying questions about just how many people may have been affected by this appalling policy beyond the cases that have already been reported. Furthermore, it is clear that the scheme is failing to deliver the compensation that it is committed to distributing. Of 1,108 claims made to the scheme by 31 December 2019, only 36 awards have been made, totalling just £62,198. Is that because the scheme is poorly run, or does the hostile environment policy extend to making it difficult for citizens to claim the compensation to which they are legitimately entitled?

Further evidence that the Government are finding ways to wriggle out of their commitments is to be found in clause 1, in which they reserve the right to modify the scheme "from time to time". Does this mean that the Government may seek to downgrade the compensation available or to limit the types of people who might be able to make a claim? It is clear that the same Home Office that allowed this appalling scandal to arise in the first place cannot be trusted to administer the compensation scheme. Friday's announcement of an independent adviser

is welcome, but it would be far better if the scheme were removed entirely from the Home Office and administered by a different Department or by an independent body.

Along with many other Members of the House, I look forward to reading the Windrush lessons learned review, whenever it is published. It is essential that everybody takes some time to reflect on how the situation was allowed to occur, and I very much hope that the Government will listen hard to the lessons of this scandal and take the opportunity to end the hostile environment.

7.9 pm

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con): It is right that we have this discussion about the much needed compensation scheme. A number of constituents have been in touch with me, including from Barnard Castle and Hamsterley to name but a couple of areas. I rise to support to the Bill, to add my apology that this was allowed to happen, and to play my small part in, I hope, righting this wrong.

The Windrush generation have built their lives here in our nation and have contributed enormously, not only to our economy but to the very foundations of our society. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said, we would not be the nation we are today without their incredible contribution. The Windrush generation have not received the treatment they deserve from successive Governments, and this Bill seeks to put that right—not for the sake of statistics, but for the real people whose lives were shaken by what was allowed to happen to them.

When people came to the UK from the Commonwealth prior to 1973, they were deemed under our legislation at the time to be settled in the UK. That meant that some did not receive, or were told they did not need, documentation to prove their right to be here. Although the majority of people who arrived before 1973 have since acquired the necessary documentation, there have recently been too many cases where people have not obtained it and have subsequently struggled to access public services. This issue has come to light because of measures introduced in recent years to make sure that only those with a legal right to live in the UK can access services such as NHS treatment and rented accommodation, which has resulted in some people now needing to evidence their immigration status. It is right that we introduced measures to tackle illegal immigration, but it is not right that some good people have suffered wrongly as a result.

Let us also be in no doubt about the rights of the Windrush generation to remain in this country, which is their home as much as it is mine or yours. That is why I welcome the Windrush compensation scheme and the funding provided for it in this Bill.

The Bill is a vital part of rectifying the mistakes made and the losses faced by individuals. In order to understand those losses, it is right that the Government launched their consultation to gather detailed feedback from those most affected. Almost 1,500 people and organisations shared their views, and it is reassuring that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said that their opinions have been vital in shaping the design of the new scheme.

[Dehenna Davison]

The main purpose of the scheme is to provide a form of redress to those who have suffered financial losses or other negative impacts as a result of being unable to demonstrate their lawful immigration status. The scheme provides payments to eligible individuals who, through no fault of their own, did not have the right documentation to prove their status in the UK and whose lives suffered adverse effects as a result. Those effects range from loss of employment, access to housing, education or NHS healthcare, to emotional distress and, in some cases, a deterioration in mental and physical health.

The scheme is open to anyone, from any nationality, who has the right to live or work in the UK without any restrictions, or who is now a British citizen, and arrived in the UK before 31 December 1988. It is also open to anyone from a Commonwealth country who arrived and settled in the UK before 1973. Certain children and grandchildren, and some close family members, of those arriving before 1973 may also be eligible to apply. People who were wrongfully detained or removed from the UK could also be eligible to make an application. I know that the Home Office will be doing all it can to ensure that claims are processed as quickly and easily as possible, and this Bill will help in that process.

I also welcome the fact that the Windrush generation, who are British in all but legal status, are able to officially acquire the British citizenship they deserve, and to do so quickly and at no cost. Similarly, the children of the Windrush generation who are in the UK will, in most cases, already be British citizens. Where that is not the case, they can apply to naturalise, at no further cost, which is exactly the right approach.

The Government have also said that they will ensure that those who made their lives here but have now retired to their country of origin will rightly be able to come back to the UK and that the cost of any fees associated with the process will be waived. The Government are working with our embassies and high commissions to make sure that people can easily access that offer.

Concerns have been raised today about the wide range of possible costings outlined in the impact assessment, largely because it is not known precisely how many individuals have been affected and are likely to seek compensation. However, there are matters for which the moral implication should always be a greater consideration than any financial cost. As my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Rob Roberts) rightly said, it is right that each claim is assessed individually and that full consideration is given to the unique consequences faced by each affected person. My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger) was correct in saying that the process needs less bureaucracy and more humanity.

Both this and previous Governments have made mistakes which led to the Windrush scandal. This Bill gives us a chance to apologise, right some of those wrongs, ensure that lessons have been learned, and move forward to create a United Kingdom that fully demonstrates how much it values the contributions and talents of people from all over the globe who have helped to build our great nation.

7.14 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): My constituency has a strong, direct and proud connection with the Windrush generation. In 1948, about 200 passengers

on the Empire Windrush found temporary accommodation in the Clapham deep shelter and sought work at the labour exchange in Coldharbour Lane, Brixton. From there, many settled in the area, making Brixton their home, enriching community life with food, music and faith, and working hard to rebuild London after the war, including in our NHS and London Transport. We are proud of the Windrush generation and their descendants, who are an integral and highly valued part of our south London community.

Consequently, my constituency has been hit especially hard by the Windrush scandal. Long before the scandal hit the headlines two years ago, my casework team had been flagging up the fact that increasing numbers of older constituents, originally from countries in the Commonwealth, were being asked to provide an unrealistic level of proof of their right to be in the UK, despite having been here for many decades, made this country home and contributed to the UK multiple different ways, and despite, in many cases, coming to the UK as British citizens.

In one case, a constituent was asked to provide a record of his schooling, but he had attended a school run by the Inner London Education Authority, which was abolished in 1990, and both the school and its records had been destroyed many years ago. As a result of his inability to provide this impossible piece of evidence, his rights to be in the UK, to work, claim a pension and to access housing and medical treatment were all at risk.

It then transpired that what we were seeing were not isolated cases but the consequences of a systematic problem at the Home Office, and the results have been far reaching—thousands of people denied their right to live in the country that is their home; severe hardship caused by the removal of the right to benefits or pensions, or of the right to work; devastating health consequences as a result of both the stress caused by the scandal and the removal of the right to NHS treatment; and heartbreak for families separated and denied years that they would otherwise have spent together.

It is right that the Government compensate those whom they have treated so appallingly. However, the success of the compensation scheme must be judged by what it delivers for those it is intended to help. The experience of those constituents of mine who are victims of the Windrush scandal is that this scheme is not currently fit for purpose and, worse than that, their ongoing interactions with the Home Office and other Government Departments continue to compound their injustice.

My constituent Gretel Gocan was the first Windrush citizen to be able to return to the UK following the exposure of the Windrush scandal. Gretel arrived back in the UK on 3 May 2018—almost two years ago. Yet despite my support, extensive representations to the Government and applications both to the hardship fund and to the compensation scheme, she has yet to receive a penny in compensation from the British Government. Gretel is being housed and supported by her daughter, receiving only her basic pension. She is a frail and elderly woman. She should be entitled to attendance allowance, but the Department for Work and Pensions rejected her application because she had not been resident in the UK during the assessment period. The only reason she had not been resident in the UK during that time was that the British Government

had illegally prevented her from returning home. When I met a DWP Minister to discuss the case, he agreed that that was not right and that Gretel should be able to access attendance allowance. She was advised to apply to the hardship fund, since apparently it was not possible to change the rules. After extensive correspondence, an application was made to the hardship fund in June 2019, but no funding has so far been received.

My constituent Chiplyn Burton, who was illegally deported to Jamaica in 2015, returned to the UK in December 2019. Chiplyn is homeless and spent many weeks sofa surfing with relatives. Arriving during the winter and with no income, Chiplyn was in urgent need of emergency support and applied to the hardship fund for £500 to cover a bus pass, warm clothing and food. In response to this application—for £500—she was asked to provide details of what warm clothes she needed, a breakdown of food costs and bank statements. Chiplyn found that interaction utterly demeaning, and the tone and content of correspondence from Home Office officials compounded her injustice, as well as delaying the funding she desperately needed. It was, quite frankly, a disgrace.

Turning to the compensation scheme itself, I have sat with constituents to help them complete the long and complex form. Without prompting, it is very easy not to record key details. As the form asks for proof such as receipts, it is easy to overlook whole areas for which compensation should be payable because no proof is available. For example, one constituent almost omitted to mention that, because her mother had been deported, she had lost the privately rented home she was living in and all of her possessions, as it was impossible to provide any record of their monetary value.

I pay tribute to the Black Cultural Archives in my constituency. When the Windrush scandal broke, the BCA opened its doors to Windrush citizens. It worked with volunteer lawyers to offer free advice clinics to help those affected to gather together their papers to regularise their status. The BCA recently restarted those advice surgeries to support people with applications to the compensation scheme. The surgeries have been well attended, but the BCA reports that just as many people are coming to speak about ongoing problems with the benefits system as are coming to speak about the compensation scheme. The number and complexity of the issues being raised is far greater than can be sustained by lawyers working pro bono.

People are coming to the BCA because it is a trusted organisation with a grassroots history. I have been calling since 2018 for the Government to provide funding to trusted local community organisations to provide advice and support to Windrush citizens who are seeking to access compensation, but they have refused to do so.

Instead, the Government commissioned Citizens Advice to provide advice on the compensation scheme, and there is evidence that it just is not working. We have no citizens advice bureaux in my constituency, and many of my constituents are unwilling or unable to use the telephone advice service. Lawyers who have been doing pro bono work for Windrush citizens are regularly contacted by CAB advisers, who are being paid by the Government, asking for help because they do not have sufficient expertise to advise them.

The Government totally misunderstand exactly how fundamental the breach of trust in the Home Office has been. People will approach trusted organisations like

the BCA, but they will not directly approach the Home Office. That is why funding for such grassroots help and support is vital, and I call on the Government to provide that funding because it is key to the accessibility of the Windrush compensation scheme.

The Home Office continues to perpetuate the hostile environment and, while that remains the case, it cannot be right that the same Department is responsible for administering a scheme to compensate people for its own wrongdoing. The Government should accept that it would help to build confidence in the scheme if it were administered by a different Department.

Windrush citizens continue to experience huge problems accessing benefits to which they are entitled. The type of problem experienced by my constituent Gretel Gocan in accessing attendance allowance remains, and the tone of correspondence from the DWP is entirely lacking in empathy: it is unwilling to acknowledge the culpability of the Home Office in the situations with which it is presented. Will the Government therefore consider emergency legislation to ensure that no one is prevented from accessing benefits as a consequence of being a Windrush victim?

Finally, it has been estimated that over half a million people have been given wrong official advice on naturalisation and gaining British citizenship since the passage of the Immigration Act 1971. Will the Government apologise to those individuals and pay back, with interest, the costs they incurred in legal and immigration fees? The Government's failure of the Windrush generation is profound and devastating. The first step in addressing the harm that has been done and in rebuilding the trust that has been breached is to listen to what those who are affected are saying about how the scheme is currently failing, and to act on their advice. I urge the Government to do so.

7.23 pm

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): My grandad was born a British subject in Kashmir. He came to the west midlands in the 1960s to help Britain's post-war reconstruction, and he soon faced racism. It was a cruel irony that he had come to the heart of the metropole to continue the work that made the British empire rich. "We are here," the anti-racist writer Sivanandan said, "because you were there."

When the Windrush scandal came to light two years ago, it felt incredibly personal to me. Just as my grandad had come to Britain to build a life, so, too, had the Windrush generation. Just as he had been told that he did not fit in, so, too, were they. Here were British citizens, people who helped to build the NHS and to rebuild the country after the war, who were being told that they were not really British and that they did not deserve rights or respect. That is what they were being told when they were denied healthcare, when they were denied jobs, when they were forced on to the streets and when they were detained and deported.

The pervasive apparatus of the hostile environment sent one message, that these British citizens did not really belong. This was a gross injustice, and so, of course, they are owed full compensation—and my hon. Friends have highlighted many of the serious problems with the compensation scheme as it stands—but they are also owed something more. They are owed that this

[Zarah Sultana]

injustice is tackled at its root because the Windrush scandal was not a technical mistake, was not a human error and did not happen in a vacuum. It was the result of long-entrenched ideas that scapegoat minorities and migrants, and it goes back decades.

While the Windrush generation was busy rebuilding the country, the likes of Enoch Powell were blaming migrants for the country's faltering economy. While my grandad was organising in his trade union to get better pay for blue-collar workers, the soon-to-be Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was warning that the country risked being "swamped" by people from abroad.

Those ideas were turned into policy. It was Thatcher who changed the law to stop people who were born in the UK automatically acquiring citizenship, a change that led to some children of the Windrush generation being denied their rights. Ever since, leading politicians have continued to scapegoat: blaming falling wages on migrants, not on greedy bosses; blaming growing housing waiting lists on asylum seekers, not on the sell-off of council homes; blaming overcrowded classrooms on refugees, not on the Government who slashed education funding; and blaming violent crime on "black culture," not on decades of state neglect.

Those attacks—that scapegoating—were so successful that the last Prime Minister boasted about creating a hostile environment and spoke with pride as she sent "go home" vans around London boroughs. That happened even as charities such as the Legal Action Group warned of the dangers such policies would have for black and brown citizens who did not have documents to prove their rights. But, of course, they were ignored because the Government had an agenda to push.

The Government have now apologised for the Windrush scandal, saying they

"will do whatever it takes to put it right."—[*Official Report*, 30 April 2018; Vol. 640, c. 35.]

Why should we believe that? Every step of the way, the Government have dragged their feet: the compensation scheme has only given out payments to 3% of claimants; the lessons learned review has still not been published; and charter flights are still deporting people, even before the review is published, even before its recommendations are implemented, and even before it has been established that none of those waiting to be deported has a Windrush claim.

Gary Sambrook: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Zarah Sultana: I apologise, but I will continue.

The flight scheduled for tomorrow will deport people whose lives are rooted here and always will be, including a dad with young kids whose family moved to Britain when he was four years old. He has lived here for 41 years, and he has no family in Jamaica and has not been there since he was a toddler. Another is a husband, and the father of a six-month-old baby girl, and he has lived in the UK since he was a young child. A third was born here and is himself a child of the Windrush generation.

These are people who were raised in Britain, who went to school here and who have built their lives here. They have served their sentences. To deport them is a discriminatory double punishment, so I urge the

Government to stop these deportations, to give these people access to legal advice and to publish the lessons learned review.

Gary Sambrook: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Zarah Sultana: I have nearly finished.

Throughout this whole sorry saga, black and brown Britons have been forced to prove themselves: to prove that they are British and that they deserve rights and respect. This is what the late, great Toni Morrison said about racism:

"It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and so you spend 20 years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says that you have no art so you dredge that up. Somebody says that you have no kingdoms and so you dredge that up. None of that is necessary."

It is about time the Government acknowledged that. It is about time they ended the hostile environment, shut down their inhumane detention centres and, once and for all, stopped forcing black and brown Britons to prove they are British.

7.30 pm

Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): It has been two years since the Windrush scandal. We still have not had an official response to an independent review, and the injustices continue. Tomorrow, one of my constituents is due to be forcibly deported to Jamaica. I am going to talk about him a bit, because he is facing the same kind of injustice that we have seen in the past couple of years and this Bill does nothing at all to help him.

His name is Akiva, he is 22 and he came to this country at four years of age. Akiva's mum, dad and younger brother are British nationals. This is his home. When he was 14, Akiva started to get into trouble. He had lost his older brother to suicide, and he was utterly lost. He fell in with a bad crowd, and was groomed and exploited. He was sent off on county lines, carrying drugs, stolen property and knives. Today, we know much more about the grooming that is happening to our children on county lines. We have talked about it in this Chamber a lot, and Members from both sides have now understood what county lines has done to a generation of our children. Stories like Akiva's have been told in this Chamber: the stories of grooming and exploitation. Police, social workers and teachers are slowly getting better at identifying and targeting the groomers, rather than the children who have been groomed by them—the victims of the groomers. These children are victims of people whom I am told are living lovely lives behind gated communities in Essex and Kent—these are people we have yet to bring to justice.

The problems of county lines were not understood by many of us until recently, and in Akiva's case the exploitation was not stopped. So finally, in 2016, Akiva pleaded guilty, he went to prison and he served his time. His indefinite leave to remain was cancelled. Since his release, Akiva has worked as a painter and decorator. He helps his younger brother with his homework and he looks after his mum, who has serious health problems. He has a real chance to turn his life around, yet the last time he went to sign on with the Home Office, as usual, he was detained. He is due to be deported on tomorrow's flight. The Bishop of Barking and the Archdeacon of

West Ham have written to the Minister asking that he be taken off the flight. I believe, as they believe, that this has to stop.

We need to hear the Government recognise that resolving the Windrush scandal, and preventing it from happening again, go beyond what is in this Bill. If they do not recognise that, how are we supposed to believe that the lessons learned review will be taken at all seriously? Time and again, people whose lives are here have been deported into destitution. Five of those who had been deported to Jamaica were killed in a single year between 2018 and 2019—two were killed in a single day. They were preyed upon by gangs, denied the healthcare they needed and left cut off from their families, who remained here in Britain, with nowhere to go and no way of supporting themselves. Nothing in this Bill will change anything for Akiva—only the Minister can do that. Until we see the lessons learned review and how it is acted on, nothing will change to stop similar injustices being done. Unless the Home Secretary recognises the compelling circumstances of this case, Akiva will be on that flight tomorrow and he will be in danger.

We should have been able to keep Akiva safe from those gangs and offer him the life he deserved, just as we should for all those other children caught up in this. I do not want anybody in this Chamber to genuinely believe that their children could not go this way. I have sat and spoken to police officers who have cried because their children have been caught up in these gangs—it is there but for the grace of God. Instead we are going to make Akiva pay for a third time. Akiva has had a childhood without the support he needed to get him through and past the grooming of the gangs. He was not supported, in mental health, through his grief. He went to prison and now he faces deportation. How many times does a person need to be punished?

If reports are to be believed, the lessons learned review will recommend that the Government stop chartering these flights altogether. The review may, rightly, recommend that no one is deported after coming here as a child and growing up here, because this is the only home they have ever known. So much of the Windrush scandal and so many of its injustices are in these flights: We are deporting people to somewhere they will be destitute and somewhere they do not know, where they will not be safe. We are doing this without a fair process, without proper representation, and all because of what went wrong in their lives when they were just a child, here, in our society, in our communities. It is wrong. These are the injustices that are due to be done to Akiva and others tomorrow.

So I want to know: is the Home Office deliberately pushing through this flight before the review is published? If so, it is truly shameful. If righting the wrongs done to the Windrush generation is so important to the Government, why has the hostile environment not truly been dismantled? Why has it taken such a long time for policy to change? Why is Akiva on that flight tomorrow, when his parents and his siblings are British citizens? He is one of us.

7.37 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Ms Brown) and to be the last Back Bencher called in this thoughtful, sometimes passionate and always informative debate today.

The word “Windrush” used to have positive connotations, but in the past couple of years it has become symbolic with fiasco, catastrophe and, above all, scandal. I used to teach courses on post-colonial Britain, and I remember showing monochromatic slides of the SS Empire Windrush docking, with all those faces full of expectation and those people coming to make a positive contribution, with a new life in the motherland, and bursting with pride. These were brave pioneers, who went on to rebuild the nation and its public services from the post-war rubble and ruin, including as NHS nurses; my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) mentioned her own mum. These were people in our city and working on London Transport. I remember that at the height of John Major mania, if there was such a thing, they uncovered the bus conductor, a lady from Lambeth or Camberwell garage—one of the two—who had picked John Major for the post of bus conductor back in the day. So how did we get from all that positivity and expectation to a place where, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) said, this word is synonymous with national scandal? People who were legally in Britain and had been here for decades were denied basic rights. People were denigrated, detained and deported.

I am proud to be one of the 170 Members who signed a cross-party letter demanding that tomorrow’s forced deportation flight is withdrawn. I will not go into tons of detail on that issue because we had an urgent question on it earlier, but I am still none the wiser about when the lessons learned review will see the light of day. The demands of the letter are fairly modest. We know that, in line with the leaked review, there should be a pause in the process until the lessons are learned, so the sequencing seems all wrong. We still do not know when that review is going to come out. As has been said by my hon. Friends, people with no ties to places are being sent tomorrow to “destination unknown”—people who have families here are being wrenched away from them.

We are addressing the compensation scheme in this debate, so that is what I shall turn to. There are still victims out there who need justice. The process of an 18-page form that needs 44 pages of guidance to complete it is seen as onerous. The Government talk of compensation, but it feels like implementation is a slow, protracted and burdensome process. All the burden is on the claimant, who must often prove the unprovable. People feel unsupported. The “Dear colleagues” letter that the Minister sent around this morning said that Citizens Advice will be the partners in the process. In the London Borough of Ealing we have 360,000 residents—it is the capital of west London—but we do not have a citizens advice bureau. What is the mechanism for somewhere like that?

Many people are just completely unaware of the scheme, or are unwilling to make contact because of the connotations of the hostile-environment climate that the Government have fostered. The Home Office is often seen as a dirty word in immigrant homes. We are all constituency MPs as well, and week in, week out we see at surgeries the Home Office’s incompetence, with a bit of someone else’s case pasted into the letter a constituent has brought before us. People are waiting for years on end and told that it is a “complex case”, a term that I noticed the Home Secretary used in her opening remarks. It seems pretty tawdry for people who

[*Dr Rupa Huq*]

have been waiting for years and years to be told it is a complex case. The Home Office is the Department that is meant to administer the scheme and, as many of my colleagues have said, there is a level of mistrust and distrust if that same Department is judge and jury. I welcome the fact that the Minister mentioned in his note this morning that there is to be some independence, with a QC being introduced to the process, but we need finally to disentangle the two.

Kevin Foster: To be clear, Martin Forde QC, who is the independent adviser, is already in place, but we are looking to go through a recruitment process for the permanent appointment.

Dr Huq: I am grateful to the Minister for that and welcome his point. As I say, it looked a little vague, so I am pleased that we have got a bit more vagueness out of him this evening. We await to see the detail and what that turns into. Independence is a good thing in a process such as this one when there is historical distrust between these communities and the Minister's Department.

Others have cited these figures: of the 1,108 applications—8,000 were expected—only 36 have led to anything. The £64,000 sum sounds very low for people who have had years and years of loss of earnings. Again, there is the issue of proving the unprovable. We have heard today that there are people who served in our armed forces for 10 years, yet that is not sufficient proof for whatever the hoops are that the Home Office wants people to jump through. It just looks like it is being done in a perfunctory way, almost to deter people from applying.

Where is the national media campaign? The Home Secretary talked at the beginning of the debate about doing travelling road shows, which I have yet to encounter in my own borough. Was it before or after the illegal Prorogation that £140 million was spent on the Get Ready for Brexit campaign, to excite people in a politically motivated, partisan, propaganda way? It contravened the civil service code, but all the complaints seemed to get swallowed up in the swirl of the general election. We need some sort of advice campaign for this scheme so that people know about it, because people out there are unaware of it.

As we all know, 60 million Brits woke up the other day without the right to live, work and study in 27 other EU nations as part of the greatest democratically accountable trade zone that the world has ever seen. Currently, record numbers of people with British passports are applying for other passports. The highest number is the 94,000 last year alone who applied to the Republic of Ireland, but people are even applying to other countries to which it used to be unknown for Brits to apply. Some 4,800 French passports have been applied for. That does not instil us with confidence that ours is a gold-standard passport anymore. When the Windrush generation have been waiting for years and years, that just adds insult to injury.

There are worries that other categories of people may be at risk from similar difficulties with the Home Office and the mix of cruelty and ineptitude that we have seen with this particular scheme and policy. The House of Commons Library briefing lists Chagos islanders, EU

citizens and a whole load of other people who may fall into this category. A million people have applied for the EU settlement scheme, but we can already see people falling through the cracks, because that scheme is way short of where it should be. The Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), said at the beginning of the debate that 160,000 people could be eligible to apply for Windrush compensation.

We should remember that this entire scandal cost the scalp of a Home Secretary. The massive governmental failure we have seen in respect of the relatively small numbers—in the thousands—caught up in the Windrush scandal should be a warning against demonising communities without ID. Additional burdens are now being created just for people to go and put an X in a box every five years—the Government are insisting on extra documentation just for voter ID—but we know that 3.5 million people do not have any sort of photo ID. It all bodes very ill. If we really are learning lessons, we need to take heed, especially as to date there has been only one conviction for election fraud in the 2017 general election. I await to see the figures from the recent general election, but it is all part of a pattern, is it not? It looks more hostile environment than one nation Government, which is what they claim to be.

To compound things, the Windrush generation are the people who faced those “No dogs, no blacks, no Irish” signs when they came to this country. Between the original 492 passengers who set sail on the SS Empire Windrush back in June 1948 and right up to 1971, many other people came from the British empire—I think the number is nearly half a million, including my own parents, who came in 1962 from the former East Pakistan. For all those people, all these things are a great worry. We are talking about compensation, but it looks like it is not forthcoming for a lot of people. The wheels of justice are being extremely slow to turn.

At a time when other London boroughs seem to be doing away with things such as Black History Month, I am proud that in my own, the London Borough of Ealing, we have had a Windrush flowerbed in our flagship park, Walpole Park, since 1998. It was re-consecrated or renewed—whatever is done to parks; it is not religious—in 2014. There is a sense that black history is being belittled by all these things. In the neighbouring Tory boroughs, Hillingdon and Wandsworth, they have done away with black history week and are calling it diversity week, which is not the same thing. All these things are not just for a week; they are about lives and livelihoods. I am incredibly fortunate that in my borough we have on a Friday the Acton Anglo Caribbean lunch club, members of which have been affected by the Windrush scandal, although I will not go into individual cases. We also have their kids, who have formed a group called Descendants, and the WAPPY youth group.

I welcome the extension of the timeframe to 2023 and the element of independence that we have talked about, and Labour is obviously not going to oppose the Bill because it is a money Bill that allows compensation, but the scheme is still woefully inadequate. Only 3% of Windrush claimants have received compensation and the scheme falls pitifully short of all the expectations on it. Even the Home Secretary herself, in her own words, and the Government, in their “Dear colleague” letter this morning, as good as admitted that they are continuing to fail the Windrush generation. That is all wrapped up

in this whole hostile environment policy, which has created a climate of fear, so that people do not want to come forward. After all, this is the Government who sent “Go home or face arrest” vans all around the London Borough of Ealing.

The Government will not end the Windrush scandal until they completely do away with the hostile environment policy. That means they must repeal the Immigration Act 2014, which overturned legislation that had been in existence since 1973 and that was relatively liberal on freedom of movement.

Right at the start of this debate, the Home Secretary said that this is about ruling out inaccuracies. Many people do not have tons of confidence in this Government and in this Department, especially as it took people of the press—people such as the journalist Amelia Gentleman and campaigner Patrick Vernon—to shine a light on these murky waters in the first place. As I have said, this matter has already claimed the scalp of one Home Secretary. What we need is a proper restorative justice attitude—not something that is perfunctory. The Government may have achieved a stonking great majority, with dozens of new oven-baked MPs, but I hope that they do take heed of what we have been saying about the principle of restorative justice. They could introduce a flat-rate scheme with room for those who have complicated cases. They need to treat this as what it is—a genuine injustice and scandal—rather than in a deport first, ask questions later, too little, too late, inhumane way, which is what this woefully inadequate scheme appears to do.

7.51 pm

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab): I thank the many Members who have spoken in this debate, particularly those who spoke with such high regard for the Windrush generation. My family first started moving to this country from Ghana in West Africa in the late sixties, so I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Poplar and Limehouse (Apsana Begum) and for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana) for their interventions, which pointed out the impact of the Windrush scandal on all Commonwealth citizens, not just those from the Caribbean.

The hon. Members for Delyn (Rob Roberts), for Devizes (Danny Kruger) and for Wycombe (Mr Baker) pointed out that we need a more humane immigration system. I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss), for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), for West Ham (Ms Brown) and for Edmonton (Kate Osamor) for the moving testimonies of their constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) said what many of us on these Benches know, which is that the Windrush compensation scheme is not fit for purpose. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) pointed out, only 3% of those who have applied to the scheme have received any compensation. The hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) rightly pointed out that the amount that they have been given is not enough to count for the significant loss that they have sustained.

There were also thoughtful contributions from the hon. Members for Birmingham, Northfield (Gary Sambrook), for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison), for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney), and for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). I thank my right hon.

Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) for making the very important point that we were swifter to pay compensation to slave owners than we were to the descendants of the enslaved.

As Members will have heard, we do not intend to oppose this Bill today. It is only right that compensation is finally paid, however lacking it is and whatever the shortcomings of the scheme. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) said, the compensation scheme is deeply flawed in numerous ways. I wish to reiterate that we, on the Labour Benches, are in favour of the payment of compensation in this scandalous case. We do not endorse the Government’s compensation scheme and we will continue to press the Government for a statutory scheme as the basis for a fair and just compensation.

We will continue to press for major changes to the amounts offered, for the types of compensation that are awarded, for improvement to eligibility, and for a change in the recognition of those who are victims both in terms of generation and in terms of country of origin, which are both wider than the Government care to admit. We will also press not only for major changes to the publicity surrounding the scheme, but to increase awareness of it. Above all, we seek justice and fairness, which the Windrush victims have not received to date from this Government.

A series of important questions regarding the scheme were posed during the course of this debate. I am not convinced that an objective listener would take the view that those questions received full answers, or, in some cases, any answers at all. The Minister did not make it clear why this scheme cannot be put on a statutory basis in order to ensure fairness. Furthermore, we have received no clear indication from Ministers as to why they believe that the original decision for the early closure of the scheme had to be revoked as unworkable. There has also been little to enlighten us on why there has been such poor take-up to date of the compensation scheme, and whether Ministers have taken any decisive steps to improve that.

My right hon. Friend made the forceful point that more than 8,000 people have applied for the necessary documentation to establish their right to be here since April 2018, but it is not at all clear what proactive steps the Minister’s Department has taken to engage with them. There is also the question of the wider engagement with all those who are genuine victims of this scandal. They come from all over the Commonwealth, not solely the Caribbean.

I am also unsure whether we had full answers from those on the Government Benches about what is being done to alert these communities to their eligibility for the scheme. Separately, what has been done to include all further generations of the initial victims of the Windrush scandal who also find themselves victimised? Does the Minister not accept that much more needs to be done, and needs to be done as an urgent priority?

An impartial listener to this debate will also, I think, have struggled to hear any convincing argument as to why victims should not be compensated for the legal costs incurred in fighting all the injustices that they have suffered in the course of this scandal.

Finally, I want to address my remarks not solely to hon. and right hon. Members of this House, but to the victims of this scandal and their loved ones. Some of

[Bell Ribeiro-Addy]

the people who were treated so terribly died before they ever received any apology, let alone compensation from this Government. People were denied drivers' licences. They were made unemployed. They lost their homes and were put in immigration detention centres. Some were deported, and others were refused re-entry to this country after they had briefly been overseas, breaking up their families. They were British citizens, and this is still happening to them and their loved ones. I want to say to all of them, whatever their country of origin and whatever the country of origin of their parents or grandparents, they are one of us. The Labour party will not rest—and I will not rest—until this extraordinary injustice is brought to an end.

7.56 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): I congratulate the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Streatham (Bell Ribeiro-Addy), on her first speech at the Dispatch Box. It was an assured performance with well-thought through points. It is safe to say that we have had an important and wide-ranging debate, touching on a range of issues relating to the Bill. Although I will not be able to respond to every single point, it is perhaps worth my responding to a few of them.

I noticed that both the shadow Home Secretary and the shadow Immigration Minister referred to the fact that we have not put this scheme on a statutory basis. Let me be clear about this: it is to allow a degree of flexibility around the rules where it is necessary. For example, in October, following feedback from stakeholders and claimants, we allowed a broader range of immigration fees to be refunded. Last week, following feedback from stakeholders, from the independent adviser and, to be fair, from members of the shadow team as well, we extended the period by two years, and altered the mitigations. Again, we are keen to engage with stakeholders and the independent adviser about future changes that may need to be made. That is why we are not keen to put this on a statutory basis and put it all into a piece of primary legislation.

There were comments about the 8,000 taskforce applications, and the fact that, so far, only 1,100 are being followed up with a compensation claim. It does not automatically follow that someone who has secured documentation through the taskforce will then be instantly entitled to compensation. However, we clearly want to reach out, as we want to encourage people to make contact with the compensation team if they believe that there is a claim to be made.

We had a running theme throughout the debate of people who do not necessarily want to attend an event run by the Home Office, understandably in some cases, or to make direct contact with the Home Office. Some favoured approaching a trusted Member of Parliament in their local community. We are very clear that none of the information provided to the Windrush teams will be used for the purposes of immigration enforcement. We are quite happy to arrange for Windrush taskforce and Windrush compensation teams to engage directly with Members of Parliament, if they so wish, and with their constituents, and we are very clear that none of that information will be used for immigration enforcement.

Helen Hayes: The Minister is right to say that many of the Windrush citizens are fearful of approaching the Home Office because of what it might mean for their immigration status now, but it is more than that. It is also about the total lack of trust in the Home Office and the lack of confidence that the very Department that has done them so much wrong has the capacity to deliver justice for them.

Kevin Foster: That is why we are working with the stakeholder group and why we have an independent reviewer and a separate team. I have extended an invitation to my shadows, and I am happy to extend it to other Members of Parliament who have strong constituency interests, to visit the compensation team based in Leeds, to meet and talk with staff and to understand the work they do. We have taken note of the individual cases raised in the Chamber today. I do not think it would be right to respond in detail now from the Dispatch Box, but we will ensure that the details are passed on for further work.

I am keen to respond to an offer made by the shadow team and to work where possible with Members of Parliament to run engagement and outreach events in their constituency. We have already made an arrangement with the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), and we will make it clear that it is not a Home Office event, but one run by a Member of Parliament with the team attending. As I said, none of the information will be used for purposes unconnected with the Windrush taskforce and the Windrush compensation scheme, and I hope we can give people confidence in what the sessions will be about.

In an interesting speech, the SNP spokesman, the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), raised several considered points. We have already announced some changes to the mitigation policy, based on the advice from the independent adviser and feedback from stakeholders. The hon. Gentleman made a fair point about what happens when someone misses the deadline by a day in 2023 due to ill health, or perhaps a probate issue. We will continue to review the process, take advice and engage with stakeholders and the independent adviser. There is a balance to be struck between having a date far enough in the future to enable people to feel confident that they have time to make their claim, but soon enough to encourage people to put in their claim. We felt that the two-year extension also gives certainty on procurement for those who provide independent advice to claimants.

That brings me to another point made by hon. Members on how independent advice will be provided. To be clear, the initial procurement went to Citizens Advice and we have extended that until a new service is procured. We thought it right to do that, so that independent advice continued to be available to claimants. The procurement is an open process and we look forward to seeing bids involving groups that can get out and ensure that people get the compensation they deserve.

Regarding the scope of the scheme, it is open to anyone from a Commonwealth country who arrived and settled in the UK before 1973, anyone of any nationality who arrived and settled in the UK before the end of 1988, children, grandchildren and other close family members of such a person who may have been affected, and the estates of those who are now

deceased but who would have been eligible to claim compensation. References commonly made to “the Windrush generation” are a shorthand way to ensure that the public are aware of what we mean, but we are not talking purely about people from the Caribbean; those from the wider Commonwealth are also affected.

In the detailed design of the scheme, we are committed to ensuring that everyone who is due compensation can receive it. We worked with the independent adviser, Martin Forde, to ensure that the evidential threshold is as low as possible, and the team will work with claimants to provide as much information as possible to support their claim, but when spending public money it is important to have a minimum amount of information and evidence required. The changes introduced last week show that we will respond to comments and experience, as claims progress.

The taskforce has a dedicated vulnerable persons team to provide help and advice where safeguarding and vulnerability issues are identified. I am advised that up to the end of September 2019, the team had provided support to nearly 1,000 individuals. We have a fast-track service, operated with the Department for Work and Pensions, to confirm status and residence and to arrange access to benefits. Again, we will pick up the cases mentioned in the debate today and make sure a response is given.

Lucy Powell: I intervene to give the Minister the opportunity to respond to reports that the Court of Appeal has halted the flight due to take place tomorrow, deporting 50 people back to Jamaica. Does he think that the attention drawn to that case has helped to restore trust in the system or made the situation worse?

Kevin Foster: I will not comment on a case that has only just been concluded. We will consider the judgment in detail, as it may not mean quite what some take it to mean on the surface. However, as I said earlier, this is a Government who follow the rule of law and fulfil our legal duties under the 2007 Act, which Labour Members were happy to support, and which uses the word “must”, not “may”.

The Windrush stakeholder advisory group was launched by the Home Secretary at a stakeholder roundtable on 26 September 2019. The group’s purpose is to help to join up community leaders, lawyers and faith groups across the country and to seek their advice on our communications and engagement strategy. I have listened to feedback from stakeholders and affected individuals and met some members of the panel soon after taking up my current role. The evidence that we are listening is seen in what we did last week by extending the scheme, as requested, and altering the mitigation policy, also as requested. We will consider any further suggestions via that process.

I thank right hon. and hon. Members for their insightful and thought-provoking contributions on the Bill and on the wider position of the Windrush generation. As has been said many times, and as the Government will continue to say, the Windrush issues were the result of a terrible mistake, for which I apologise again on behalf of the Government, in addition to the individual apology

that each person receives with the compensation that they are entitled to. We hope that the Government’s commitment to the scheme will go some way to easing the financial burden and impact that some have endured, even though we recognise that compensation by itself cannot resolve all the hurt that was caused.

Each one of us in this House has a role to play and a duty to work to ensure that all those affected get the help they need to regularise their status. No one should be afraid to come forward through their Member of Parliament to the Windrush taskforce. The information will not be used for immigration enforcement. It will be used only for the purposes of the Windrush scheme. Similarly, no one should fear making a claim to the Windrush compensation scheme for what they are owed. We will continue to listen to stakeholders and others involved in this process to ensure that the scheme is fair. Part of that work is ensuring that the Bill is passed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

WINDRUSH COMPENSATION SCHEME (EXPENDITURE) BILL (PROGRAMME)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Windrush Compensation Scheme (Expenditure) Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

Proceedings in Committee, on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

2. Proceedings in Committee, any proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings in Committee of the whole House.

3. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion four hours after the commencement of proceedings in Committee of the whole House.

4. Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings in Committee of the whole House, to any proceedings on Consideration or to other proceedings up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

5. Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—(*Leo Docherty.*)

Question agreed to.

WINDRUSH COMPENSATION SCHEME (EXPENDITURE) BILL (MONEY)

Queen’s recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Windrush Compensation Scheme (Expenditure) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State or a Government Department under, or in connection with, the Windrush Compensation Scheme.—(*Leo Docherty.*)

Question agreed to.

Social Security

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Before I call the Minister to move motion 4, I should alert the House to the fact that the published Order Paper states, incorrectly, that the instruments referred to in motions 4 and 5 have not yet been considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. In fact, they have been. The online version of the Order Paper has been corrected. I call the Minister, Will Quince, to move motion 4.

8.8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): I beg to move,

That the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 30 January, be approved.

In my view, the provisions in these orders are compatible with the European convention on human rights. This order reflects the Government's continuing commitment to support working families and pensioners across the nation. It will increase the basic state pension and the new state pension in line with the triple lock. The basic state pension will increase by 3.9% and we have committed to increase the new state pension by the triple lock. The state earnings-related pension schemes and the other state second pensions, as well as protected payments in the new state pension will rise by 1.7% in line with prices. It will increase the pension credit standard minimum guarantee by 3.9% in line with earnings. It will increase working age benefits by 1.7% in line with prices. Universal credit work allowances will also rise in line with prices. It will increase carers benefits and benefits intended to meet additional disability needs by 1.7% in line with prices. In addition, the carer and disability-related premiums paid with pension credit and working-age benefits will increase by 1.7%.

The Government are committed to supporting the most vulnerable in our society. In this order, the Government propose to spend an extra £5 billion in 2020-21 on increasing benefit and pension rates. With this spending, we are upholding our commitment to the country's pensioners by maintaining the triple lock and helping the poorest pensioners who count on pension credit; spending an additional £1 billion on working-age benefits and ensuring that we continue to support working people; and providing essential support to disabled people and carers. I commend the order to the House.

8.11 pm

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): This uprating order will increase a range of social security entitlements and pensions. As a result of the Government's Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, most working-age benefits and tax credit elements have been subject to a four-year freeze, covering the period 2016-17 to 2019-20. It is a basic human right to have security and stability in our lives, secure housing, reliable income, and support when things get difficult. Society's choices about benefit levels help to determine the levels of inequality and living standards, sometimes for the most vulnerable in our society.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, especially as I did not have the opportunity to intervene on the Minister.

Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the fairnesses that we have to consider is intergenerational fairness? We are seeing a widening discrepancy between the protection for pensioners—rightly—through the rise in the basic state pension, and what is provided for those on working-age benefits. If people on working age benefits are kept in very difficult financial circumstances, they cannot save for their old age. Is not this really politically motivated, rather than a genuine policy to achieve better equality and protect the most vulnerable?

Mike Amesbury: My hon. Friend makes a very valid and powerful point.

For too many of our citizens, there is no such security. The responsibility for this situation lies firmly at the door of the Government, whose lack of compassion and cruel social security policies have afflicted those who are most in need.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that many of the cuts have been self-defeating, and current decisions are self-defeating as well? Research by Alma Economics shows that if the Government decided to restore the local housing allowance rates for the cheapest 30% of rents, that would save local authorities, the health system and many others billions of pounds in the long run. Surely the Government need to look at that.

Mike Amesbury: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I will come on to that later in my speech.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I am listening very closely to the hon. Gentleman, and, having skim-read the order, I concede of course that some of the increases are very modest, but my hon. Friend the Minister set out the overall cost of even those increases. What would the Labour party do? How big would its increases be and what would the overall cost be to the taxpayer?

Mike Amesbury: Unfortunately, the Labour party is not in government, but I will say to the hon. Gentleman that the cuts have amounted to £4.7 billion per year, so the so-called investment that the Government propose pales into insignificance against that.

As we have heard from the Minister today, the Government intend to end their four-year freeze on benefits by proposing to uprate working-age benefits in line with the CPI rate as of September 2019, which was 1.7%. We welcome that slight step forward. Remarkably, for a range of benefits and not just universal credit, this will be the first cash increase in basic entitlements since April 2015. It is important to point out that there has not been any recent change in policy from the Government: the freeze was always due to come to an end in April this year, as announced by the previous Chancellor.

If we scratch beneath the surface of the increase, we find that, after adjustment for price increases, the four-year benefit freeze has actually meant a cut in the real level of benefits by 6%. In many cases, that has come on top of earlier cuts. The 2015-16 benefits freeze followed uprating by only 1% each year in the three years prior to its introduction. There is, therefore, now a yawning gap between the level of benefits offered and essential living costs. Those political choices have consequences, with child poverty, homelessness and in-work poverty at alarming levels, as evidenced in the recently published Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK Poverty report.

Indeed, under this Prime Minister, children will receive a miserly increase of 75p per week in child benefit, and the second child just 55p per week.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a lengthy and well thought-out speech, unfortunately not reflected by the Government. He mentioned the increase in child poverty and the concerns that so many charities, including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, have. Their conclusion is that the cuts in social security are driving not only child poverty but disability poverty. Does he agree?

Mike Amesbury: I do agree with my hon. Friend. Social security has become a vehicle for cuts and children have borne the brunt, with over 4 million now in poverty.

The 75p per week for the first child will not even buy a loaf of bread in many shops. As a result of the four-year freeze, families living in poverty are now a total of £560 worse off a year on average, equivalent to three months of food shopping for low-income families. Harsh and punitive Conservative policies such as the benefits freeze, the two-child limit and the five-week wait have created a society in which people are forced to turn to food banks in ever-increasing numbers just to get by.

The flagship social security reform of universal credit is not working. The full roll-out will now be delayed yet again until 2024, seven years behind the original plan. It is driving far too many people into poverty, debt and rent arrears. One of its key defects is the in-built and unrealistic five-week wait. At what stage will the Minister apply common sense and change that to fortnightly payments?

According to latest figures available, in 2018-19 the Trussell Trust distributed just short of 1.6 million emergency food parcels, of which 578,000 went to children—the highest level since the charity opened and up nearly 20% on the previous year. In some parts of the UK—Scotland and London and the north-east—the percentage increase year on year was even higher. That represents a depressing 73% increase in food bank use over the past five years, and the Trussell Trust identifies the failing benefits system as one of the main reasons behind that. Behind these devastating statistics are real people, families and children up and down the country, many of them in the constituencies that the new Tory MPs in the north represent.

I turn to the freeze in the local housing allowance. Evidence suggests that it has been a particular source of hardship because of the increasing number of people forced into private rented accommodation by the shortage of social housing. The charity Shelter has calculated that as a result of the benefit freeze, 94% of areas in the UK are unaffordable for people claiming LHA. Recent research by the charity Crisis and the Chartered Institute of Housing found that almost 93% of areas were still unaffordable. There are huge discrepancies throughout the country. For example, an average of £87 a month would be needed to make the bottom 30% of the rental market available in the UK. However, in London a claimant would need an extra £1,398, so the uprate of £10 per month is totally unrealistic.

Kate Green: As my hon. Friend knows, Trafford in Greater Manchester, where I am a Member of Parliament, has relatively high housing costs. I frequently see people who are driven into rent arrears because of the lack of

generosity in local housing allowance. That means that they have to seek advice to avoid penalties or eviction, but that advice is not available. Eventually, the cost piles up and they arrive at the door of the local authority saying that they are now in housing need because they have been evicted from their private rented accommodation. How can that be sensible?

Mike Amesbury: My hon. Friend is totally correct. It is not sensible at all.

The devastating repercussions of 10 years of Tory austerity and the impacts of the benefit freeze will remain for a long time to come. The 1.7% uprate is a token mild thaw at the tip of the iceberg of systematic and pernicious cuts to the benefit system. It is too little, too late, and it does nothing to repair the damage done to people's lives by this Government's failed social security policies. It has served to further entrench poverty in society. For those reasons, it is Labour's intention to abstain from voting on this statutory instrument.

8.22 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): There is, of course, nothing to celebrate here. The Conservative Government are trying to clean up the mess they created, and they are not even getting the job done properly. We have repeatedly called on the Government to scrap the benefit freeze. This uprating is of course welcome, but it appears to be too little, too late. The brutal cuts imposed by the Government have entrenched, and continue to entrench, poverty across these islands. A 1.7% increase in working-age benefits does not make up for the damage caused by the four-year freeze. If austerity was really over, the Government would be making up the shortfall.

Let us look at some of the effects. Overall, benefits and tax credits affected by the four-year freeze will be around 6% lower in 2020-21 than they would have been if CPI indexation had been applied during the four years of the freeze. Taking account of all uprating restrictions across the decade, affected benefits are around 9% lower in 2020-21 than they would have been if CPI indexation had applied since 2010. Child benefit and working tax credit elements are between 13% and 17% lower in 2020-21 than would have been the case if CPI indexation had applied throughout the decade.

The Resolution Foundation estimated that the four-year freeze saved the Government £4.7 billion a year by 2019-20, of which £1.8 billion was attributable to the final year of the freeze, and yet the Treasury forecast at the 2016 Budget that the four-year freeze would achieve an annual saving of £3.5 billion by 2019-20. Just last week, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported:

"The benefit freeze has seen the value of many benefits fall. The same benefit received in 2019 and 2013 is worth around 6% less".

We have to wonder about that. If austerity was really over, as we are continually told it is, the Government would make up that shortfall.

I am sad to say that there are 1 million people living in poverty in Scotland, and almost one in four of them are children. In 2019, 250,000 children living in one of the world's richest nations are growing up in poverty. That is nothing short of scandalous. Poverty is not inevitable. People not having enough money to feed and clothe their children is not something that happens by

[Chris Stephens]

accident. The existence of poverty in a country as rich as ours is a direct consequence of political choices. The decade of austerity was a political choice. Massive long-term cuts to the social security budget were a political choice. The widening of the holes in the social security safety net so that more families and children would fall through was a political choice. The ill-conceived and hopelessly financed introduction of universal credit was a political choice. Making the poorest, weakest and most vulnerable in our society carry the can and bear the brunt of a financial crisis that had nothing to do with them was, of course, a political choice.

There can be no doubt that one of the main drivers of child poverty in these islands has been the Government's package of welfare reforms, which by any measure has been an abject failure. How else could one describe a package of reforms the result of which is that 65% of all the children who live in poverty come from households in which at least one adult is working? There is no need to take my word for it; the United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty said:

"Changes to benefits, and sanctions against parents...are driving the increase in child poverty."

Some would still have us believe that it will take decades to turn things around and lift children out of poverty, but I do not believe that that is true. There are measures that the UK Government could take right now that would immediately stop children and their families falling into poverty. One of those would be for the Government immediately to stop the roll-out of universal credit, take their time and find the money to fix the major problems in the system, which they are only too well aware of but choose to ignore. There is no doubt that poverty in childhood leads to poverty of hope, aspiration and opportunity. Most movingly, we hear too often of the deep scars that people have in adulthood as a result of child poverty.

Debbie Abrahams: On that point, I wonder what the hon. Member thinks of the Citizens Advice proposal that all frozen benefits be uprated not just by CPI, but by CPI plus 2% for the next four years. That would go some way to addressing the appalling imbalance, and the poverty that so many of our children and our disabled people have found themselves in.

Chris Stephens: The hon. Lady—my good friend—is right that Citizens Advice has produced an excellent report on this. My local citizens advice bureau bears the brunt of trying to help people fill out forms and navigate their way through the social security system, and I am sure she knows all about that. I hope that the Government will take cognisance of the Citizens Advice report to which she refers.

There is an inescapable and undeniable link between the paucity of affordable rented property in the private rented sector, as we have heard from the shadow Minister, and the increased risk of people becoming homeless simply because they cannot afford to meet the cost of living in private rented accommodation. There is a chasm of difference between what people are expected to pay and what they can afford to pay.

Let us be absolutely clear: this housing crisis—particularly in England—and the rising levels of homelessness and rough sleeping did not happen by accident. There has

not been some unforeseen set of circumstances that has led to the number of households living in temporary accommodation in England rising by 60% between 2012 and 2018. No unexpected or unforeseen quirk has led to the number of rough sleepers in England nearly doubling over the past five years. This housing crisis was all too predictable, because just about every stakeholder warned the Government right from the start about the inevitable consequences of pursuing their austerity agenda. When they froze local housing allowance and failed to meet their targets for building social housing, what did they expect to happen other than a rise in homelessness and the number of people sleeping rough on our streets? That is exactly what has happened, so let us call this what it is: a crisis entirely of the Government's own making.

It is incontestable that the Government's austerity agenda has had a hugely negative impact on people's ability to rent private sector accommodation. Research from the Chartered Institute of Housing shows that many LHA rates now fail to cover even the cheapest third of rents, as they were designed to. A survey carried out by the National Housing Federation and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations found that tenants on universal credit were more than twice as likely as other tenants to be in debt.

There is much more to be done to ensure that we help our fellow citizens escape poverty. I hope that Ministers have seen the two Bills that I presented today, the first of which aims to ensure that people who give up a zero-hours contract job are not subjected to sanctions under universal credit, and the second of which would ensure that the Government would step in to ensure that no one in rent arrears is evicted from their home.

8.30 pm

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I welcome the fact that, for the first time for many years, benefits are being uprated in line with inflation. It is a welcome change and one that is long overdue. But I think we do need to look a little bit at the history of what has happened since 2010, as the shadow Minister has done in part.

In the 2012 autumn statement the then Chancellor, George Osborne, limited increases in most working-age benefits—including those for people in work—to 1% for three years from 2013-14. That was due to end in 2015-16. But then, as we have been reminded, we had the benefits freeze, which froze most working-age benefits at cash levels for a further four years. Thank goodness that freeze is ending, but we have now had seven years without inflation uprating, and the inflation uprating that we are getting through this order is at the lower CPI rate, rather than at the RPI rate that was always used prior to 2010.

The Government have chosen to cut the incomes of those who are assessed as being the poorest, and we all know the consequences. We have been reminded of some of them already in this debate: enormous numbers resorting to food banks; people sleeping rough in Westminster tube station; and child poverty going through the roof.

Social security spending on working-age adults and children amounted to 5.7% of GDP in 2010. It is now down to 4.3%. A single adult's jobseeker's allowance will be £74.35 a week from April under this order. It

would have been £86.72—one sixth more than it is actually going to be—if RPI uprating had been in place since 2010. Child benefit for the first or oldest child is going to be £21.05 a week after the modest increase that the shadow Minister drew attention to in his speech. If it had been uprated by RPI since 2010, it would have been £26.90 a week—over 25% more than it is actually going to be because, of course, child benefit was frozen in cash terms from 2010, not just from 2015.

This morning Citizens Advice published research entitled “The impact of the benefits freeze on people in debt”, which states:

“Since the benefits freeze began, we’ve seen an increase in the proportion of people we help with debt who have no money left at the end of the month once they’ve covered their living costs. In 2016/17, 32% of all people we helped with debt had no money left after covering their costs, but by 2019/20 this had risen to 38%.”

It argues that the Government should adopt the recommendation of the Work and Pensions Committee to which my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) has already drawn attention. I think the Committee first made this proposal last July under the chairmanship of Frank Field, to whom I pay tribute and who will be greatly missed in the House. The recommendation was:

“From 2020/21, the Government should increase the rates of frozen benefits by CPI plus 2%. That would mean that benefit rates would, after four years, reach the level at which they would have been set if they had not been frozen.”

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation calculates a minimum income standard for a minimum acceptable standard of living for different household types. In 2009, the benefits system provided 70% of that standard for a lone parent with two young children. By last year, that was down to 58%. In 2009, the system provided a childless working-age couple with 42% of the standard. Hon. Members might think that that is low enough, but last year it was down to 30%. The household benefit cap is not being uprated at all, when it certainly should be, and there is no change at all to the harshness of the two-child limit.

Debbie Abrahams: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend—the new Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee—for giving way. Many of us are concerned that the Government’s proposed increase is not at all going to rectify the dreadful social security situation that exists at the moment. Is he as concerned as I am about this?

Stephen Timms: I am very concerned. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I think that the Government are making sure that the situation is not going to get worse, or at least not much worse, but they are certainly in no way putting right the damage that has been done over the last few years—indeed, over the past 10 years.

Kate Green: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a cruel lack of logic in the household benefit cap because it is a blunt instrument that takes no account of different family structures and different forms of need in different households?

Stephen Timms: My hon. Friend is quite right. We were given a rationale when the cap was introduced—it was an extremely blunt one, but it was a rationale—but the benefit was reduced arbitrarily after that.

I have several questions for the Minister. Does he recognise that the freeze has made life much harder for those who depend on benefits, and that they are due a better offer than simply maintaining the current diminished level of income in line with inflation in the years ahead? Does he recognise the force of the case made by the Select Committee under its previous Chair and by Citizens Advice, which is of course drawing in part on its observations from the work it does for the Department, running the help to claim service for universal credit? Does he recognise that benefits need to catch up on ground lost over the past 10 years?

I have one specific technical question. The definition of RPI is to be revised. The Treasury is going to consult on the future definition, which will replace the current definition in a few years’ time. Is it the Government’s intention to make the new RPI the default uprating amount for each year, rather than the CPI figure that is being used this year? I would be grateful if the Minister said a little about the Government’s intentions in that regard.

As has been mentioned already in this debate, there is one part of the system where inflation uprating makes no sense at all, and that is local housing allowance—determining how much housing support claimants in the private rented sector in each locality can receive. Local housing allowance was introduced in 2008 to limit the amount of housing benefit that could be paid. It was set initially at the 50th percentile of rents in a locality, so the effect was to cap housing support at the median rent locally. In 2011, it was then reduced to the 30th percentile, so housing support would cover only the cheapest 30% of accommodation in the area. Since 2016, local housing allowance has been frozen completely in cash terms, while rents have increase by leaps and bounds. That is why, as the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) and others have pointed out, Shelter and others have drawn attention to the fact that there is now hardly anywhere in the country where people can rent accommodation for the amount set by the local housing allowance. The shortfall therefore has to be made up from people’s other income, and if that is benefit income that has been frozen since 2015-16, so people have to pay their increasing rent by somehow reducing what they spend on everything else.

What does that mean in practice? Well, it is a very big part of the reason why so many people are sleeping rough in London this winter. I can remember—I imagine that many of us can—when nobody slept in Westminster tube station overnight. We have all seen the large numbers who seem at times to be camping out there at the moment. That is the consequence, to quite a large extent, of the extraordinary unwillingness to allow the local housing allowance to reflect what is actually going on in housing costs in London.

Last summer, I hosted a visit to my constituency by members of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Commission on Housing. We called on one of my constituents who lived with his wife and child in a single small, squalid room above a shop on East Ham High Street. Both those parents work in the NHS part-time, but this room was all they could afford. Their four-year-old son was running around when we visited—a very lively youngster. His mother had given birth to a younger sister, but she

[Stephen Timms]

had died. It was clear that the housing conditions in that room had contributed in no small part to her death.

That is the impact of the grinding down of housing support since 2010. Surely we can do better than that. In its report last July, the Select Committee recommended “that the Department unfreeze Local Housing Allowance as planned in 2020/21, and restore rates to at least the 30th percentile of local market rates. Thereafter, the Department should commit to uprating Local Housing Allowance in line with rental prices.”

I want to urge that view from the all-party Select Committee on the Minister this evening.

8.41 pm

Will Quince: Let me start by thanking all hon. Members for their contributions. Very many issues have been raised. As much as I much hold back the temptation to hold a second DWP oral Questions session, which I easily could, given the varied range of questions raised, I stress to hon. Members across the Chamber—the Chairman of the Select Committee knows this—that my door is always open. We may not always agree, but there is always a listening ear, and they are very welcome to come to see me or, indeed, write to me.

This order reflects the Government’s continuing commitment to support those in work while protecting the most vulnerable in our society. To reiterate, this Government are increasing the basic state pension and the new state pension in line with the triple lock. We are increasing the pension credit standard minimum guarantee by earnings to support the poorest pensioners. We are increasing working-age benefits in line with prices. We are increasing the universal credit work allowances so that claimants can earn more before their payments are reduced. We are increasing benefits to meet additional disability needs and carer benefits in line with prices. I commend this order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 30 January, be approved.

Pensions

8.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): I beg to move,

That the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 27 January, be approved.

The GMP increase order is an entirely technical matter that is attended to in this place every year. It is subject matter that is dealt with under every successive Government. The statutory instrument provides for defined-benefit or final-salary occupational pension schemes that are contracted out to increase members’ guaranteed minimum pensions that accrued between 6 April 1988 and 5 April 1997 at 1.7%, in line with the increase in the consumer prices index to September 2019. I commend this order to the House.

8.44 pm

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his comments.

On the uprating of the state pension in line with the triple lock, we are pleased that the Government have kept to this despite some voices on the Conservative Benches arguing, at an early stage, that the triple lock should be scrapped. This comes at a time when pensioner poverty is on the rise for the first time in five years, according to the recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, “UK Poverty 2019/20”. The shadow pensions Minister, my hon. Friend—my good friend—the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), who cannot be with us today, is correct to assert that the Government have failed to encourage take-up of pension credit, which is down from 70% in 2010 to 64% in 2016-17, and have introduced new rules on eligibility that put a young partner at potential risk of being sanctioned and could leave couples over £7,000 a year worse off.

The other point I would like to pick up on with the Minister and the Government is that they have failed to address the financial hardship faced by millions of women born in the 1950s due to the hurried and unfair changes in pensions policy. I do hope that the Minister and the Government rectify this to ensure that these millions of women get justice over the duration of this Parliament.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 27 January, be approved.

Business without Debate

EUROPEAN STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

Ordered,

That Kirsty Blackman, Geraint Davies, Mrs Flick Drummond, Philip Dunne, Sir David Evennett, Vicky Ford, Mark Garnier, Andrew Jones, Stephen Kinnock, Charlotte Nichols, Mary Robinson, Amanda Solloway, Jo Stevens, Owen Thompson, Liz Twist and Craig Williams be members of the European Statutory Instruments Committee.—(*Amanda Milling, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

GP Provision: Pilsley

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Leo Docherty.*)

8.46 pm

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): Once again, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is an honour to speak under your chairmanship; fate seems to keep bringing us together. I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise this important constituency matter in this House.

During my maiden speech, Madam Deputy Speaker, you may recall that I invited you to visit many wonderful parts of my constituency. Pilsley was one of the places I mentioned, and of course I extend that invitation once again. Pilsley is a delightful village—or perhaps two villages, depending on who you speak to—with great charm and character. But the village is currently in a state of great anxiety due to the proposal to close the incredibly popular local surgery. This potential loss is what I wish to discuss tonight.

The future of the Pilsley surgery has been something of an ongoing affair for nearly three years. The surgery is run by Staffa Health. It is one of four that it runs in the region, and they are generally considered to be very good. I wish to say early on that I do not doubt the commitment of the staff of Staffa Health to deliver the best possible service, nor do I doubt their sincerity in their belief that this closure is a good move. That is not to say that I agree with them.

As I understand it, an initial proposal was put forward in 2017 by Staffa Health to close three surgeries, but that got dropped along the way. I will recap some of the events over the past year. On 1 May 2019, the practice identified the various stakeholders that it needed to discuss the planned closure with. On Monday 24 June 2019, Staffa Health wrote to patients, commencing a consultation to propose the permanent closure of Pilsley Surgery. The consultation ran for 60 days, until 23 August 2019.

As you will appreciate, Madam Deputy Speaker, I was elected in the early hours—around 5 am—of 13 December, some months after the consultation had closed. I feel a bit like I have won an FA cup final ticket, only to discover that I have turned up in injury time, because my involvement started last month. I received a letter via email on 14 January from Staffa Health informing me of its decision to close the surgery. I was given eight days' notice before it was taken for a final decision to the NHS Derby and Derbyshire clinical commissioning group. I immediately wrote to Staffa Health, offering a meeting with the Secretary of State to explore other options. Similarly, I wrote to the clinical commissioning group, asking for a delay to any decision, and I met the amazing Sheila Baldwin, who I will mention more later on.

I think it would be helpful to set out the reasons given for this proposed closure. In the letter to patients dated 24 June 2019, Staffa Health said:

“Staffa Health provides a high degree of choice to our patients in terms of appointment type, location, time of day, day of the week and the ability to book ahead and on the day. Operating in this way over our four sites and providing effective GP cover is challenging. For some time the Practice has been experiencing increasing difficulty in sustaining clinical GP cover over four sites.”

On the face of it, this is about difficulties in recruiting and retaining GPs—a problem that many surgeries face.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman is illustrating an issue that is apparent in not only his constituency but across the United Kingdom, including in my constituency. The availability of GP appointments is fast becoming a nationwide crisis, which is adding to pressure on minor injuries units and A&E departments. Does he agree that there must be direct funding to encourage medical students to commit to a five-year placement in a GP practice, in exchange for student loans, Province-wide and UK-wide? That may be a possibility.

Mark Fletcher: It is a delight to receive an intervention from the hon. Gentleman. As I understand it, he is slightly notorious for doing so. He strayed slightly from what I wish to speak about this evening, but I thank him for his support, as do the people of Pilsley.

As I was saying, on the face of it, this is about difficulties in recruiting and retaining GPs. That is why this Government have committed to recruiting 6,000 more GPs and 26,000 primary care staff other than GPs. We know that there is a particular issue with meeting increased demand at GP surgeries, and we are addressing that challenge head-on with a three-pronged approach: recruiting more GPs; recruiting other staff such as nurses and pharmacists, who can often deal with more routine appointments; and finding new ways of working, such as telephone appointments. That is why I wrote to the Secretary of State asking for a meeting with myself and Staffa Health, to discuss alternative ways of working—a meeting that I believe he is happy to arrange.

But if I were being a cynical man, I would suggest that the top line about GP recruitment is a cover for other reasons why Staffa Health wishes to go ahead with this closure. In the frequently asked questions section of the consultation letter, there was a section headed,

“How would it help Staffa Health by closing the Pilsley surgery?”

Five reasons are given. The first is, as previously covered:

“Enabling us to review and improve access to GP appointments without having to spread staff thinly over four sites”.

The second is:

“Allowing us to redesign the way we provide some aspects of the service. We plan to improve access to same day urgent care, telephone and online consultations”.

I am at a bit of a loss as to why the closure of a surgery is required for that to happen. The third reason stated is:

“Reducing some of the activities that are duplicated across multiple sites, providing greater efficiency”.

I suspect that that might be the most important reason. I think that the finances of the closure may be a considerable factor in this proposal, and if I am right, I wish that Staffa Health would come out and say so, rather than hiding behind other factors.

The fourth and fifth reasons given are:

“Giving the Practice a greater ability to support doctors, nurses and pharmacists in training by supervising them on fewer sites”

and

“Making the practice a more attractive place to work due to a more supportive, less stressful and less isolated working environment”.

What both those points skirt over is the impact that this will have on residents in Pilsley, who are unanimously against this closure. Of course it is important to think

[Mark Fletcher]

about the morale of staff and the quality of their training, but if doing so results in the plummeting morale of patients, is that a good decision? There are serious concerns about the impact the closure will have on the residents of Pilsley, especially those who cannot drive or suffer mobility issues. The village has a higher proportion of elderly residents than most of my constituency, and there are three major issues that I want to raise today.

The first is public transport. The consultation document points out that the other Staffa Health surgeries are only a couple of miles away from the Pilsley surgery, and that there are two public transport routes to them. My inbox and postbags are full of residents' communications presenting a very different picture. As one email from a Pilsley resident stated:

"Our village has lost one bus service and what is left is erratic and unreliable. I am 72 and currently drive but wonder what will happen in the years to come."

Do we really want our elderly patients who cannot drive waiting in the freezing cold in bus shelters for a once-an-hour service that is far from reliable? Will this improve their health, or would we prefer them to shell out for a return taxi that will cost about £20, or are we to rely on a commitment to home visits that will surely put considerably more strain on the workforce?

The consultation document says that the practice

"recognises that not all patients would be able or willing to travel to one of the other surgeries. Any patients who may choose not to remain registered with Staffa Health would be fully supported and offered advice on how to re-register with a different Practice."

However, this is far from adequate. It knows that it is the only surgery available, and those wanting a local doctor will have no alternative. That was the one part of the consultation I was somewhat offended by.

The second issue is the new housing being built in the village. Because it is a fantastic place to live, Pilsley is popular for new housing developments. The Pilsley surgery has 2,800 patients registered at the practice, which has increased by 500 patients since 2017 due to new housing in the area. Other developments, such as the Rockcliffe housing development on Green Lane and a site on Gladstone Lane, have been identified for more housing. It is perverse to build new housing in a village while at the same time losing vital infrastructure. We need to have a much more joined-up approach between the local authority, the CCG and Staffa Health, and I suggest that some of the developers building in Pilsley should be contributing financially to local services such as the GP practice.

The new houses will create more demand, and we are going to end up in a position in a few years' time where we will need to reopen this practice, so let us just cut out this closure. I was particularly amused to read that, because of concerns over parking at one of the other surgeries—in Tibshelf—the plan was to close the Pilsley surgery to patients, who will then have to travel to Tibshelf, but to move administrative staff from Tibshelf to the now closed Pilsley service so as to free up car parking space in the short term at Pilsley. It brought to mind the episode of "Yes Minister" when Jim Hacker visits a new hospital that has no patients, and Sir Humphrey proudly tells him that it is one of the best performing hospitals in the country on many measures.

The third concern I want to raise is the consultation, a lot of which was done online. Not all residents are online and not all residents in Pilsley feel they have been kept up to date on the process. Two brilliant ladies, Sheila Baldwin and Wendy Hardwick, took matters into their own hands and organised a petition against the closure, collecting 600 signatures in three weeks. I applaud their efforts, particularly as Sheila is not online, yet she has galvanised Pilsley into action. She is one of a number of people who have tried calling the surgery in recent weeks only to discover that the options system for the practice automatically transfers them to the test results option. This has added to the confusion and Chinese whispers that are inevitable in a situation of high anxiety.

I brought the consultation up in business questions a few weeks ago, and I know that the CCG is of the opinion that the consultation process for the proposed closure was satisfactory, but I question whether it has explored more than the papers put in front of it. It is clear from speaking to residents in Pilsley that they feel very unsure about who is making decisions, when they are coming, and what impact they will have. We are far too reliant on websites for this sort of thing, and it annoys me that those of us who are tech-savvy gloss over the discrimination this presents to those who are not computer-literate. On behalf of all residents in Pilsley, I thank Sheila and Wendy for all that they have done.

I appreciate that the Government do not have control over this decision: responsibility lies with the CCG. Reportedly—this has not been confirmed to me in writing—a decision will be made at its next meeting on 26 February, although no time or location has yet been provided to me. Equally, I appreciate that a lot of this happened before I was elected. I also wish to state again that I have no ill will towards those who work for Staffa Health, who I am sure wish to do their very best to make their patients' lives better; I disagree with them on this matter, but I do not question their passion for what they do. But it seems to me that the rationale for this proposed closure is short-sighted. It will adversely impact many vulnerable and elderly patients. It is deeply unpopular, and the best approach would be for us to find a way of keeping this surgery, such a vital part of the Pilsley community, open.

I also fear that the closure of the surgery could see a reduction in services or a potential closure of the local pharmacy, creating a real health blackspot in one of the finest parts of Derbyshire. I know the Minister is particularly passionate about pharmacies, and she knows how vital to communities these local businesses are.

I hope Staffa Health and the Derbyshire CCG will pause this proposal, meet me and the Secretary of State to discuss their issues and reassess what can be done. If any confirmation of the importance of this issue were needed, I might add that when I spoke to Sheila earlier today she told me that a last minute notice had gone out in the community because ITV's "Calendar"—I am sure you are a big fan, Madam Deputy Speaker—was filming in the local area and wanted people to come out; at incredibly short notice 30 people made themselves available. This is a vitally important issue for the residents of Pilsley and I look forward to the Minister's response.

9.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher) on securing this debate about GP provision in Pilsley. We know that general practice is the lifeblood of the NHS, and we understand the essential role that local practices play in their community, and this is particularly the case in rural areas such as Pilsley.

Before I address the specific issue of the proposed closure of the Pilsley branch surgery, I would like to mention the local work that is being done in Derbyshire that partly explains some of the things that my hon. Friend was talking about. First, Derby and Derbyshire CCG has been active in working with NHS England to expand the local workforce, and I am very pleased that three new GPs have been recruited in Derbyshire, one of them indeed by Staffa Healthcare. Secondly, the CCG has made progress in ensuring that GPs remain in the NHS and within general practice in particular. An example of that progress is the “GP Aspire” programme launched by the GP taskforce in Derbyshire. The programme started as a pilot back in 2018 and now provides support to all GPs across Derbyshire at any stage of their career. That includes, among other things, one-to-one careers guidance, signposting for wellbeing, mentoring, leadership and mental health advice. Since its launch, the programme has had some 116 individual contacts from Derbyshire GPs.

Retaining experienced GPs and encouraging more into the profession is the way we will be able to deliver more services across the nation and get more appointments into primary care, so people can get the right care from the right healthcare professional. On that, I add that I understand my hon. Friend’s point about pharmacies because the right appointment with the right healthcare professional for individuals will be hugely important as we begin to understand how to better work with the national health service across all the different healthcare professions.

I turn to the proposed closure of Pilsley branch surgery. As my hon. Friend outlined, the closure of a GP surgery is considered and decided by the local CCG, following the application from a GP provider. Such a decision understandably stirs up strong emotions within the local community, as he explained so well.

An application to close Pilsley branch surgery was submitted by Staffa Health in 2019. On the recommendation of the CCG, the public consultation was launched on 24 June. Staffa Health employed a wide range of feedback approaches during the 60-day period, including: meetings with staff; meetings with stakeholders and the patient participation group; issuing a letter, a “frequently asked questions” sheet and a questionnaire to all registered patients; text-message alerts to raise awareness of the consultation; and three face-to-face drop-in sessions. However, I understand what my hon. Friend said about the use of modern technology and how that may not always cover all patients who access local surgeries.

In addition to the consultation, the local petition calling for the closure to be halted, which got 592 individual signatures, was presented, and I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to Sheila Baldwin and Wendy Hardwick, who organised it. I commit here and now to ensuring that my officials write to the CCG to ask it to set out how it has fully taken on board the views of the ladies

and the broader petition and the action that it intends to take in response. Those local views can often help to deliver the most sensible solutions for everybody.

Following the conclusion of the consultation, Staffa Health decided to continue with its application to close the Pilsley branch to ensure the long-term sustainability of its whole practice across the three other local settings. A report was compiled and submitted to the CCG engagement committee for review on 8 January, and it commended the consultation for being “robust”. The report was also submitted to Derbyshire County Council’s improvement and scrutiny committee, and the final decision regarding the future of the Pilsley surgery will now be made by Derby and Derbyshire CCG’s primary care co-commissioning committee. The committee has been asked by Staffa Health to approve the closure, but to postpone it for a year from the date that approval is given. That postponement is to allow time to increase the number of consultation rooms at the neighbouring Tibshelf surgery and to address car parking issues. Those specific concerns have been raised through the consultation to date.

The committee met on 22 January and decided at the meeting to defer its decision to the next meeting on 26 February, which I understand will be after my hon. Friend has met the Secretary of State with Staffa Health. In the run-up to and following the PCCC’s decision, the CCG and Staffa Health are urged to continue to listen to the concerns that have been raised and to ensure that appropriate action is taken to reduce the impact on the community, which my hon. Friend laid out so eloquently.

As I stated, improving access to general practice is a leading priority for our Government and, consequently, I have asked that I be kept informed about developments regarding the future of Pilsley branch surgery. I understand that workforce shortages have been cited as a reason behind the application to close, as my hon. Friend said, and I appreciate how challenging the situation is for GP surgeries across the country. As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) outlined, it affects all of us, north to south, east to west, and particularly those trying to deliver across large rural areas and multiple sites, where delivery is extremely challenging. As such, I reassure my hon. Friend that tackling this issue lies at the heart of our determination to strengthen general practice and support those who work in it. We are committed to increasing the workforce, providing about 6,000 more doctors and 6,000 more primary care professionals such as physiotherapists, pharmacists and physician associates, on top of the 20,000 primary care professionals to whose funding NHS England is contributing.

Jim Shannon: Earlier, I referred to the possibility of a scheme allowing student doctors to commit themselves to five years in a general practice and thereby offset some of their student fees. Would the Department be prepared at least to consider that?

Jo Churchill: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are always prepared to consider anything that will help to sustain the viability of the entire workforce. Offering appropriate career development, for instance, is important to ensuring that we retain doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals. We do not just want to train them; we want to keep them as well.

[Jo Churchill]

Last year Health Education England recruited the largest ever number of GP trainees—some 3,540—but the system is under significant strain, and more trainees will be required to meet our target of 6,000 general practitioners. The five medical schools that are currently coming onstream will be central to that objective. However, training new staff is only one piece of the jigsaw. As I have said, retention is just as important. The GP contract recognises that, and sets out an ambitious programme of initiatives which, by 2023-24, will support existing doctors. As well as introducing those workforce measures, we intend over the next 12 months to reduce the unnecessary burden of bureaucracy that often restricts GPs.

Our review has been agreed as part of this year's contract, and will begin with a ministerial roundtable that will seek input from our partners across Government and general practice. Our aim is to free up valuable time for doctors and primary care professionals, while also ensuring that Government agencies, departments and

patients have the necessary access to information. By recruiting and retaining more doctors in primary care, covering a wider range of specialisms, we will reduce the burden of bureaucracy placed on them and create additional capacity over the next five years. However, this is also about delivering care in the most appropriate setting as we strengthen general practice, and at the heart of each and every one of those settings is the patient. That can only work if we listen to the concerns and views of all involved in general practice, both staff and patients.

I commend my hon. Friend's tenacity. He has lobbied both the Secretary of State and me to ensure that we know about the challenges at the Pilsley surgery, and that we listen and then continue a conversation that involves me but also, most importantly, the Secretary of State when he and my hon. Friend meet Staffa Health shortly. We will act on what we are hearing.

Question put and agreed to.

9.13 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statement

Monday 10 February 2020

TREASURY

Freeports

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Rishi Sunak):
Today the Government have launched a consultation on freeports policy, allocation and governance.

A freeport is commonly defined as a place inside a country's land border but where different customs rules apply. Countries around the world have successfully used freeports to drive investment and prosperity.

The creation of up to 10 freeports around the UK was a flagship policy in the Government manifesto. Since the election, HM Treasury has moved at pace with the Department for International Trade, the Department for Transport and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to develop an ambitious set of policy proposals. Freeports will boost trade, jobs and investment with a view to building innovative business clusters that benefit the local area and level up the economy across the UK.

At the centre of our new freeports policy is an ambitious new customs model, drawing on international best practice. The model will improve upon both the UK's existing customs facilitations and the freeports the UK previously had. We are also consulting on which tax incentives businesses in freeports could benefit from, potentially including business rates reliefs, capital allowances, research and development tax credits, and reductions in national insurance and stamp duty land tax.

Ports consistently flag that planning regulations restrict their expansion. Both the Government and local planning authorities can support freeports through planning options including permitted development rights and zonal planning, which would help to simplify planning processes, accelerate development in relation to freeports and support the wider regeneration of nearby areas.

Freeports also have the potential to be dynamic environments which enable innovators, start-ups, businesses and regulators to generate and test new ideas and technologies. Freeports could be used as sandboxes in which innovative technology and processes could be trialled.

Freeports will be a cornerstone of the Government plan to level up opportunity across the country, building on existing schemes such as the towns fund and the coastal communities fund, alongside other existing strategies across infrastructure, skills and dedicated trade and investment support. They will allow us to drive forward investment and regeneration in some of the most deprived areas in the UK, delivering highly-skilled jobs for people across the country.

Freeports will be selected through a fair, transparent and competitive process, and will be expected to collaborate closely with key partners across the public and private sectors.

The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government is responsible for place-based strategy and regeneration in England and will lead on the domestic delivery of freeports, working alongside the Department for International Trade, which leads on attracting inward investment across the whole of the UK, and the Department for Transport, which leads on port strategy, policy, relationships and the wider transport network. HMRC will maintain control over the authorisation of customs sites within a freeport, to ensure sites are compliant with necessary security requirements. We will also work closely with the devolved Administrations to support the development of devolved policy proposals which allow the creation of freeports in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We now need to understand how these proposals can most effectively support ports, businesses and communities in all parts of the UK. The "Freeports Consultation: Boosting Trade, Jobs and Investment Across the UK" [CP222] has been laid in Parliament. Copies are available in the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office, and also at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/freeports-consultation>

The Consultation will close on 20 April.

[HCWS103]

Ministerial Corrections

Monday 10 February 2020

TRANSPORT

Foot and Bicycle Journeys

The following are extracts from Transport Questions on 30 January 2020.

11. **Feryal Clark** (Enfield North) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the number of journeys taken by (a) foot and (b) bicycle. [900511]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (George Freeman): As the Minister for the future of transport, I am committed both to creating a framework for UK leadership in transport technology and innovation and to bolder measures for place-based cleaner, greener and healthier transport and decarbonisation. I am delighted that, as a result of the £2 billion that we invested during the previous Parliament, we have seen a 13% increase in cycling and walking, and we are committed to a 100% increase over this Parliament.

Feryal Clark: The Minister will be aware that transport accounts for a higher share of overall emissions than any other sector, so helping people to drive less and cycle more is crucial to tackling the climate crisis. We currently spent £7 per head on cycling infrastructure, but the Walking and Cycling Alliance recommends that we should be spending £17 per head on cycling infrastructure if we are serious about improving cycling.

He will be aware that the Conservatives' pledge to spend £350 million on cycling infrastructure actually reduced that spend to £1.18—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I call the Minister.

George Freeman: As the new Minister for the decarbonisation of transport, I can say that the Government are absolutely committed to this, and we have a cycling Prime Minister who is committed to it. We have announced £350 million for cycling infrastructure. As I have said, we are completely committed over this Parliament to doubling the number of people cycling and walking.

[*Official Report, 30 January 2020, Vol. 670, c. 917.*]

Letter from George Freeman:

Errors have been identified in my responses to the hon. Member for Enfield North (Feryal Clark).

The correct responses should have been:

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (George Freeman): As the Minister for the future of transport, I am committed both to creating a framework for UK leadership in transport technology and innovation and to bolder measures for place-based cleaner, greener and healthier transport and decarbonisation. I am delighted that, as a result of the £2 billion that we invested during the previous Parliament, we have seen a **16% increase in walking since 2015 and a 22% increase in cycling since 2013**, and we are committed to a 100% increase in cycling over this Parliament.

[*Official Report, 30 January 2020, Vol. 670, c. 917.*]

George Freeman: As the new Minister for the decarbonisation of transport, I can say that the Government are absolutely committed to this, and we have a cycling Prime Minister who is committed to it. We have announced £350 million for cycling infrastructure. As I have said, we are completely committed over this Parliament to doubling **cycling and increasing** walking.

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