

**Monday  
9 March 2020**

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No. 36**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 9 March 2020**

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# HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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(FORMED BY THE RT HON. BORIS JOHNSON, MP, DECEMBER 2019)

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## OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF THE  
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND  
[WHICH OPENED 17 DECEMBER 2019]

SIXTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF  
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 673

FIFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2019-2021

### House of Commons

*Monday 9 March 2020*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

#### PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Mr Speaker:** I should inform the House that, after calling Question 1, I will leave the Chamber to represent the House at the Commonwealth service in Westminster Abbey. The Chairman of Ways and Means will take the Chair.

### Oral Answers to Questions

#### WORK AND PENSIONS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

##### Workplace Pensions

1. **Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of trends in the number of people contributing to a workplace pension. [901381]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman):** You have impeccable timing, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Workplace pension participation rates have more than doubled since the introduction of automatic enrolment under the coalition Government in 2012, rising from 42% in 2012 to 85% in 2018. In West Worcestershire, my hon. Friend's constituency, 9,000 eligible jobholders have been automatically enrolled, and thanks are due to the 2,600 local businesses that are supporting them.

**Harriett Baldwin:** This has truly been one of the great policy successes of the last decade, but many would argue that people are still not saving enough for a comfortable retirement. Does the Minister plan to use other nudge techniques, such as automatic uplifts whenever a person gets a pay rise, to encourage saving for old age?

**Guy Opperman:** We have the 2017 review, which we continue to monitor and will implement going forward. Automatic increases are not part of the Government's present plans, but I am actively looking to learn from private sector companies that are carrying out similar initiatives. I welcome my hon. Friend's interest and would be happy to discuss this in more detail.

**Jack Dromey** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Auto-enrolment, the creation of the last Labour Government, has transformed the lives of millions, with 10 million more now saving into a workplace pension, but 5 million people are still not covered because they are too young, because they earn too little or because they are self-employed.

The hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) is right that 8% cannot be the summit of our ambition to ensure security and dignity in retirement. Does the Minister agree that 8% cannot be right, and will he agree to cross-party talks on putting right that wrong?

**Guy Opperman:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, we frankly speak far too often—virtually on a weekly basis—to ensure a cross-party approach to pensions policy. He is right that automatic enrolment was conceived under a Labour Government, implemented under the coalition and brought forward by the Conservatives. I accept that 8% is not enough going forward, but we await the 2017 review, the implementation of that review and further discussions on an ongoing basis.

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): This Government need to demonstrate that they stand on the side of self-employed people. Given that millions of self-employed people are not saving enough for their retirement, what update can the Minister provide the House on the incentives and encouragement we are providing for self-employed people to pay into a pension?

**Guy Opperman:** As a formerly very fat, self-employed jockey and a self-employed white-collar barrister, I fully appreciate the issues concerned. I agree with my right hon. Friend that these are issues we have to address. He will be aware that we are trialling self-employment matters on an ongoing basis with the National Employment Savings Trust and a variety of private sector organisations. We welcome unions and other organisations that wish to be part of that, and it is front and centre of what we are trying to do.

**Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab):** Too many young people do not save for their pensions, so how can the Minister ensure that young workers are better represented in workplace pension schemes?

**Guy Opperman:** The statistics are actually getting better by the minute. In 2012, only 35% of young people aged between 22 and 29 saved into a workplace pension. Now 85% of 22 to 29-year-olds save, but there is more we can do, including for the self-employed. The 8% that is being saved has made a transformational difference, and the opt-out rate among the young is the lowest of all the cohorts.

### Universal Credit

2. **Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con):** What steps she is taking to provide support for people who require additional help transitioning to universal credit. [901382]

6. **Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con):** What steps she is taking to provide support for people who require additional help transitioning to universal credit. [901386]

18. **Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con):** What steps she is taking to provide support for people who require additional help transitioning to universal credit. [901398]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince):** The Department is working with a range of organisations to support claimants who are transitioning to universal credit. Help to Claim, which is being delivered by Citizens Advice, is working effectively for claimants, and we are in the concluding stages of detailed discussions for a second year of delivery.

**Giles Watling:** On a recent visit to my local jobcentre, it was clear that we have excellent staff and that they support universal credit. Will the Minister outline what plans are in place for outreach services for those who might be intimidated by a visit to the jobcentre or, indeed, who want to access support online?

**Will Quince:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question and for visiting his local jobcentre. All jobcentres have wi-fi and computers available for claimants to access the internet. For those who are still unable to access or use digital services, or who are not able to travel, assistance to make and maintain their claim is available via the freephone UC helpline. As I mentioned, Help to Claim offers tailored practical support to help people make a UC claim.

**Sara Britcliffe:** As universal credit is rolled out, I welcome the use of new technology to help applicants, particularly in Hyndburn. What support is available to make sure applicants make the best use of the new systems?

**Will Quince:** Universal credit has been designed to be as quick and easy as possible for the user, ensuring claimants receive money at the earliest available opportunity. It is designed to be a digital-first service, ensuring we make the best use of technology to design a modern and effective working-age welfare system. It is important to note that our UC claimant survey found that 98% of claimants have internet access and have claimed online.

**Karl McCartney:** I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. Is he aware that in Lincoln we are pleased that the claimant rate is as low as 4.4%, which is a vast improvement on what it was when I was first elected in 2010? Will he outline what other initiatives his Department is undertaking, as well as the local jobs fairs that Conservative MPs organise in their constituencies, to assist the 2,500 or so claimants in my constituency?

**Will Quince:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question and for all the work he does in this area, and I welcome him back to his place. In recent years, the Government have made significant investment to improve work incentives, including the reduction in the UC taper rate from 65% to 63% and an extra £1.7 billion a year put back into UC to increase work allowances for working parents and disabled claimants by £1,000 a year from April 2019. That provides a boost to the incomes of the lowest paid and results in 2.4 million families keeping an extra £630 a year of what they earn.

**Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab):** The Prime Minister said last week that any workers who need to self-isolate because of the coronavirus and who are not eligible for statutory sick pay could claim UC. However, people have to meet a work coach at the start of a claim for UC, there is a five-week wait for the first payment and anyone asking for an advance also has to go to a jobcentre to have their identity verified. So how will people who have to self-isolate be able to claim UC?

**Will Quince:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question. As the Prime Minister set out last week, we will introduce, as part of the Department of Health and Social Care's emergency Bill, provisions for statutory sick pay to be made from day one. Employers have been urged to make sure they use their discretion and respect the medical need to self-isolate in making decisions about sick pay. People not eligible to receive sick pay may be able to claim UC and/or contributory employment and support allowance, and staff at our jobcentres are ready to support people affected and can rebook any assessment or appointment that is necessary.

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** That just does not answer the question, does it? Will the Minister therefore outline what happens where someone on UC has to self-isolate but has to go through work searches and is unable to attend a jobcentre? Will he expect that person to be sanctioned if she cannot turn up?

**Will Quince:** Absolutely not, and discretion will, of course, be used.

**Neil Gray:** The Minister said last month that he of course thought that improvements could be made to UC. I agree, so perhaps he could outline some, starting with ending the two-child cap, ending the five-week wait and fully restoring the work allowances. Have those conversations been had between his Department and the Treasury, ahead of the Budget?

**Will Quince:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. We are a Government who listen. Let us look at the improvements that have already been made to UC: increased advances, of up to 100% of a full monthly payment; cutting the taper rate, so people keep more of their salary; increasing the amount someone can earn before their UC is reduced; scrapping the seven-day waiting times; introducing a two-week overlap of housing benefit; and, as of July, we are introducing a two-week overlap of various legacy benefits. There are lots of improvements to be made. They do, of course, require Treasury approval, and I am looking at these in a lot of detail.

**Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con):** Like my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling), I recently visited one of the jobcentres that serves my constituency—it was in Grimsby and, along with the ones in Immingham and Barton-upon-Humber, it serves Cleethorpes. The staff there do an excellent job and they are very positive about UC. Will he congratulate the staff and do what he can to reassure those who are having problems transitioning to UC that the Government will be working to solve any of the existing problems?

**Will Quince:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question and for visiting the jobcentre, and he describes the same feedback that my Front-Bench colleagues and I receive when we visit jobcentres. UC is a modern, flexible, personalised benefit, which reflects the rapidly changing world of work. Conservative Members believe that work should always pay and that we need a welfare system that helps people into work, supports those who need help and is fair to everyone who pays for it. I can certainly thank the staff at that jobcentre for all the work they do.

**Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab):** A major cause of difficulty in transitioning to UC is the five-week delay between applying and being entitled to benefit. The Work and Pensions Committee, at its first meeting last week, chose to make this the subject of its first major inquiry, and I am grateful to the Minister for the conversation we have already had about this. Will he confirm that the Department will do all it can to assist the Select Committee in its inquiry?

**Will Quince:** I thank the Chairman of the Select Committee for his question. I start from the premise that we do not believe anybody has to wait five weeks for a payment under universal credit. Advance payments are available at the beginning of a UC claim and budgeting support is available for anybody who needs extra help. We have the two-week roll-on of housing benefit, and as of July this year we will also have the two-week roll-on of other legacy benefits. I will of course look carefully at the findings of the report by the right hon. Gentleman's Committee.

## Universal Credit and State Pension Payments

3. **Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab):** What steps she is taking to reduce the length of time between a claimant's last universal credit payment and first state pension payment. [901383]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince):** The Government recently announced that anyone reaching state pension age while claiming universal credit can receive a run-on until the end of the assessment period in which they reach state pension age. This removes any potential gap in provision, with such pensioners receiving, on average, an additional £350.

**Mark Tami:** The announcement in the written statement on Thursday was extremely welcome and a great victory for hundreds of thousands of pensioners throughout the country. I thank all Members from all parties who signed early-day motion 129, which highlighted the issue. As it was clearly a bad policy in the first place, what redress will the Government offer to those pensioners who have already suffered loss?

**Will Quince:** First, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for all his work in this policy area. As he rightly pointed out, the change does remove any potential gap in provision, with people reaching state pension age and leaving universal credit receiving an additional £350 on average. I stress that the process is already in operation on an extra-statutory basis, ensuring that nobody loses out on reaching state pension age. Legislation will be amended accordingly later this year.

**Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con):** Will the Minister outline to the House what steps his Department is taking to support those citizens who have fallen into problem debt?

**Will Quince:** Certainly—the breathing space policy is a prime example. If my hon. Friend would like to meet me or, indeed, the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), who is the Minister for Pensions, we would be happy to do so to set out in more detail the action that the Government are taking.

## People with Disabilities: Employment Support

4. **Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con):** What steps she is taking to support people with disabilities into employment. [901384]

11. **James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con):** What steps she is taking to support people with disabilities into employment. [901391]

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson):** The Government are committed to seeing 1 million more disabled people in work between 2017 and 2027. We support disabled people to return to work through our work coaches and disability employment advisers. This is achieved through programmes such as the Work and Health programme, Access to Work and the new intensive personalised employment support programme.



**Angela Richardson:** I welcome the news that 16,000 employers have signed up to participate in the Disability Confident scheme, which is a fantastic initiative that helps employers to unlock the talent of workers with disabilities and is changing attitudes for the better. What plans does my hon. Friend have to expand the scheme further and encourage more businesses to sign up?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I am pleased to report that as of last month we are at 17,353. We use Disability Confident to empower employers of all sizes to share best practice. Only last week, I met all the Health and Work programme providers to look at how they can work with those businesses that have signed up for Disability Confident to offer more opportunities for disabled people.

**James Sunderland:** I thank the Minister for his response. What is being done to support ex-forces personnel, who may have physical or mental disabilities, into employment, perhaps even through the auspices of bringing the armed forces covenant into statute?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I thank my hon. Friend for that important question. The Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince), who is the Minister for Welfare Delivery, has been doing a huge amount of work in leading on that issue. We are making sure that we offer resettlement support; support from our armed forces champions, for which posts there is a £6 million package of support; and early access to the Work and Health programme. The Office for Veterans' Affairs is committed to putting the armed forces covenant on a statutory footing and it will have our full support.

**Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab):** We all want to see more disabled people supported into work, but it is also vital that they receive the support that they are entitled to through employment and support allowance and personal independence payments. It has recently been reported that vulnerable and disabled people who have appealed against decisions to deny them those benefits are being pressured to accept unrecorded telephone deals that pay thousands of pounds less than they may be legally entitled to. The Minister's Department is accused of telling some people that the offer would be withdrawn if they did not accept it within minutes. How can that practice possibly be acceptable?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I thank the hon. Member for raising that issue, which was covered in the media. It is not something that should be happening. We have changed the mandatory reconsideration process so that we can try to support claimants who are challenging a decision to gather the additional written and oral evidence at that stage, rather than their having to wait for the lengthy independent appeal process. Stakeholders and charities are extremely supportive of that process, which is new and making a significant difference, but I am disappointed to hear that in some cases it has not been of the standard that it should be. We will review that.

**Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab):** The trouble with many people who have had brain injuries, particularly traumatic brain injuries, is that the nature of their condition is such that it varies considerably from day to day, week to week. They can suffer from phenomenal lassitude, making it almost impossible for them to get

out of bed—not out of laziness, but because their brain and their body will not work in that way. How can we make sure that everybody who is working for the DWP, whether they are assessing a person for a benefit or trying to help them into work, fully understands brain injury?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I thank the hon. Member who has been a long-standing campaigner in this very important area. We work with claimants, charities and stakeholders in all areas to improve the training and awareness that all our health professionals and frontline staff have, and this is a very important area of work.

### Child Poverty

5. **Mr Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab):** What recent assessment her Department has made of trends in the level of child poverty. [901385]

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** There are 743,000 fewer children in workless households compared with 2010. The evidence shows that work is the best route out of poverty, and a child living in a household where all adults work is about five times less likely to be in poverty than children in households where nobody works.

**Mr Morgan:** I thank the Secretary of State for that reply. The Child Poverty Action Group has published a study that detailed the lives of children who go hungry and the impact on their health, education and friendships. It showed that some were ashamed to invite friends home because they have no food to offer them. When will the Government give child poverty the priority that it needs?

**Dr Coffey:** I am conscious of CPAG's report, which tends to use the relative "after housing costs" poverty measure. However, it is important to say this about the relative element; if we go back just over 10 years, we can see that just having a recession reduces relative poverty. We need to keep focused on what is really happening to families. That is why, if we use the absolute poverty measure, we will see that fewer people are in poverty than was the case 10 years ago. We will continue to work with parents to ensure that they try to earn the amount of money that they need so that they can continue support their children.

**Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con):** Childcare costs place a huge strain on family finances. Will my right hon. Friend outline what help is being given to families with up-front costs of childcare?

**Dr Coffey:** The way universal credit works is for people to have payments in arrears, but 85% of eligible childcare costs are covered, compared with 70% under the legacy system. It is also important to stress that the flexible support fund can be used to help with those sorts of costs, but we need to ensure that people are paying according to their salaries, as opposed to our simply giving grants up front.

**Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab):** According to the Department's own figures, the majority of households hit by the two-child limit are in work but on low incomes. This policy pushes working families further into poverty, when our social security system should be giving people a route out. Will the Minister have a strong

word with the Chancellor and end this pernicious policy in this week's Budget, and why not support the *Daily Mirror's* "Give Me Five" campaign while he is at it?

**Dr Coffey:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that child benefit continues to be paid for all children, as well as an additional amount for any disabled children. He is hitting the wrong note here, as is the *Daily Mirror*, when it comes to the "Give Me Five" campaign, as this is not a targeted policy to reduce child poverty. I simply say that, by keeping the two-child policy, providing support for a maximum of two children ensures fairness between claimants and those who support themselves and their families solely through work.

### Special Rules for Terminal Illnesses: Review

7. **James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What progress her Department has made on the review of special rules for terminal illnesses announced on 11 July 2019. [901387]

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson):** The Department is prioritising a full review in this vital area, evaluating how the benefits system supports people nearing the end of their lives and those with severe conditions. We are making significant progress on this, having engaged with claimants, clinicians and stakeholders to bring forward options.

**James Wild:** I thank the Minister for that update and the Government for taking the initiative in reviewing these rules. My North West Norfolk constituents suffering terminal illnesses want to see the six-month rule scrapped, so will he continue to work with Motor Neurone Disease Association, Marie Curie and others to find a solution that works for all of them?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Absolutely. The reason we commissioned the review was that the status quo needs to change. We recognise that, and I wish to pay tribute to the organisations that have been supporting a thorough review, including the MND Association, Marie Curie, Hospice UK, Macmillan, the Royal College of Nursing, Sue Ryder and NHS England.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Scotland has already shown what can be done when a Government put dignity and respect at the heart of their welfare policies—for example, by removing any time qualification for people who are terminally ill. Why has the Department for Work and Pensions not yet followed Social Security Scotland's lead and what are Ministers waiting for?

**Justin Tomlinson:** My understanding is that that has not yet been changed in Scotland. We are working with our Scottish colleagues and looking at all options. As I have said, our review will conclude shortly. Having consulted extensively with stakeholders, claimants and clinicians, and having looked at the international evidence, we will not be having the status review; we will be looking to improve the case for people towards the end of their life.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Although face-to-face reassessments are very important in the normal processing of claims, do the Government accept that people living with and suffering from terminal diseases should be exempted from the stress that such reassessments impose?

**Justin Tomlinson:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We can typically turn around those applying under the special rules for terminal illness process within six days, ensuring that those who are most in need of support get it as quickly and as swiftly as possible.

**Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that it is inappropriate for terminally ill people who do not qualify for universal credit under the special rules for terminal illness to have to go to their jobcentre to discuss their career when they may not have very long left to live?

**Justin Tomlinson:** As part of this review we are looking at consistency across DWP work, as well as working with the NHS and hospices to try to have a more consistent and sympathetic approach. Where claimants do struggle to get to jobcentres, there are always opportunities for home visits.

### Access to Employment for Ex-offenders

8. **Sir Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Justice on improving access to employment for ex-offenders. [901388]

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** I work closely with my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor as does the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince). The Under-Secretary also works with the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer). We have visited HMP Downview to see at first hand the excellent work of our prison work coaches, of which there are 130 based across the country. We have identified prisons that currently do not have a work coach as part of delivering on our manifesto commitment to break the cycle of crime.

**Sir Robert Neill:** I am grateful for that progress, but can the Secretary of State tell me when we will be in a position where all prisons will have this provision? Will she also tell me what progress there has been in ensuring that all prisoners are able to claim universal credit before the end of their sentence, because it is well established that access to a job or honest, legitimate benefits is one of the best means of preventing reoffending?

**Dr Coffey:** The Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, is working carefully on the pilot scheme that is currently being rolled out in certain Scottish prisons, and we are working with the Prison Service to ensure that universal credit claims are made in a safe way. This includes booking appointments at the jobcentre in advance by using a telephony-based system to avoid the risk of IT crime that could happen as a consequence.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will know that many prisoners have conditions that are not seen as a disability upfront. For example, they might be on the autism spectrum or have special educational needs—indeed, they may well not be numerate or literate. As someone comes up for release from prison, could the Department work to identify the real talents that many of these people have and support them in these?

**Dr Coffey:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that it is primarily the role of the Ministry of Justice to consider these issues and help people to prepare for release. We are keen to have a work coach in every prison so that when people do leave they can get back into the world of work as quickly as possible. This issue is very much front and centre, and the Prime Minister has set up a specific taskforce, which he chairs, to ensure that we try to crack this cycle of crime, especially when people leave prison.

### Support into Self-employment

9. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support people into self-employment; and if she will make a statement. [901389]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies):** Supporting people into self-employment and backing them to grow their businesses is a priority for me, as the employment Minister. Since 2011, the new enterprise allowance has resulted in nearly 131,000 new businesses. We expanded this provision in 2017 to include universal credit claimants with existing businesses and provide them with specialist support to boost their earnings.

**Michael Fabricant:** That is very encouraging news indeed. As my hon. Friend will know, it was Adam Smith, not Napoleon Bonaparte, who said that Britain is a nation of shopkeepers. That is especially so in the west midlands, in that people have small businesses that expand into large businesses. When will she meet the Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street, to discuss how we can stimulate the economy there still further?

**Mims Davies:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising that. In fact, later today in the Chamber the west midlands will be standing proud as we see the debate on the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill. The legacy around jobs and skills from that will be very welcome indeed. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be meeting Andy Street this Thursday; I am sure that everyone will be delighted about that. I recently held a roundtable to redesign how we look at self-employment going forward, listening to people across the country talk about how they can build, create and boost their businesses.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): I am very interested to hear about the Minister's roundtable, because one of the great barriers to people in self-employment, particularly women in freelance-type occupations, is the fact that, unlike employed people, they cannot share their parental leave with their partner. Will she, as part of her roundtable discussions, and discussions with other Ministers, ensure that the Government change the system so that self-employed freelancers can share parental leave?

**Mims Davies:** Women were 41% of those taking up the new enterprise allowance recently, moving from table-top to large businesses. That is brilliant news and it is very encouraging. The hon. Gentleman will be delighted to hear that I was in north Wales to see about pop-up businesses, with many women involved in trying to move from ideas into successful businesses. We are redesigning this at the moment. I would be very happy to meet and hear from him.

15. [901395] **Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Freelance IT contractors in my constituency are already losing contracts because of the complexities and legal risks around IR35. Now that they face periods of self-isolation, possibly for days or weeks on end, the Government urgently need to clarify their entitlement to support from the welfare system, and also generally to outline what the Government are going to do to get them through this difficult period.

**Mims Davies:** I thank my right hon. Friend for raising this issue. I know that other Members across the Chamber will have met constituents around this issue, as indeed I did on Friday. There are over 5 million people who are self-employed at the moment, with a huge amount of people coming into this area, which we are trying to boost, as I mentioned earlier. I am sure that as we go into the Budget, the new Chancellor will be listening to her very carefully.

### Personal Independence Payment Assessments and Outcomes

10. **Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con): What steps she is taking to reduce the time taken for claimants to receive personal independence payment assessments and the outcomes of those assessments. [901390]

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson):** Reducing end-to-end customer journey times for PIP claimants is a priority for the DWP. We continue to work closely with both assessment providers, amending and refining current processes.

**Dr Evans:** Constituents in my patch of Bosworth can face up to 42 weeks for clearance of their case—that is, processing and determining the tribunal hearing either in Leicester or Coventry. The national average is 30 weeks. What steps can the DWP and the Ministry of Justice take to ensure that the process is swift and that claimants are kept up to date during this time?

**Justin Tomlinson:** Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service has developed a new digital system, and it is increasing the number of judges. This goes hand in hand with our changes to the mandatory reconsideration stage whereby we are proactively contacting claimants who are seeking to appeal their decision to see whether we can help to identify additional written or oral evidence to correct the decision at that stage, reducing the number of claimants who then need to enter the independent appeal process.

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): As the Minister will be aware, PIP assessments can be incredibly stressful and traumatic for claimants. That is why I am working with Disabled People Against



Cuts to provide recording equipment for anyone living in Hull West and Hessle who is going for an assessment. But it should not be down to individual MPs to provide that. So will the Minister look at providing recording equipment for every PIP assessment that takes place right across the country to improve transparency and fairness?

**Justin Tomlinson:** The hon. Member has raised a very fair point. We have been piloting both audio and video recording of assessments. That pilot will be coming to a close soon. I certainly have a huge amount of sympathy around making sure that there is provision in place for audio recording for claimants.

### State Pension Age: Life Expectancy

12. **Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): What assessment she has made of the implications for her policies on the state pension age of trends in the level of life expectancy. [901392]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman):** The Government are committed in legislation to undertake a review of state pension age every six years. The 2017 independent review was by John Cridland. The next review will be conducted by 2023 and will give consideration to the latest life expectancy projections. The latest Office for National Statistics projections of cohort life expectancy, published in January 2020, showed that it is projected to continue to increase, and the WHO Global Health Observatory data show that people in the United Kingdom have better life expectancies than European or world averages.

**Joanna Cherry:** The new Marmot review has shown that a decade of Tory policies, from cruel benefit cuts to the unfair treatment of the WASPI women, have stalled life expectancy and increased the years spent in ill health for the poorest in our society. Which Tory policy would the Minister reverse first to begin to undo that damage?

**Guy Opperman:** I am afraid that the hon. and learned Lady is wrong. I will quote from the Marmot review, which says on page 13 that

“Increases in life expectancy have slowed since 2010”,

but then adds at page 15 that

“Life expectancy at birth has been increasing since the beginning of the 20th century.”

### Claimants with Disabilities: Number of Assessments

13. **Mark Fletcher** (Bolsover) (Con): What steps she is taking to reduce the number of assessments undertaken by claimants with disabilities. [901393]

21. **Mark Jenkinson** (Workington) (Con): What steps she is taking to reduce the number of assessments undertaken by claimants with disabilities. [901402]

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson):** As our manifesto set out, we are committed to reducing the number of assessments that disabled people face. That will build on improvements already made, including reducing the frequency of

assessments for those with severe or progressive conditions and removing regular reviews for PIP claimants over pension age.

**Mark Fletcher:** I thank the Minister for his response. A number of constituents with severe conditions that are not reasonably expected to improve have contacted me with concerns about the current process. What reassurance can he give my constituents that their predicament will be given consideration as part of any future changes that the Department makes?

**Justin Tomlinson:** In the coming months, we will launch a Green Paper that will look at claimants' experience, trust in the process and allowing claimants to lead full and independent lives. We will be doing a full review, working with stakeholders, claimants and charities to identify further areas of improvement on top of what we have already done.

**Mark Jenkinson:** I welcome the Department's announcement last week that it will create a single, integrated service for PIP applicants and users. Can my hon. Friend confirm that that will make the application process much smoother for my constituents in Workington?

**Justin Tomlinson:** It will give us greater flexibility to try out new ideas that will be identified in the Green Paper, ensuring that we put claimants first.

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Before Errol Graham was found dead after his employment and support allowance was stopped, he wrote a letter to the Department for Work and Pensions, pleading with officials. He said:

“Please judge me fairly. I am... overshadowed by depression.”

That letter was revealed to the public weeks after the National Audit Office published a damning report showing that the Department has investigated 69 suicides linked to social security, which are just the tip of the iceberg. Will the Secretary of State finally make a statement on that report, and will she now commit to an independent inquiry into the deaths related to social security?

**Justin Tomlinson:** The Secretary of State is absolutely passionate about the need to make improvements in this area and is leading very important work. On the specific point of the NAO report, we are working at pace to drive forward improvements and learn the lessons from any cases. We have already improved support and guidance for staff on how best to support vulnerable people. The NAO report notes action that the DWP is already taking, but we are now carefully considering the NAO's findings and how they can help to further improve our excellence plan.

**Mike Amesbury:** That passion certainly does not seem to be demonstrated in recent tribunal cases—the Department for Work and Pensions has lost more employment tribunals for disability discrimination than any other employer in Britain. Is the Secretary of State shocked by her Department's own disability tribunal record, given that it should be, as the Minister said, leading by example? What will the Secretary of State do to rectify that?

**Justin Tomlinson:** Fair and respectful treatment is a right, and we do not tolerate discrimination in any form within the workplace, including within ours. We have instigated a review of our processes and actions to ensure that all employees are treated fairly and with respect. I am proud that, as a Department, since 2014, when 6.8% of our workforce were identified as having a disability, we are now at 15.3%, which is well above the civil service average of 11.7%. We are keen to be a fully inclusive and diverse workforce to benefit from their full potential.

**Paul Maynard** (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): Many of my constituents reduce the number of assessments they face by discontinuing their applications themselves, because they find it far too traumatic to have to repeat their life story over and over again to every public body they come across. When somebody dies, the Government have a “Tell me once” principle to help bereaved families cope by only notifying a public entity on a single occasion. As the Minister draws up his Green Paper, can he look at whether we can have one single source of truth for each claimant to reduce the trauma they face in going through this process?

**Justin Tomlinson:** My hon. Friend is absolutely spot-on. This comes up time and again, and it is driving our desire to bring forward the integrated assessment: where a claimant has already secured sufficient evidence, with the claimant’s permission, and only with the claimant’s permission, that information can be used to increase the chance of a paper-based review and reduce the need for a full face-to-face assessment for other benefits.

**Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): For a decade, disabled people and disability organisations such as the Disability Benefits Consortium have highlighted the absurdity of testing people with learning disabilities and progressive conditions every six months, as well as the stress for them and the cost to the taxpayer and the NHS. The Minister says those assessments will be reduced. When can they expect them to be reduced?

**Justin Tomlinson:** We have already made changes—for example, in the PIP process, where we no longer routinely assess those of pensioner age and those with the most severe conditions—and that work will continue to be brought forward as our knowledge of different conditions improves. As part of the ambitious and exciting Green Paper we are bringing forward in the coming months, claimants, charities and stakeholders can further identify how we can make the claimant experience much better. I know that the hon. Member has done a huge amount of work in this area, and I hope he will contribute to the Green Paper.

#### **People with Disabilities: Financial Assistance**

14. **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): If she will hold discussions with her Cabinet colleagues on ensuring that people with disabilities receive financial assistance in addition to welfare payments for costs related to their disability. [901394]

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** I commend my right hon. Friend for his passion and work on this particularly important issue. The year

2020 is crucial for our work on disability with not only the Green Paper, but the cross-Government national strategy. Of course, I will continue to speak to my Cabinet colleagues about supporting people with disabilities into work, making them wealthier in their own right and helping them live fulfilling, independent lives.

**Robert Halfon:** What assistance are the Government giving to apprentices with disabilities to help them with their travel costs or any other costs they may incur, and what are the Government doing—specifically and currently—to get more people with disabilities to do apprenticeships?

**Dr Coffey:** My right hon. Friend may not be aware of this, but people with disabilities undertaking an apprenticeship can receive assistance from the Access to Work scheme to overcome workplace barriers. In addition, our flexible support fund can support eligible claimants with a variety of the costs associated with starting work, whether initial travel costs or, indeed, things like clothing.

#### **Working-age Social Security Benefits: Four-year Freeze**

16. **Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): What assessment her Department has made of the effect of the four-year freeze in working-age social security benefits on levels of poverty. [901396]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince):** The benefit freeze will end next month, and working age benefits will rise with inflation. We will spend an additional £1 billion on working age benefits in 2020-21.

**Kirsten Oswald:** A 1.7% increase in working age benefits does not make up for the damage caused by the four-year freeze: affected benefits and tax credits will be about 6% lower in 2020-21. If austerity was really over, the UK Government would be making up the shortfall. Has the Secretary of State asked the Treasury to make up that shortfall?

**Will Quince:** As I have just said, the Government have already announced that working age benefits will rise in line with inflation next month. As the hon. Lady will know, the Secretary of State has a statutory obligation each autumn to conduct a review of pension and benefit rates for the following year. This review will begin in October for implementation in the following April.

#### **State Pension Age Equalisation: Financial Support for Women**

17. **Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): What plans she has to provide financial support to women affected by the equalisation of the state pension age. [901397]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman):** Changes to state pension age were made by successive Governments from 1995, including the Labour Government from 1997 to 2010, and addressed the long-standing inequality in pension age. This includes the Pensions Act 2007, which I believe the hon. Lady supported. Women continue to have the



same eligibility for support from the welfare system as men with the same date of birth, and this country presently pays more in welfare support than ever before.

**Mrs Hodgson:** Approximately 6,100 of my constituents have been affected by the equalisation of the state pension age, and many have told me of the financial hardship that they and their families are suffering because of the change and their inability to work any longer. Last week, there was another lobby of Parliament that I, together with lots of people who will be in the House today, attended—it was packed. Another one is coming up soon. These women stressed to me last week that they are not going away and are not going to give up, so what is the Minister going to do to give some justice to those amazing women?

**Guy Opperman:** The hon. Lady will be aware that full restitution would cost something in the region of £215 billion and that a case was before the courts last year: on all grounds, these ladies lost their case. Clearly, that matter is subject to appeal, but the case was lost in respect of every ground, including notice.

### Topical Questions

T1. [901406] **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** The coronavirus is currently dominating my work at the DWP. The Department is fully prepared for all eventualities and has conducted extensive planning against reasonable worst-case scenarios. I have been in discussions with the Chancellor and will continue to work across Government to prepare. If claimants cannot attend their jobcentre appointment in person because of self-isolation, work coaches can exercise discretion, so claimants should engage with them—they will not be sanctioned as long as they let us know before the appointment.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out last week, nobody should be penalised for doing the right thing. That is why the Government safety net also extends to those who are self-employed or who work in the gig economy. They can apply for universal credit or new-style ESA, and advances are available for universal credit immediately. These are exceptional circumstances and we will support workers to do the right thing for the protection of their health and public health.

**Vicky Foxcroft:** The local housing allowance is designed to cover the cheapest third of rents, but in Lewisham claimants face on average a shortfall of £40.22 per week between their rent and their benefits, and that is the case up and down the country. Has the Minister made any representations to the Chancellor ahead of the Budget to ensure that the local housing allowance once again reflects the true cost of renting?

**Dr Coffey:** LHAs will of course go up by 1%; I signed that off last year. The hon. Lady will also be aware of the discretionary housing payments that we have been making widely available to councils across the country. But let us face the reality: the Mayor should be building more homes in London.

T2. [901407] **Felicity Buchan** (Kensington) (Con): What steps is the Department taking to enhance the workplace savings programme for my constituents in Kensington?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman):** As my hon. Friend will be aware, this was introduced in 2012 and has been a cross-party success story. It is fantastically good news for her constituents in Kensington, where 39,000 residents are signed up to an 8% automatic enrolment. Due thanks need to be given to the 5,300 local businesses who are supporting individual constituents, who are receiving 8% per annum workplace savings.

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): The Government tried to justify introducing the new bereavement support payment in April 2017 on the grounds that it modernises support, but couples who are not married or not in a civil partnership are not eligible. Last month, the High Court in England found that that is incompatible with human rights legislation and discriminates against children of unmarried parents. The Prime Minister has admitted that that is an injustice, so when will the Government put it right?

**Dr Coffey:** This is one of the issues on my agenda for us to take forward a consistent and coherent approach, recognising the issue of cohabitants and the impact this can have on children. We are working on particular solutions.

T3. [901408] **Mr David Davis** (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): May I take up the Secretary of State on her comment at the beginning on sanctions in the context of coronavirus? Currently, jobseeker's allowance requires claimants to attend jobcentres in person every two weeks and prove that they have been looking for work—they must show evidence that they have been applying for jobs and going to interviews.

Claimants can be sanctioned if they fail to attend the jobcentre, turn down a training course or fail to go to an interview. The Secretary of State said that the sanctions will not be applied if jobcentres are informed in advance, but the process of going through self-isolation may be shocking to the people involved; it may be disorganising what may already be disorganised lives. Can the Secretary of State tell the House that the Department will retain sufficient flexibility to ensure that people will not be punished for doing what the Government recommend?

**Dr Coffey:** I have tried to make clear to the House that people will not be penalised for doing the right thing. It is important that people have that conversation with their work coach. As I emphasised to the House, work coaches can exercise discretion but the important thing is a claimant's ongoing conversation with their work coach.

T4. [901409] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I am not sure that anyone will be desperately reassured by the idea of exercising discretion on something quite so fundamental. The Government need to be much more robust in their advice. When will that advice be published for jobseekers, advisers and those whose job it is to scrutinise what the Government do?

**Dr Coffey:** We are working, right across Government, on a number of different scenarios. We are preparing guidance carefully and I assure the hon. Gentleman that rapid progress is being made. The Government will always be guided by the advice of our chief medical officer and the chief scientific adviser, particularly on self-isolation.

T8. [901413] **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): From initial submission to award of benefit, how long does the average personal independence payment application take? Will the Government reduce the time period?

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson):** The average time is 14 weeks. We continue to review the process. As I set out earlier, with the forthcoming Green Paper we will be looking to identify further ways to improve the claims experience and make it easier to get supportive evidence that increases the likelihood of a paper-based review without the need for a face-to-face assessment.

T5. [901410] **Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): I have a constituent who cannot walk without aid and has severe depression currently going through the appeals process. That has already taken months, during which time no payments have been awarded to them. My constituent has had to rely on handouts from friends simply to survive. What advice can the Secretary of State give my constituent, or any other person in that situation, to help resolve the situation?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I thank the hon. Member for raising this matter. If he wishes to share the details of the case with me afterwards, I will be happy to look into it. Without the details, I can only give a broad answer. We are doing additional work on the management reconsideration stage to ensure we can help all claimants gather the additional written or oral evidence that could help to change the claim, so that they are less likely to be in the long independent appeal process.

T9. [901414] **Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): Many of my constituents are taking advantage of the online application for advance payments of universal credit. I recognise that it is a useful facility, but no bank would lend to people in this manner. Will the Minister work to ensure that claimants receive proper debt advice before requesting an advance and look to significantly extend the repayment period?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince):** Advances are an important tool to help the most vulnerable claimants receive the money they need to live on. As part of the application process, proposed repayments and advance payment are explained. All claimants are advised to request a level of advance that is manageable when considering the repayments required.

We have announced that from October 2021 the repayment period will extend to 16 months, but I am very sympathetic to extending it further and am looking at that in detail.

T6. [901411] **Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): Evidence from Macmillan Cancer Support shows the availability of home visits for people suffering from cancer and

claiming universal credit varies considerably across the country, with some waiting up to a year. Even before the advent of coronavirus, people with cancer should not really have attended a jobcentre if they were undergoing chemotherapy and were at risk of infection. What advice will the Minister give on that? Will he publish the figures on the availability of home visits for universal credit across the country?

**Justin Tomlinson:** I thank the hon. Member for raising this issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince), who is the Minister with responsibility for welfare delivery, and I regularly meet and work with Macmillan, which is a brilliant organisation. I am disappointed to hear that it feels it is proving too difficult for some claimants to access a home visit. We will take up that matter and look into it.

**Anthony Mangnall** (Totnes) (Con): I recently met jobcentre and citizens advice bureau employees who expressed their grave concern about personal independence payment assessors. Can the Minister give me an assurance that the scheme's assessors are of the highest calibre and able to judge each case on a proper basis?

**Justin Tomlinson:** We strive for 100% accuracy with high quality, objective, fair and accurate assessments. All our assessors are health professionals and experts in understanding the effects of a health condition on an individual's daily life. They are occupational therapists, level one nurses, physiotherapists, paramedics or doctors with at least two years' experience. We continue to monitor performance, share best practice, and work with claimants, stakeholders and charities to improve training and guidance.

T10. [901415] **Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): The Health Secretary has said that changes will be made to provide financial support to workers currently ineligible for statutory sick pay. Will the Minister confirm that those changes will include emergency legislation to remove the £118-a-week threshold that currently excludes 1.8 million low-paid workers from receiving sick pay—a measure supported by both the TUC and the Confederation of British Industry?

**Dr Coffey:** The hon. Lady will be aware that the £118 a week is an average over eight weeks, and it will swing about whether people are eligible or not. I have tried to make it clear to the House, reinforcing the comments of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Health Secretary, that people who are working will not be penalised because they cannot work in this regard. We continue to work across Government to bring forward the necessary legislation or other changes required.

**Danny Kruger** (Devizes) (Con): It was encouraging to hear about the work coaches programme in prison. Do Ministers agree about the importance of independent civil society organisations, as well as DWP staff, in supporting prisoners who are preparing for release? Will they work with the Ministry of Justice to ensure that more prisons can give access to local community groups?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies):** I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue. When it comes to jobs, community progression and our jobcentres, working through outreach

with civil society and local charities is absolutely vital. My hon. Friend in the other place, the good Baroness Stedman-Scott, is very keen to continue doing this, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger) is very keyed up on it. We will not waste time and we will get on with it as soon as possible.

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): The gap between local housing allowance rates and average rents for a two-bed property in Southwark is now over £1,000 a month, and raising the local housing allowance in line with the consumer prices index will do almost nothing to close the gap. By continuing to ignore the issue, the Secretary of State is continuing to contribute to entirely unnecessary homelessness. If the Government are serious about ending homelessness, will the Secretary of State urge her right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to use this week's Budget to re-link the LHA to the bottom third of rents?

**Will Quince:** As the Secretary of State said a moment ago, local housing allowance rates are not intended to meet all rents in all areas. The LHA is designed to ensure a fair balance between supporting vulnerable people to meet their housing costs and public spending. From April 2020, LHA rates will be increased by inflation, but I join the Secretary of State in urging the Mayor of London to do far more in terms of supply.

**Paul Maynard** (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): In 2015, our election manifesto rightly committed us to halving the disability employment gap. By 2019, unfortunately, we had watered that down merely to reducing it. 2015 was also the last year that we published Fulfilling Potential indicators, allowing us to monitor the gap. As the Minister pulls together his new national disability strategy, I urge him to reinvent the wheel and provide robust statistical indicators to allow us to monitor the narrowing of the gap.

**Justin Tomlinson:** In the last six years alone, there have been 1.4 million more disabled people in work; in the last two years alone, there have been 404,000 more disabled people in work, bringing the figure to 54.1%—a 9.9 percentage point increase in the last six years alone. The disability employment gap has fallen by 5.6 percentage

points in the last six years. We are making progress and we continue to be ambitious about unlocking everybody's potential.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State ensure that during the coronavirus epidemic, any social security claimant who fails to attend a work capability or work-related activity assessment will also not have their social security support stopped?

**Dr Coffey:** I have tried to make it clear to the House, and will again, that—as has been said quite often—people who do the right thing, whether they are required to self-isolate or are actively ill, will not be penalised for doing so.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): My constituent, Jennifer Bell, was made redundant following the collapse of Thomas Cook, but secured a job with Jet2 late last year, which fell through given the DWP's refusal to pay for a training course. She has now landed a job with Virgin Atlantic, which involves five and a half weeks' training in Crawley. However, her application to the flexible support fund at Renfrew jobcentre for accommodation costs has been denied, despite other former colleagues having secured funding at other jobcentres. Will the Minister please look into this discrepancy for Jennifer?

**Mims Davies:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue, which came through to us in jobcentres after the collapse of Thomas Cook. I am happy to take it away as a learning point. We are doing all we can on the Flybe issue, and I urge anybody affected to go to their local jobcentre and ask for support and benefits.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Four out of 10 older people say that the TV is their main source of company, yet as a result of Government decisions, millions of older pensioners are about to lose their free TV licences. The Budget is the last opportunity for the Chancellor to step in and overturn this unfair policy. Will the Secretary of State urge him to do so?

**Guy Opperman:** As the right hon. Lady knows only too well, this is a BBC decision. The Government remain very disappointed at its decision and urge it to think again.



## Coronavirus

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Before I call the shadow Health Secretary to ask his urgent question about the coronavirus, I draw to the House's attention the fact that it is being streamed live with accompanying British Sign Language interpretation, which means that people will have to be very careful what they say and how they wave their hands around during this important piece of business.

3.31 pm

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care if he will update the House on the coronavirus outbreak.

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock):** The coronavirus outbreak continues to advance around the world. The number of cases in China and South Korea keeps rising but at a slowing rate, but the outbreak in Iran, Italy, Switzerland and now France and Germany is growing. In Italy alone, we have seen 1,492 more cases overnight and 102 more deaths. Here in the UK, as of this morning, there were 319 confirmed cases. Very sadly, this now includes four confirmed deaths. I entirely understand why people are worried and concerned, and we send our condolences to the families.

The UK response is guided by our four-point action plan: we continue to work to contain the virus, but we are also taking action to delay its impact, to fund research and to mitigate its consequences. Throughout, our approach is guided by the science; that is the bedrock on which we base all our decisions. Our plan sets out what we are prepared to do, and we will make the right choice of which action to pursue at the right moment. The scientific advice is clear that acting too early creates its own risks, so we will do what is right to keep people safe. Guided by science, we will act at the right time, and we will be clear and open about our actions and the reasons for them. These are the principles that underpin the very best response to an epidemic such as this.

On research, I can report to the House that we have made available a further £46 million to find a vaccine and develop more rapid diagnostic tests, and we will continue to support the international effort. Here at home, the NHS is well prepared, with record numbers of staff, including nurses and doctors. I thank all those involved for their work so far. The number of calls to NHS 111 has increased—we have now added an extra 700 people to support that effort—and 111 online is now dealing with more inquiries than the voice calls.

To date, Public Health England has tested nearly 25,000 people, and the time taken to test is being reduced, as we are bringing in a new system for faster results, but of course responding to coronavirus will take a national effort; everyone must play their part. Of course, that means Government, and it also means everyone washing their hands more often and following public health advice, but there is much more we can all do, through both volunteering and supporting the most vulnerable. We will shortly introduce legislative options to help people and services to tackle the outbreak. The Bill will be temporary and proportionate, with measures that will last only as long as necessary in line with

clinical advice. I can also report that over the weekend, we initiated action to help 120 passengers on the Grand Princess cruise ship off the coast of California to return home.

We will stop at nothing to get our response right.

**Jonathan Ashworth:** Our thoughts are naturally with the loved ones who have sadly died of covid-19. Let me also record, again, our thanks and gratitude to our hard-working NHS and Public Health England staff.

May I press the Secretary of State a little further? He will know that we have called repeatedly for an emergency funding package for our NHS, he will know that the NHS is short of 100,000 staff, and he will know that critical care beds were at 81% capacity during the week for which the latest figures are available. The Chancellor has said that the NHS will receive whatever it needs. Does the Secretary of State agree that in this Wednesday's Budget we need to see significantly more resources for the NHS, not just rhetoric?

Scaling up and freeing up capacity in the NHS is now urgent. What is being done to scale up intensive care beds in the NHS, what is being done to expand access to the oxygen and ventilation machines that will be needed, and what is the current capacity of extra corporeal membrane oxygenation beds? We welcome the distribution of personal protective equipment to NHS staff, but does the Secretary of State agree that GPs and social care staff also need access to that equipment?

Those in receipt of social care are some of the most vulnerable, and could be affected extremely badly by this virus. Indeed, many who work in social care are low paid, and if they have to go on sick leave there are huge implications for the delivery of social care. What advice has been given to social care providers and, indeed, local authorities to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected, and what plans are in place to protect staff and increase the number in the social care sector?

Public health directors are expected to play a leading role in local preparations. They need to make decisions about deploying staff—Public Health England, for example, has asked for staff to be seconded—yet they still do not know their public health allocations for the next financial year, which will start in three weeks' time. We are begging the Secretary of State: please tell local directors of public health what their Budget is for this coming April.

We are still officially in the containment stage. At some point, we presume, we will need to move into the delay stage, when we understand that social distancing measures will be necessary. Many of our constituents are now asking—and I think it would benefit the House if the Secretary of State could explain to them—why we are not yet considering more home working, whether we should be asking those over 65 to isolate themselves, whether we should be cancelling larger events, and whether those returning from northern Italy, for instance, should be quarantined. I think it would help our constituents if the Secretary of State ran through the medical advice, although I understand why he has made the decisions that he has made.

Can the Secretary of State also confirm that once we move into the phase in which measures of this magnitude are proposed, he will come to the House, explain why that has happened, and allow Members to question him?

He has hinted, or suggested, that we will need emergency legislation for the mitigation stage. As a responsible Opposition, we would like to sit down with him in order to understand the content of that legislation, because we want to work on a cross-party basis; but let me leave him in no doubt that we also want statutory sick pay for all from day one. Asking people to wait five weeks for universal credit is not a serious solution.

Will the Secretary of State update the House on food supplies and the conversations that he has had with supermarkets? Can he reassure us that our constituents do not need to be panic-buying, as we saw people doing on social media in some parts of the country over the weekend? Finally, does he agree that whatever happens, we must find a way for Parliament to continue to hold Ministers to account so that we can ask questions on behalf of our constituents? However, we continue to offer to work constructively with the Government, because the public health interest and the safety of our constituents must always come first.

**Matt Hancock:** Let me start by concurring with what the hon. Gentleman said about the legislation. It should be taken through on a cross-party basis. I should of course be happy to talk to him about the proposals in that legislation, and also to ensure that the clinicians are able to explain why they are necessary and proportionate. I am grateful for the tone that he has taken throughout, recognising that our responses are led and guided by the science.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the NHS and its preparedness. There are record numbers of nurses and doctors, as I said. The 8,700 increase in the number of nurses over the past year is welcome in this context. We are, as he said, scaling up intensive care beds, and making sure that we have as much availability of ventilation equipment and, crucially, the skilled and trained people to use it, because ventilation equipment, without trained people, is dangerous. On that subject, we are making sure that we have the oxygen needed to go into those ventilation kits, working with oxygen suppliers to make sure that that is available.

The hon. Gentleman also asked whether GPs would have access to the protective equipment that they need, and the answer is yes. We have stockpiles of protective equipment and, again, we will release it at the right time. I am working closely with NHS England to make sure that that happens.

The hon. Gentleman asked about social care. He is absolutely right to draw attention to the importance of making sure that the staff in social care are well enough supported, including if they are sick and, critically, because many people in residential social care are some of the most vulnerable. Those living in the community in receipt of social care are likely to be vulnerable, whether because of prior health conditions or because they are elderly, or both. That is an area of significant attention, and we will update the existing guidance this week with further information for social care providers.

The hon. Gentleman asked about public health budgets which, of course, are going up. He also asked about home working and the cancellation of large events. We are not at this stage proposing the cancellation of mass events, because we are following the scientific advice that that is not what is proposed at this stage. Home working and flexible working are things that, in many cases,

are advocated anyway. People will make their own decisions as to when that is appropriate. What we are saying from the Government point of view is that people should follow the public health advice so that, for instance, if they are returning from an affected area and they have symptoms they should stay at home, and that means home working. Over the weekend we added northern Italy to the list of places to which the Foreign Office does not recommend travel except in exceptional circumstances. We recommend that people returning from northern Italy self-isolate if they are symptomatic.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the food supply. We are confident that food supply will continue, even in our reasonable worst-case scenario. We have been talking to the supermarkets for some time about this scenario. I appreciate that on Friday there was discussion about whether every single supermarket executive had been involved in those talks. If any further supermarket executive wants to be involved in those conversations they should get in contact, but those conversations have been ongoing, and it is important, especially as we ask more people to self-isolate and stay at home, that we can ensure that we get supplies that are needed to the people we are asking to stay at home.

The hon. Gentleman asked about statutory sick pay, and I can confirm that we are proposing to put changes to statutory sick pay in the legislation, and I am happy to go through the details with him in the talks that I mentioned at the beginning of my response.

Finally, on Parliament, of course, this is a matter for the whole House. I know that the Commission met this morning, and I think that parliamentary scrutiny of decisions of the magnitude that we are having to take in response to coronavirus and their novel nature is incredibly important, and I will do all that I can to ensure that Parliament remains open.

**Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con):** I commend the Health Secretary for the way in which he is handling the crisis and ask him to reflect on what we now feel we have learned from the situation in China, given that yesterday was the first day when reported new cases in the UK exceeded reported new cases in China. The chief medical officer told the Select Committee that he hoped that a smaller proportion of the population in the UK would get the virus, given what we can learn from what happened in China, but one of the reasons for growing concern among our constituents is that the only number out there is the 80% reasonable worst-case scenario. Is it not time for the Health Secretary to share his central estimate of what proportion of the UK population he thinks will get the virus, even though we would all understand that that estimate might change over the passage of time?

**Matt Hancock:** I pay tribute to the Chair of the Select Committee for the way in which he has handled this—for instance, in demonstrating the need for transparency in the questioning of the chief medical officer last week. I will take away his point on the need for a central estimate. The figures out there relating to the proportion of people who will get the virus are a reasonable worst-case scenario. On the central estimate, there are still things that we do not know about the spread of the virus through China—in particular, whether the degree to which the slowing of the increase in cases in China is because the virus has reached a large proportion

[*Matt Hancock*]

of the population and there is a large proportion who are not symptomatic, which would mean that the mortality rate was lower than otherwise thought; or whether the significant measures that the Chinese have taken are having a significant effect, and that therefore, as and when they are lifted, the virus will continue to spread. Either of those options is possible, and we do not know which one it is, but whichever it is, the approach that we are taking in the UK is the right response to both of those scenarios.

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): There seems to have been some media confusion in reports that the move from the contain phase to the delay phase will involve an instant flick-of-the-switch moment. Will the Secretary of State assist us by confirming that that is not the case and that any move will involve a phased transition? Another area of particular vulnerability is the UK prison system, which is extremely short-staffed and stretched. What measures will he be taking following reports of riots and deaths among inmates in Italy's prisons to ensure that our prisons remain under control during what will be a period of heightened tensions and frustrations as restrictive measures are introduced? Will he also confirm that he is aware of the latest workplace advice from Health Protection Scotland, which was published today and which urges routine cleaning of phones and keypads and says that food should not be left open for people to share? Will his Department be making a similar recommendation for England?

**Matt Hancock:** The hon. Member is absolutely right to suggest that the transition to the delay phase is indeed that: it is a transition. We will not give up hope of containing this disease while we can still take containment actions, and many of the actions that are needed to contain it are also effective for delaying. Of course, the primary action is that everyone should wash their hands, but there is much more than that. He asked about the advice from Health Protection Scotland. We are working very closely with HPS, and Public Health England will shortly be bringing forward further updated guidance that we have been working on over the weekend, not just on social care, as I mentioned earlier, but more broadly, including for businesses, employees and others.

**Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. He will know that the number of cases in Hertfordshire is now into double figures, and that it is a county with some very large businesses with an international footprint, as well as many commuters going into London. Has the time come for discussions with those large businesses on how to reduce the number of international visits that are made, perhaps through more teleconferencing, and also on how to allow more people to work from home when possible and to reduce the number of visits backwards and forwards that might be affecting the spread?

**Matt Hancock:** An awful lot of companies and other employers are taking these steps. Teleconferencing is usually cheaper and also better for the environment than travel, so there are good reasons to use it anyway.

**Ms Harriet Harman** (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): The Secretary of State made it clear in his answer to the urgent question that parliamentary accountability is

fundamental—that is evidenced by so many Members on both sides of the House rising to raise myriad issues—yet despite that acknowledgment we are hearing reports that after Easter the House might be suspended until September. Will he give an undertaking that that will not be the case? Will he recognise that, as a big organisation of 650 MPs and thousands of staff, we can play our part in containment without opting for the nuclear option of closing down accountability altogether? Other measures could be considered, such as using Westminster Hall on a UQ basis, so that we have continuous accountability for what the Government are doing through Parliament, albeit in a different form.

**Matt Hancock:** I have not seen those specific reports, but I know that the House of Commons Commission met this morning. Parliamentary accountability is incredibly important. I will be doing all that I can to ensure that Parliament stays open through this process, and that we follow the clinical advice on how that can happen so that we keep that parliamentary accountability. It is a decision for the House, but my position and that of the Government is clear.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The Government are absolutely right to be putting a lot of public money into research on a possible vaccine, but the Secretary of State will know that research is no good unless we can produce vaccine at scale, and this country is not great at doing that. What can he do to ensure that we grow indigenous capacity very quickly so that the public, and particularly key workers in our health service, do not have to wait in line when a vaccine becomes available?

**Matt Hancock:** My right hon. Friend raises an important point. We do have significant vaccine capabilities, and not only in research, where we are world-class, but in some production, for instance in Hamilton in Scotland. The broader point is that investment in the whole production chain and not just research is critical.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The Government have outlined emergency legislation that will extend new powers to the Welsh Government. Council representatives I have spoken with are concerned that there are currently legal obstacles hindering the swift deployment of emergency staff, for example in relation to vehicle insurance and limits on working hours. That applies particularly to social care staff, of whom there is a shortage in Wales and, I believe, across the UK. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Welsh Government to ensure that there are clear guidelines for emergency implementation in the care sector?

**Matt Hancock:** We have ongoing discussions with the Welsh Government. For instance, the Welsh Government joined the Cobra meeting this morning—in fact, they have been present at all the Cobra meetings—and we have had very good engagement on the Bill. I will look into the two specific points that the right hon. Lady has raised and will talk to my Welsh colleagues about them.

**Dr Caroline Johnson** (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): May I thank the Health Secretary for the way he is managing this crisis, and for how frequently he has



come to the House to answer questions? Pregnancy is a time of great joy, but in the context of coronavirus it can also be a time of great worry. Is there any specific advice from the chief medical officer for ladies who are expecting or who are considering starting a family?

**Matt Hancock:** I am glad to say that the evidence so far indicates that there is not a particularly raised concern. Nevertheless, I entirely understand the level of worry that getting coronavirus might cause somebody who is pregnant, so we are researching this very carefully.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): A study of 52 critically ill patients at Jinyintan Hospital in Wuhan has found that more than two thirds required invasive breathing support, and last Monday, as the Secretary of State will know, the World Health Organisation urged all countries to stock up on ventilators. Given that around 5% of those with coronavirus might require critical care, what is his current best estimate of the number of ventilators that would be required to meet that demand, bearing in mind his earlier point about having sufficient staff to operate the ventilators?

**Matt Hancock:** I am very happy to write to the right hon. Gentleman with the specific answer to his question, but the general answer is more, and, frankly, as many as possible. We are buying ventilators—we have a commercial strategy on that—and, of course, we are training people to use them.

**Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): As my right hon. Friend knows, vaccines are the long-term solution to tackling the virus. Can he give the House a bit more detail on what work is being done and on the potential timings for new vaccines and home tests? More importantly, will he keep under active review the balance between the efficacy and safety of vaccines and the public health impact they could have?

**Matt Hancock:** The critical point about vaccine development for coronavirus is that if we cannot be sure that a vaccine is safe, we cannot put it into large numbers of people for a disease with a mortality rate of around 1%. This is different from a disease like Ebola, where the mortality rate of around 70% is so high that it is worth taking the risk.

The broader point about the response to this virus is that it is very different from Ebola. It spreads in a different way and its mortality rate is very different, so it is very important that we fight this disease rather than fighting the last war.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): The other day, the Prime Minister said on morning television,

“perhaps you could take it on the chin, take it all in one go and allow the disease to move through the population without really taking as many draconian measures.”

Can the Secretary of State advise the House that that is not the Government’s official position?

**Matt Hancock:** No, it is not the position. The Prime Minister was explaining why we have taken the decisions that we have.

**Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): This is obviously a particularly worrying time for our elderly population who are, by all accounts, more likely to suffer badly from the disease. What advice would the Secretary of State and, indeed, the chief medical officer give to the elderly, their families and their neighbours about how best to protect them? What actions should they take to ensure they are not exposed to this disease?

**Matt Hancock:** That is a really important point, and the advice now is, as for everybody else, that they should wash their hands, follow the public health advice and catch sneezes and coughs. We do not rule out changing that advice to advising measures that help protect either the elderly or more vulnerable people who have pre-existing health conditions, because an approach that treats them differently is appropriate given that the disease treats them differently.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. A lot of people are standing, and I cannot really let this business run much past quarter past 4. People are being quite brief and the Secretary of State has been brief, but I give notice that not everybody will be called.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I press the Secretary of State on this matter? Yes, it is very important that we follow good science, but we also need good management. It is all right having a national Cobra, but what about local Cobras? Every community and every local authority has to deliver on the ground as this gets worse, and that needs partnership across health, the police and local authorities. Is he sure that is in train?

**Matt Hancock:** Absolutely. This is a national effort, and a national effort involves the Government, the NHS, every single individual, local authorities, local resilience fora and local police. It is a national effort.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Can we have net figures that take account of recoveries? It is very alarming simply to be given cumulative deaths and cumulative cases.

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, very shortly.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): It is not just coronavirus and dealing with it that needs parliamentary scrutiny. The Government cannot continue levying income tax unless we have another Finance Act, and they will not be able to use emergency powers under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 for longer than 28 days, so Parliament will have to keep on sitting, won’t it? The Secretary of State is wrong, as it is not for the House authorities to decide whether this House sits. The only person who can table a suspension of Parliament is a Government Minister, so will he just rule it out now?

**Matt Hancock:** As I said, we see no purpose for suspending Parliament, and parliamentary accountability is very important, as is the legislative power of Parliament.

**Greg Clark** (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): On the day Carillion collapsed, all the UK banks, through UK Finance, agreed forbearance on the loans and overdrafts of small businesses affected. Has Cobra obtained the same assurance from the banks in respect of businesses affected by the coronavirus?

**Matt Hancock:** Those sorts of discussions are going on, led by the Treasury and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): Millions of people in this country live alone, and many elderly people rely on their relatives visiting them to keep them able to live in their own homes. This activity may well be disrupted if people get ill or have to be isolated. How then will those vulnerable people, who rely on outsiders to be able to live, get their food delivered and be looked after, possibly cope?

**Matt Hancock:** This is an extremely important consideration, because in keeping people safe from coronavirus we also need to support people to live their normal lives. Many people rely on support from others who come to them, whether through social care in the formal system or, as in many cases, through informal care and support. We may need to see more of that, but it will have to be done properly in order also to protect the people involved from the coronavirus.

**Dehenna Davison** (Bishop Auckland) (Con): Last week, I met officials from Durham County Council, and part of our discussion turned to council preparations for coronavirus. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he is working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and with local authorities to ensure that we are fully prepared?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, we are working with all the local resilience forums and the local authorities, which are crucial parts of them.

**Daisy Cooper** (St Albans) (LD): The director general of the World Health Organisation has called on all Governments to develop all-of-society and business continuity plans. What is the Minister doing in respect of two groups: the street homeless, and the staff and volunteers who work in homeless shelters; and small businesses? Specifically, in a worst-case scenario, would the Government, under contingency plans, underwrite the three biggest costs facing small businesses—staff, rent and business rates?

**Matt Hancock:** MHCLG is working on and leading on the first of those, which is very important, and the Treasury is leading on the second.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Does the wearing of gloves on public transport or in other public places make any difference to the dangers of acquiring or transmitting the disease?

**Matt Hancock:** I am tempted to give my right hon. Friend a clinical answer, but instead I will ask one of the chief medical officer's team to write to him.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): On Friday, I met the chief executive of my local council, where four cases have been identified. She told me that the council is not able to obtain information from Public Health England about where those four individuals are self-isolating, and that is a concern in managing community relations and information. Of course we appreciate the need to protect patient confidentiality, but will the

Secretary of State discuss with colleagues the need for information to be shared with specific council officials, on a need-to-know basis, so that they can manage the protection of the whole public?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, absolutely. There should not be data protection problems here, but sometimes there are perceived to be, so cracking through those is important as well.

**Mr Tobias Ellwood** (Bournemouth East) (Con): May I echo the concerns about suspending Parliament? Whatever the threats and the challenges we face in this country, Parliament must continue to do its business and do its duty. The Secretary of State has a responsibility, and the Government have responsibility for the people in the UK and for those overseas. How is he working with the Ministry of Defence on the support it might provide, both domestically and internationally, in looking after our citizens abroad?

**Matt Hancock:** I agree with my right hon. Friend wholeheartedly on the first point. On the second, it is absolutely true that the MOD is working alongside the Department for International Development, and of course the Foreign Office, to support Brits overseas.

**John Cryer** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Returning to the issue of statutory sick pay, can the Secretary of State confirm that all the relevant Departments are in agreement that SSP should be paid to self-employed people who are told to self-isolate?

**Matt Hancock:** We are all in agreement that nobody, including those who are self-employed, should be penalised for doing the right thing. How we get that support to them is a different question, because SSP is paid by the employer and the self-employed do not have an employer. We will bring forward a solution to that particular policy conundrum.

**Richard Fuller** (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): The Grand Princess cruise ship will finally dock in Oakland today, allowing 140 Britons, including at least four of my constituents, to disembark. My right hon. Friend mentioned a few messages about the support that will be given. A lot of the Brits on the ship feel that the UK has not responded as strongly as the Americans. Will he use this opportunity to say a little more, or will he perhaps get the Foreign Office to contact constituents on the ship directly?

**Matt Hancock:** The Foreign Office will be putting out more information, because it leads in that policy area. We will be repatriating the Brits and we are working with the Americans to ensure that we can get them home safely. We have full confidence that the American public health system will be able to help those individuals off the ship and on to planes to come home.

**Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): Is the Secretary of State aware that services and advice may not be accessible to those for whom English is not their first language? Will he ensure that the Government make instructions and advice available in a range of languages, including Braille?



**Matt Hancock:** Yes.

**Karen Bradley** (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): Members of the Procedure Committee are, like many in the House, concerned about how we make sure that we properly represent our constituents if either Members of Parliament or their staff have to self-isolate. The Committee is meeting regularly this week to discuss the changes that might be needed to our procedures in that event. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government will work with us to ensure that all parliamentarians are able properly to represent their constituents?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, that would be a pleasure.

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): To follow up on the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer), there are 4.7 million self-employed people, and currently they will not be entitled to statutory sick pay or contributory jobseeker's allowance. The company Hermes, working with the GMB, has already said that it will offer support to its workers who cannot come to work because they have to self-isolate; other companies have not. What pressure are the Government putting on businesses such as Uber, Deliveroo and DPD to ensure that the people who deliver their services will be able to self-isolate?

**Matt Hancock:** I urge all companies, especially the large companies that, as the hon. Lady said, use an awful lot of self-employed workers to deliver their services, to look at what Hermes has done and appreciate that their part of the national effort is to help everybody to make sure that they can go home and stay at home if they need to stay at home to keep themselves and others safe.

**Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con): I have a practical question for the Secretary of State. Many of my colleagues who work in the health service are keen to come forward and do their best. Their big concern is: should schools close, who would care for their children when they run forward to help in the NHS? Are the Government considering any plans to support frontline workers?

**Matt Hancock:** We absolutely are, not only in terms of any measures that we take and how they might have to be amended for key workers, but also because, critically, when it comes to school closures, one reason why closing schools is not a cost-free option is that it takes away some of the very staff whom we need to be able to respond to the crisis.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): I have been approached by some parents who want to know what option they may have to withdraw their children from school for a short period, perhaps prior to the Easter break, if they wish to do so, and agree with the school an arrangement for a period of home study. Is the Secretary of State working with his Department for Education counterparts on any contingency plan should home schooling become necessary?

**Matt Hancock:** The most important thing is to follow the advice from Public Health England. We now have in place well-established routes to ensure that all headteachers get the appropriate advice. Ultimately, it is headteachers who are currently responsible for such decisions.

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Home working is all but impossible in the early years sector, in which employers tend to be small and medium-sized enterprises and employees tend to be women. I have been contacted by nursery owners in my constituency who are extremely concerned that the advice they are getting from Government helplines is not consistent. I urge the Secretary of State to make sure that the information provided to these essential businesses in a crisis is consistent and kept up to date.

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, absolutely, and if my right hon. Friend could bring the individual concerns to my attention, I would be very happy to look into them.

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): My constituents of Inverclyde are expecting 80 visits from cruise ships during the sailing season, which starts in April, including from the Regal Princess, which is due in on 10 May. What plans do the UK Government have in place should there be an outbreak on a cruise ship in UK waters?

**Matt Hancock:** We are, of course, working with Public Health England on making sure that we have the right answers should this happen. Looking into what happens on cruise ships and what advice will be given with respect to people going on future cruises is a critical piece of work that we are undertaking.

**Bill Wiggins** (North Herefordshire) (Con): Today, we had the first acknowledgement that there was a case in Herefordshire and yet I am still waiting to hear from the Government about the 70 children who are planning to go to northern Italy to ski. Can we make sure that airlines are giving these parents their money back?

**Matt Hancock:** We advise against all but essential travel to northern Italy, and I do not regard skiing as essential.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): The adult intensive care unit at Nottingham University Hospitals Trust was at over 100% capacity on 76 occasions in the past year. An expansion of critical care will add a further eight beds. What is the Secretary of State doing to expedite this expansion? How many additional intensive care beds does he believe can be created and how soon?

**Matt Hancock:** We are working very hard right across England and I know that my Scottish and Welsh counterparts are working right across Scotland and Wales to ensure that we get that expansion of critical care beds as much as is possible.

**Anthony Mangnall** (Totnes) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State and his team for their help for all patients who have been diagnosed with covid-19 in the south-west, but, as he knows I have a highly rural community. Can he please just elucidate as to how he will be able to provide further action and help for those in rural communities?

**Matt Hancock:** This is a very important point. One thing we will be doing during this period is encouraging people who need to see their GP or to have an out-patient appointment for something that is not to do with coronavirus to do so via Telemedicine if it is both

[*Matt Hancock*]

clinically and practically possible. That is even more important in rural areas, and absolutely critical for reducing the amount of infection through GPs.

**Karin Smyth** (Bristol South) (Lab): Before I entered this place, I worked as an emergency planner for the NHS. I would like to pay tribute to my former colleagues and to say that I am pleased that the Secretary of State is following their expert advice. Most people will not go into hospital or go to their GPs; they will be supported in the community. Critically, they will be supported by the wider services of local government and the voluntary sector. Will the Secretary of State expand on what conversations he is having with his counterpart in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to support the wider public health and social care provision of local government?

**Matt Hancock:** We have extensive work under way to provide exactly that support. It is also available through the Office for Civil Society, and through volunteers as well. It is very important that we offer the opportunity for people to volunteer in these difficult circumstances, but we have to do so in a way that the voluntary efforts can then plug in and add to the professional efforts that are, as the hon. Lady says, providing a great service to this country.

**Jane Stevenson** (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): I was deeply saddened to find out that the fourth case has died in my constituency in Wolverhampton North East. I offer condolences to the victim's family and friends. Our thoughts also have to be with the staff at New Cross Hospital. I ask my right hon. Friend whether there is any special advice for those with relatives in New Cross Hospital or the attending staff members, because I know that people are greatly concerned.

**Matt Hancock:** I add my condolences to the family and loved ones of the patient who has died at New Cross Hospital. I want to thank the staff at the hospital who have acted in an exemplary way and to reassure other patients at the hospital that the steps that are necessary to ensure that the hospital is safe have, of course, been taken and that my hon. Friend's constituents can be confident that her local NHS has risen to this task.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): On the point about people who have booked holidays and cruises and who are perhaps doing the right thing by considering not going on them, I have to say that, even though they are insured, they are not always covered to do so unless they have been specifically told not to travel to that country. What are the Government doing to assist people in that sort of situation?

**Matt Hancock:** We constantly keep travel advice under review, and have made covid-19 a notifiable disease. Both those measures will help with the circumstances outlined by the hon. Gentleman.

**Andrew Griffith** (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): On behalf of those who have already been affected in West Sussex, may I thank all those who have been working extremely long hours to deal with this crisis? Will the Secretary of State remind everyone involved

that this is a marathon, not a sprint, and that pacing is incredibly important in dealing with any crisis? I urge him to use the innovation, capacity and capability of business as we move through this situation.

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, I agree with all of that. This is a marathon, not a sprint. Critically, as the scientists have advised us, getting the timing of the interventions right is crucial for getting the best possible response as a nation.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** If Members continue to be pithy, we will get everybody in.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Last week I asked the Secretary of State about the advice given about coronavirus to DWP decision makers. We were not particularly reassured by the answers given by Department for Work and Pensions Ministers this morning, and that advice has still not appeared in our inboxes. Can he please follow that up?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes.

**Felicity Buchan** (Kensington) (Con): My local authority of Kensington and Chelsea has eight confirmed cases—the most of any local authority in London. We have a lot of international visitors. My constituents are very concerned that people are continuing to arrive from north Italy, and they are only being told to self-isolate if they have symptoms, but we all know that the symptoms can often come late. Will my right hon. Friend think about testing at airports or mandatory quarantining?

**Matt Hancock:** We are increasing the amount of information that is available at airports, but the evidence from other countries that have tried temperature testing at airports shows that it is not effective and can actually be counterproductive to the effort because it leads to lots of false positives.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): Industries such as the hospitality industry employ people on zero-hours contracts, and I know of one major hotel that has laid off a number of people. What can the Secretary of State do to ensure that people are not left in financial difficulties due to their employers taking these decisions?

**Matt Hancock:** This is a matter that the Chancellor is considering ahead of the Budget.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend and his team for the way in which they are being guided by the science and medical advice. My constituents in the Colne and Holme valleys, and Lindley, are keen to do the right thing and to do their very best to contain the outbreak. What specific advice would the Health Secretary give my constituents who are organising community events over the Easter period and over the May Day weekend, particularly events that will have large attendances from those who are most at risk—the elderly?

**Matt Hancock:** We are not currently advising the cancellation of mass events, but we are considering closely providing further advice and strengthening advice to those in the vulnerable and elderly groups.

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): King's College Hospital in my constituency has the highest level of debt of any hospital trust in the country. It also has a new 60-bed intensive care unit, which has been much delayed in its opening. Can the Secretary of State confirm what additional resources will be made available to King's to ensure that those beds can open—fully staffed and fully equipped—as soon as possible, and to ensure that this challenged NHS trust has all the resources necessary to deal with the additional needs presented by coronavirus?

**Matt Hancock:** I am very happy to look into that specific example.

**Edward Timpson** (Eddisbury) (Con): In May and June millions of pupils, including in Eddisbury, will be sitting important public exams. Although I accept that my right hon. Friend is doing the right thing by following the scientific evidence, may I encourage him to do everything possible to ensure that those exams go ahead, and to put in place clear contingency plans in the event that they do not?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, of course. This is a lead for the Education Secretary, but he and the Schools Minister are working very hard on it.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Churches in my constituency took precautions yesterday. Those who need to self-isolate are having food supplies delivered, and are receiving regular phone contact to stave off the feeling of being alone. Does the Minister accept that the ability for churches to meet for fellowship and prayer is essential for a lot of people's mental health and spiritual welfare, and that churches remaining open for as long as possible is as essential as schools remaining open?

**Matt Hancock:** I emphatically agree. I should, of course, have added churches and other religious groups to the long list of organisations that can—and I hope will—participate in this national effort, so that the country can get through this situation as well as possible.

**Aaron Bell** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): Good communication is obviously key, so, first, may I thank my right hon. Friend for his regular updates? Secondly, will he join me in praising the staff and management at Royal Stoke University Hospital, who have treated a case recently and have communicated very clearly with the local community in Stoke and in Newcastle-under-Lyme?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, all the staff at the Royal Stoke have done a brilliant job. I worry that they will no doubt have more cases to deal with, but the work they have done so far is something that we should all praise.

**Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Secretary of State has called for a national effort on a number of occasions. What is his take on the request from the TUC, which has called for a joint emergency taskforce between trade unions and businesses to make sure, for example, that statutory sick pay issues are addressed as well as keeping public services afloat?

**Matt Hancock:** Of course trade unions have an important role to play in this as well, and that is something we absolutely should consider.

**Ben Everitt** (Milton Keynes North) (Con): The Secretary of State is no doubt aware that one of the four deaths that he referred to in his statement was an elderly patient with underlying health conditions in Milton Keynes University Hospital. What steps is he taking to ensure that hospitals like Milton Keynes University Hospital and others are open, safe and clean?

**Matt Hancock:** All of the hospitals that have so far dealt with cases—and, indeed, the four confirmed deaths—have protocols in place to ensure that the hospital remains a safe place to treat everybody else. The evidence so far is that that has worked well, but of course we keep working at it.

**James Murray** (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op): Many careworkers are on zero-hours contracts and work for multiple providers. This means that they may struggle to prove that they are eligible for statutory sick pay, forcing them to choose between protecting their clients and paying their bills. The Secretary of State mentioned statutory sick pay earlier. What is he planning to do to help care staff who are not eligible for statutory sick pay or who might struggle to prove their eligibility?

**Matt Hancock:** I am working very closely with the Work and Pensions Secretary to address this exact point.

**Neil O'Brien** (Harborough) (Con): Over the weekend, Leicestershire had its first confirmed case of coronavirus, while a number of European countries moved to ban large public events. Will the Secretary of State explain why the timing of such social distancing measures is so crucial, and at what point and on what basis he will decide if they are necessary?

**Matt Hancock:** The first question we must ask is, "How effective is this measure—is it effective?", and the second is, "Are we going to get unintended consequences from people acting differently in a way that actually hinders the overall effort?" It is for the scientists best to explain the reason why they have scientifically come to this advice. But it is clear that there are other measures that we can take that are more effective and have fewer negative side-effects.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): My constituents in Kettering are struggling to understand why we are not banning flights from quarantined areas of north Italy.

**Matt Hancock:** The reason is that there are many UK citizens in that area who may want to come home. Also, crucially—this is very important—the evidence shows that banning flights from affected areas does very little to protect us. Indeed, Italy was the only country in Europe that banned flights from China earlier in the progress of this disease: it did not work, and now Italy is the epicentre of the European outbreak.

**Stuart Anderson** (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): We have just heard about the death in Wolverhampton. I have had a lot of constituents talk to me about safety



[Stuart Anderson]

in schools. The Secretary of State has updated the House on this, but there are hundreds of school trips planned over the next three months all over the UK and Europe, so what is the advice around that?

**Matt Hancock:** The advice around school trips is to follow the Foreign Office travel advice—so, as of this weekend, not to take a school trip to north Italy, and otherwise to follow the travel advice.

**Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): As a former journalist, I know the temptations of a dramatic headline, but does my right hon. Friend agree that in this case there is an onus on the media to report responsibly and not engage in scaremongering?

**Matt Hancock:** I strongly agree. I would say that largely the media have been responsible, but there have been a couple of exceptions. I hope that the media play their part in this national effort in reporting the facts and what the Government are thinking of doing, especially with the transparency that we are providing, but do so responsibly and thoughtfully as to the consequences of the way that this virus is portrayed.

**Danny Kruger** (Devizes) (Con): If large numbers of elderly and vulnerable people have to self-isolate, the statutory system will simply not be able to provide them with all the support they need at home. May I urge the Government to work with not only local authorities but civil society groups, to ensure that people get the social and practical support they need?

**Matt Hancock:** I emphatically support the call for civil society groups to play their part in the national effort. My hon. Friend knows more than most about the work that they do and can do, and I would be grateful to work with him on how to ensure that this is best done.

## Point of Order

4.25 pm

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. There have been several references today, including from the Secretary of State, quite rightly, to the House of Commons Commission meeting that was held earlier, jointly with the House of Lords Commission. Many of us are meant to have visits in Parliament from schools in the next couple of weeks, as well as from international delegations; I think there is one group coming from Croatia next Monday. It would be helpful if there were a means of the Commission updating the House and perhaps answering questions, and I wonder how that might be achieved.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I thank the hon. Member for his point of order. I know that this issue is being discussed on a daily basis and taken very seriously, but I also know that Members have constituents or delegations coming here—some of them travelling many miles—and they will want to be informed. I do not sit on the Commission, so I do not know how the deliberations went this morning, but I will ensure that his request is passed on to the Speaker when he gets back.

## BILLS PRESENTED

### HATE CRIME (MISOGYNY)

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Wera Hobhouse, supported by Sarah Olney, Christine Jardine, Layla Moran, Munira Wilson, Wendy Chamberlain and Stella Creasy, presented a Bill to make motivation by misogyny an aggravating factor in criminal sentencing; to require police forces to record hate crimes motivated by misogyny; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 10 July, and to be printed (Bill 107).*

### HATE CRIME (MISANDRY AND MISOGYNY)

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Mr Philip Hollobone presented a Bill to make motivation by misandry or misogyny an aggravating factor in criminal sentencing; to require police forces to record hate crimes motivated by misandry or misogyny; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 10 July, and to be printed (Bill 108).*

## **Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill [Lords]**

### *Second Reading*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Before Second Reading, I should tell the House that Mr Speaker has certified clauses 13 to 19 and 23 of the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill [Lords] as relating exclusively to England and Wales on matters within devolved legislative competence, and clauses 25 to 29 of the Bill as relating exclusively to England on matters within devolved legislative competence.

4.27 pm

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

Today, on Commonwealth Day, I rise to open the Second Reading debate on the Commonwealth games Bill. The 2022 games, held in Birmingham, will be the biggest sporting and cultural event that the city and the region have ever seen. With an estimated TV audience of 1.5 billion people, it will showcase Birmingham, the west midlands and the entire country as an amazing place to live, work, study, visit and do business. It will coincide with the platinum jubilee and Festival of Britain, crowning a year of celebration. It will be the most inclusive Commonwealth games in history. For the first time, a major multi-sport event will feature more women's than men's medal events, along with the largest ever integrated para-sports programme.

The benefits of the games will be felt for many years to come. It will accelerate new housing, create new jobs and provide improved transport and new community sports facilities for the people of the west midlands. There will be a new Commonwealth games village, supported by £165 million of Government funding, which will support the long-term regeneration of Perry Barr. A £70 million refurbishment of the Alexander stadium will turn it into a world-class athletics venue, along with new community sports facilities, and we are building a brand new aquatics centre in Sandwell, the site of which I had the pleasure of visiting only a couple of weeks ago. I saw how that development is already having a positive impact on the local economy, with anticipation building to welcome some of the world's best swimmers and divers. A world-class leisure centre will also leave a legacy for decades to come. It was fantastic to hear about these plans and to see the palpable excitement of local school children.

However, the Commonwealth games is not just about sport. This will be a global games, kicked off with Her Majesty the Queen's baton relay. It will be accompanied by a vibrant cultural programme that will showcase the best cultural artists from across the city, the region and the Commonwealth. We will see a huge programme of visits, with Heads of Government arriving from all over the Commonwealth.

**Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con):** The Minister is correct in identifying the Commonwealth games as an opportunity to rejuvenate the Commonwealth family and large parts of Britain's second city, but does he share my concerns about some of the overspending to do with the village by the local council and the extra complexities caused

by the demolition of the Perry Barr flyover, which experts say will not impact traffic flows at all? We want Birmingham 2022 to have the same transformative effect as Manchester did, not the financial hangover—for those old enough to remember it—of Montreal in 1976.

**Nigel Huddleston:** I thank the Chair of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee for those comments. He is aware that we are having these games in record time—considerably shorter than the usual seven years—but we are conscious of that in terms of cost containment, because we are not building new facilities from scratch, or not all of them, and that has helped with the finances.

All the stakeholders and all the partners are well aware of their financial responsibilities, and we are working with them. I shall address some of the transport concerns and the flyover issues later, but again we are working with all the partners involved to make sure we can come to a suitable outcome.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con):** I thank my hon. Friend very much for giving way on what I think is his first outing at the Dispatch Box, which is already going extremely well. As he would imagine, we are very much looking forward to the games coming to the royal town of Sutton Coldfield, and in particular to the appearance of part of them in the Royal Sutton park.

May I, however, emphasise the importance of the point made by our hon. Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee? The Government, the Mayor and the West Midlands authority have been generous and very supportive on the financial side. While I do have some sympathy with Birmingham City Council, it is essential that my hon. Friend, on behalf of the Government, makes it absolutely clear that it must show greater financial control.

A particular example has been mentioned by our hon. Friend, but there are other worries to do with contingency funding. Obviously, I expect the Government to be generous and supportive, but Birmingham City Council must show financial rigour, which has not been a feature of that council. If it does not do so, I hope the Minister will make it clear that the Government will not tolerate any question of failure in these games, and that Birmingham City Council will be removed from the management of them if it does not demonstrate such control.

**Nigel Huddleston:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments. I can assure him—I will come to this later in my speech—that the financial governance of the games is very strong. Again, we are working with all stakeholders to make sure that we can deliver on time and on budget—both on the time commitment and on the financial commitment.

**Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab):** In the spirit of this debate and the cross-party nature of the spirit required to ensure the success of the games, I hope the Minister will at some point in his remarks reflect on the extraordinary strength of character required for a council that has lost £700 million of funding over the last few years to deliver the games not in the usual seven years, but in four and a half years. Let us unite around a shared endeavour to make this a success.

**Nigel Huddleston:** I thank the right hon. Member for his comments. Indeed, I think we have seen a spirit of cross-party co-operation already and that we will continue to see it throughout the delivery of the games and beyond. We are absolutely seeing that on both sides of the Chamber in both Houses. Long may that continue—I will certainly play my part in ensuring that that is the case. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) mentioned, that does not mean that we should not hold all stakeholders to account on the promises they have made, and we should continue to do so.

We are expecting Birmingham 2022 to create 41,000 games-time roles, and a procurement spend of about £350 million, from which local and regional government suppliers will all benefit.

**Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): There is already a lot of excitement about the games in my constituency, particularly in the local schools, but one worry is that because we are not actually hosting an event—the Minister is touching on the opportunities of that—we might not get the same opportunities in our local area. Can he assure us that those opportunities will be opened up to people across the whole of the west midlands, particularly those in North Warwickshire and Bedworth?

**Nigel Huddleston:** I thank my hon. Friend for those comments; as a west midlands MP myself, I have some skin in the game as well. I can give him those assurances: it is absolutely the intention that the benefits of the games—in the run-up, during the construction and from the legacy—be felt throughout the entire west midlands and indeed the country.

On procurement, anybody can sign up to [birmingham2022.com](http://birmingham2022.com); businesses can sign up to the business portal to have the opportunity to bid for many of the procurement opportunities. A whole host of other opportunities to do with legacy will be felt right across the west midlands.

**Edward Timpson** (Eddisbury) (Con): One of the reasons why the Manchester Commonwealth games in 2002 was so successful is that it took the best from the Sydney Olympics and transferred that to Manchester, particularly on volunteering and bringing the whole city together. We also saw that in London 2012. Is my hon. Friend making sure that we also learn from the central importance of bringing the city together through volunteering, and that right across the west midlands people will feel that they are connected to the Commonwealth games?

**Nigel Huddleston:** Absolutely—volunteering is at the heart of these games; it always has been and I am sure always will be. We saw that in the fantastic Glasgow Commonwealth games, and indeed in the Olympic games. We are expecting around 10,000 volunteers, perhaps substantially more, and excitement is already building, particularly among schoolchildren in the region, about the opportunities to participate. More news about those opportunities will be coming in due course.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): First, I congratulate the Minister on getting his position; I look forward to his contributions on many occasions, all positive, in this House.

Does the Minister agree that the exclusion of shooting sports from Birmingham 2022 will have a negative impact? The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has always excelled at shooting, and Commonwealth countries have followed the United Kingdom's lead in that. Does the Minister share my disappointment that those in that most law-abiding and responsible section of the community have been excluded? Can the Minister confirm that his job in the future, if he still has this position—I hope he does—will be to ensure that shooting sports are included in the next Commonwealth games?

**Nigel Huddleston:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for intervening. It would not be a debate without his intervention; I am just surprised that he was not first.

On the shooting championship, I think we have a reasonable compromise that everybody—or most people—are quite happy with. The Commonwealth games are happening in summer 2022, and the championships for shooting and archery will take place in the January. The events will be separate, but at the end of the games there will be a Commonwealth sport medal table. I think that is a reasonable conclusion to what has been quite a challenging situation; I do not know whether it will set a precedent for future games, but I think that in these particular circumstances we have come to a reasonable conclusion.

**Julian Knight:** Part of the arrangement made with India on shooting is that we now have women's T20 cricket in the Commonwealth games, and I am sure my hon. Friend will welcome that. There is a great deal of excitement in my constituency and around the west midlands about making such a fantastic mark in sport.

**Nigel Huddleston:** Again, I could not agree more. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, it is fantastic that we have more women's games than men's in the Commonwealth games. That is a first.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): On the subject of specific sports, the Minister will share my pleasure that seven-a-side rugby is a fundamental part of the Commonwealth games, with games being played at the Coventry stadium. Does he agree that it will be great to see those players coming to the birthplace of the game during the tournament?

**Nigel Huddleston:** Indeed, there are many fantastic places around the west midlands where we can—

**Mr Khalid Mahmood** (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab) *rose*—

**Nigel Huddleston:** We are going to have a game of sport bingo here, I think.

**Mr Mahmood:** I thank the Minister for giving way. We have just sent to Pakistan an England kabaddi team to play in the competition there. Will he consider in the future introducing kabaddi as a national sport here as well?

**Nigel Huddleston:** I am afraid the hon. Gentleman is giving me powers I do not have. He knows that these decisions are made elsewhere, but I am sure he will continue to make his case. He has already made it to me personally and he has now made it again in the Chamber. I will continue with my speech for a few moments now.



The Birmingham Commonwealth games will have been successfully delivered in a much shorter time than other games: in just four and a half years, rather than the typical seven. Just as for the London 2012 Olympic games, a pre-games Bill is essential if we are to support the successful delivery of such a landmark event. On that occasion, the House came together to approve a vital Bill. I am sure that the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill will be no different. The Bill contains four important measures, the first of which relates to transport.

Putting in place effective transport provision is a crucial part of any major sporting event. I know that Andy Street, the Mayor of the west midlands combined authority, is strongly focused on that so that athletes, officials and the 10,000 volunteers can get to their events and shifts on time, and, crucially, so that residents can also move around easily. The measures will make sure we can do just that. They will allow temporary changes to road use where needed, so that anyone travelling to and from the games, and around the region, can do so safely and with minimal disruption.

**John Spellar (Warley) (Lab):** Many of the facilities, for example the aquatic centre in Smethwick, will be used after the games have ended. Is there not a need for consideration of longer-term changes to transport arrangements? Will they be included in the legacy plans to ensure such facilities are properly used and enjoyed in the future?

**Nigel Huddleston:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. The integration of transport and the co-operation of all stakeholders in the run-up to the games, as well as during and after, is being considered by the organising committee and other stakeholders, including the Department for Transport. That is a key factor that we hope will ensure the legacy of the games.

The Bill will also set a statutory basis for a games transport plan and provide the Secretary of State with a power of direction to safeguard the delivery of essential road regulation measures. I can assure the House that any road regulation measures will be kept to a minimum, so we can run a safe and efficient games. Local residents and businesses will be consulted and kept informed of the proposals.

Secondly, the Bill will work to protect the commercial rights of those who invest in the games as sponsors. Securing commercial sponsorship is critical to staging a world-class event and maintaining investment in the games. That can be achieved only when the rights of sponsors are protected. The Bill introduces measures, similar to those for the Olympic games in London and the Commonwealth games in Glasgow, to protect against unauthorised association. That is not designed to stop the many local residents and community groups who will want to show their support for the games; in fact, the organising committee wants to make it easier for them. Last week, it launched its new community programme, United by Birmingham 2022. Community projects that share the vision and mission of the games can apply to join.

The provisions are instead aimed at stopping commercial infringements, where a business is claiming an association with the games without making the commitments required of an authorised business. The Bill places a duty on the organising committee to produce guidance to ensure

that everyone is clear about what activity may constitute an infringement. It introduces restrictions to advertising and trading in and around games locations. Again, they are in line with the approach of previous games. The restrictions will ensure that trading does not obstruct easy movement in the vicinity of games locations and will provide a consistent approach at each venue.

Regulations will set out the detail of when and where the temporary and proportionate restrictions will apply. They will be driven by the particular usage of each games location. The organising committee will be required to produce guidance on the effect of the advertising and trading restrictions, which local authorities will share with traders that may be affected. That will help to ensure that traders likely to be affected will be aware of what they need to do.

Thirdly, there are provisions on ticket touting. There is a role for a responsible secondary ticketing market for those who are genuinely no longer able to attend events, but professional touts are a scourge on any major event. They make tickets more expensive and make it harder for fans to see the events they love. We have already legislated to ensure there is a responsible market, from strengthening requirements on secondary platforms to banning touts from using bots to dodge security measures. Those measures received the support of both sides of the House. These are robust powers that stop online touts hoovering up large numbers of tickets for profit and help consumers to make informed choices when buying tickets on the secondary market. However, these games are a global, multi-sport event underpinned by significant public investment, so we want to go even further so that fans can buy tickets, confident that they will not be funding unscrupulous touts. That is vital if we are to act as a powerful deterrent to touts and protect the integrity of the games. Only those vendors authorised to sell tickets by the Birmingham 2022 organising committee will be permitted to do so, meaning that buying tickets will be clear, simple and affordable for genuine fans.

The Bill will create an offence that will apply to any unauthorised attempt to sell tickets for profit in the course of business or in a public place. Over 1 million tickets will be available for games events.

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab):** The measures that the Minister is announcing sound as though they will go some way towards achieving what we all want: to ensure that tickets end up in the hands of the fans at the price intended, not at vastly inflated prices. To ensure the enforcement of what he hopes to achieve, will he consider extra funding for National Trading Standards so that it has the resources to enforce what he has put in the Bill?

**Nigel Huddleston:** I thank the hon. Member for that point and praise her for the work that she has done on unscrupulous secondary ticket sales. She makes a fair point. The dynamics and details of sales and enforcement relating to tickets have still to be determined, and I am sure that everybody has heard her comments.

The organising committee's ticketing strategy will be underpinned by the values of fairness, affordability and accessibility. That will help to ensure that everyone who wants to experience the games will have an opportunity to do so.

[Nigel Huddleston]

Finally, the Bill contains measures on the funding of, and reporting on, the games. The organising committee has been established as a non-departmental public body. It is subject to standard controls on public bodies and will provide regular budgetary and financial updates to Parliament over the life cycle of the games. Indeed, the organising committee's first annual report and accounts were laid in Parliament in September last year, and the report for the year 2019-20 is due to be published this coming July.

The Bill contains a technical measure that makes sure that financial assistance given to the organising committee continues to comply with financial propriety rules. Alongside that, the Bill also requires the organising committee to produce an annual report on its delivery of the games. However, those interested in the delivery of the games will not need to wait for a statutory report. The organising committee already produces quarterly updates on its delivery; the next one will be available shortly and will be published on its website. Indeed, I met the CEO of the organising committee, Ian Reid, during my recent visit to Birmingham and came away with a really strong sense of confidence that the games will be a huge success.

**Fay Jones** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): My hon. Friend probably already knows that people who exercise for 150 minutes a week are likely to live seven years longer than more inactive people. In my area in mid-Wales, my local health board says that only 50% of our young people are reaching that goal. Does he agree that with so many people inspired to get active after the Commonwealth games, it will be vital to meeting our public health challenge?

**Nigel Huddleston:** I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. She hits on a very important part of the games' purpose, its legacy, and indeed, the Government's sport strategy. We will be working much more on the issues that she raises to encourage more young people to participate in sport at the right level. The Youth Sport Trust and many other bodies play a key role in delivering that, as do our schools. Those of us who are parents have a responsibility too, but the games are a key chance to make sure that we double down on those opportunities and inspire young children to get involved in sport at a very early age, with the huge mental health and physical health benefits that come with that.

**Mr Mitchell:** Inspired by my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones), I thought I would rise to my feet again. Before the Minister finishes, will he say a word or two more about the issue of legacy, which is so important? I had the privilege of sitting on Lord Seb Coe's International Inspiration, which took forward the legacy from the Olympic games in London. Will he confirm that legacy is about international, national and local objectives and that it is a very high priority for the Government to build on Britain's experience under Lord Coe's leadership?

**Nigel Huddleston:** Legacy planning is already taking place. There is already a team within the organising committee focused on legacy, not just the physical legacy, important though that is—the physical assets, the new sports facilities, the new village and homes—but the

long-lasting legacy in terms of inspiring people to travel and invest in the west midlands. The tourism, trade and investment opportunities will be a core part of this. We have learned the lessons, both the positive lessons and where we can improve, of the Olympic games and the games in Glasgow, and I am confident that we will continue to make those very important legacy decisions.

**Shabana Mahmood** (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that one way we should evaluate the success and eventual legacy of the games is by how successful they are at getting jobs, skills and volunteering opportunities to those furthest from the world of work? He will know that my constituency has the highest rate of unemployment in the country and that many other Birmingham constituencies are afflicted with the awful problem of long-term, systemic worklessness. The games are an incredibly important opportunity to turn this around. Does he agree that this must be front and centre of all decisions when it comes to the jobs and skills the games will provide?

**Nigel Huddleston:** I agree with the hon. Lady. These issues were raised when the Lords considered the Bill. Front and centre of the social values charter in the Bill are things such as skills, opportunity, sustainability and a host of other important aspects. We must ensure these live not just when the games happen but for many years after, and I am sure we will debate this matter much further. I would encourage all colleagues to visit the organising committee. They would be very welcome. When I went up, I left inspired and confident that those issues—the longevity, the focus on skills, the opportunities for regeneration—were front of mind for everybody involved.

In conclusion, the Bill will help to deliver a Commonwealth games where transport keeps moving, commercial rights are protected and fans can be confident about the tickets they buy. It is critical that we get this right because the Commonwealth games are an important milestone for the region and the country. Just as we did in London, we will show the world that we are a hospitable, warm and tolerant country that is proud to host world-class sport, and we will leave a lasting legacy for Birmingham, the west midlands and the whole UK. That is what the Bill will do, and I commend it to the House.

4.52 pm

**Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): It is a great pleasure to open this important debate for the Labour party. It feels particularly apt to be debating the Commonwealth games on Commonwealth Day. Today we mark the strength and diversity of the Commonwealth while recognising the substantial challenges still facing people in many parts of the Commonwealth. While it is a shame the Secretary of State is not in his place this afternoon, I congratulate his understudy on his fine performance so far.

In what I hope is a sign of things to come, the Opposition agree with much of the Bill. We agree across the House that the games offer an enormous opportunity to the west midlands, but the House must ensure that the games organisers make the most of those vast opportunities. That is what we are here to debate today. I hope to take up the Minister's offer and to visit the sites ahead of the games, perhaps with my right hon.



Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), if the people of the west midlands are sensible and put their faith in him to be their Mayor later this year. I hope to see for myself a bigger and bolstered Alexander stadium, the new aquatics centre in Sandwell and the countless other stadiums and venues that will be the envy of many nations.

I look forward to athletes competing in just over two years, hopefully winning an impressive haul of medals for all the home nations. As many will attest, the games have the potential to transform communities in the way the Olympics did for London. The new athletes village in Perry Barr, with the associated transport improvements and investment in public services, will provide good-quality homes for thousands of residents and create a new community in the heart of the city. I recognise that the Bill is a vital part of ensuring the fair and proper organisation of the Commonwealth games in 2022 in Birmingham and a step towards the games delivering for the people of the west midlands.

I particularly welcome the steps in the Bill to prevent ticket touting. All Members will agree that the games should be open and accessible to as many members of the public as possible. Strong steps to prevent exploitative and unfair ticket touting are needed to avoid the scenes that we have witnessed during other sporting events in recent years, and to guarantee that the people of the west midlands can have a fair chance to enjoy the sport on offer.

I am, however, disappointed that the Government have not used the opportunity presented by the Bill to ensure that Birmingham 2022 is truly game-changing for the region—the opportunity to showcase the truly transformational potential of the games. In that regard, they could go further. I know that the organising committee has done good work to be an inclusive and progressive employer, but more could still be done. The west midlands has one of the lowest levels of living wage accreditation among the UK regions, and the Bill could have given the Government the ideal opportunity to set down a marker by ensuring that the committee followed the lead of Labour-run Birmingham City Council and became living wage-accredited. Not only would that have helped so many who are directly involved in the delivery of the games, but it would have served as an example of good employment practice for businesses across the region, and become a catalyst for further improvement in the income and living conditions of people throughout the west midlands.

Sadly, the Bill also contains no provision to bar gambling companies from sponsoring the games. Although I know it is unlikely that the organising committee will enter into an agreement with a gambling company, I firmly believe that the Government should declare that as a matter of principle. We know that too many children and young people in the UK are already addicted to gambling, and we need to ensure that the Bill will protect them. A specific pledge preventing any form of official gambling support might just make those companies understand our concern about how best to protect casual gamblers who enjoy a flutter so that their enjoyment does not slide into destructive gambling addiction.

On a similar note, the Bill could have gone further to ease the financial pressures on Birmingham City Council, about which we have already heard. It could have opened

up further funding streams so that the council would not have to face difficult choices when considering sponsors and partners.

It is fantastic that so many additional tourists are expected to visit Birmingham, but a hotel levy of £1 per room per night would go some way towards raising the additional revenue needed to fund the successful delivery of the games, and easing the pressure on council taxpayers. Such levies work in many cities across the world; why should they not work in Birmingham? The leader of the city council, Ian Ward, has been vocal in calling for this for some time. I urge the Minister to reconsider, and to add that provision for a hotel levy.

I should also like the Minister to give further assurances about the climate change impact of the games. I know that both the council and the organising committee are going to great lengths to showcase sustainable aspects of the games, and I welcome the council's commitment to sustainable transport improvements in the athletes' village.

**Gary Sambrook** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): Does the hon. Lady accept that, while the council is trying to ensure sustainability for the games, it has voted to build on 8 hectares of parkland every year within the city boundaries? Will she condemn that blatant hypocrisy?

**Tracy Brabin:** I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's intervention, and I am sure that his constituents have heard what he has said, but my understanding from my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill is that 51,000 homes need to be built, primarily on brownfield sites. Birmingham's planning conditions and responsibilities are not my area of expertise, but if the hon. Gentleman wants to take the matter further, I am sure that my right hon. Friend will discuss it with him outside the Chamber.

We need to do more to tackle the climate emergency that we all face. All the expert advice suggests that we have about 10 years in which to prevent it from getting out of hand, and this is the Government's opportunity to showcase a lead in that very respect. Before, during and after the games, we can show that we are serious about the need to take action, and to do all that we can to have a sustainable and environmentally friendly games. Birmingham cannot achieve that on its own.

**Mr Khalid Mahmood** (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): The Mayor and the West Midlands Combined Authority are trying to introduce a bendy bus under the current diesel structure that would cost £35 million just in the Perry Barr area. Would it not be more constructive to have electric buses running for that price, along with normal buses to make environmental changes for Birmingham?

**Tracy Brabin:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, and I hope that the Government will step into discussions about how we make more vehicles electric—surely that is the way forward. The Government were leading on some of this, with electric buses and cars, and we need to make sure that that filters through to all opportunities on this. The Minister has heard my colleague's comments, and I am sure that in Committee we will take that forward in more detail.

[Tracy Brabin]

I welcome the Minister's assurances that his Department will work with Birmingham City Council and the organising committee to ensure that the games are a shining example to the world in how to deliver a green, sustainable and forward-looking major sporting event. Finally, I urge the Minister to ensure that these games work for local people, and that his Department make every effort possible to provide for a long-lasting and tangible boost for grassroots sport for local people in the west midlands. When the Minister responds, I would love him to mention doing all that he can to ensure that as many people as possible watch the games on free-to-air channels with their family, without committing to buying a subscription service. It is not fair that we say that people should have access, but then they have to pay to watch.

We all know the power of sport to change lives, and Birmingham 2022 has the potential to inspire and radically change the lives of people in the west midlands. For an area with high levels of social deprivation and poor health outcomes, this could be absolutely game-changing for confidence, mental health issues and obesity, and it could transform the life chances of many people, but only if we get the decisions right now. One of the biggest lessons of the 2012 Olympics in London is that, sadly, we failed to capitalise on the immense interest in sport that the games ushered in. We need to ensure a legacy of sporting participation for the people of Birmingham and the surrounding areas.

Inevitably, the drastic and disproportionate cuts to local councils played a key role, with councils forced to concentrate on their core services. We cannot risk a repeat when it comes to Birmingham 2022. Every child who goes to bed dreaming of one day winning a gold medal—I once did that in gymnastics; unfortunately I did not get it and I am here instead—or even adults who are simply inspired to get fitter or try something new must have somewhere to give it a go. The power to change lives via the games is enormous, and the Bill takes the necessary steps to ensure that we can make the most of that opportunity. Yes, there are things that I should like to see tightened up or improved in the legislation, but I hope that overall the House today finds much more to agree than to disagree on. I look forward to the debate.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Usual courtesies, please, for the maiden speech of Jacob Young.

5.3 pm

**Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con):** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and happy Commonwealth Day. It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, and I would like to start by mentioning Johanna Jackson who, like me, is a born and bred Teessider, but unlike me, won the gold for the 20 km walk in the 2010 Commonwealth games in India. Jo Jackson, from New Marske, completed the walk in just one hour, 34 minutes and 22 seconds, which is about the same amount of time that it takes me to walk here from my office in Norman Shaw North.

I am immensely proud to be in this place, representing my community. I have lived in Teesside my whole life, and Redcar is where I went to college, trained as an apprentice and cut my teeth in the chemical industry.

For a lad from Teesside to stand in the House of Commons is all a bit overwhelming. Most people down here think PPE is a degree course; where I come from, it is what you wear to work. Indeed, to the envy of George Osborne, I believe I am the first MP to wear a hard hat in the photo on his parliamentary pass.

I stand here by the grace of God. My constituents have put their trust in me and, like my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, I know that their votes are only lent. During my time here I will work hard to make my community proud to have elected its first Conservative Member of Parliament.

Our constituency is Redcar, but it is not just Redcar. It is Eston, South Bank, Marske, New Marske, Ormesby and Nunthorpe, to name but a few. Over the years the Redcar constituency has had many different names. From 1290 to 1832, it was part of the Yorkshire constituency. After that it was the North Riding of Yorkshire, and before it became Redcar it was Cleveland, but many of my hon. Friends will now know it as “Bluecar”.

As well as being proud Yorkshiremen, we are proud Teessiders and sit as part of the Tees valley in England's north-east. We are a people with an affinity for industry and an economy based on hard graft and global trade. Although the villages of Marske, Nunthorpe, Lazenby, Lackenby and Kirkleatham go back as far as the Domesday Book, life in the Redcar constituency as we know it today started in 1841 with the discovery of iron ore in the Eston hills. Suddenly, the sleepy fishing village of Redcar and its neighbour Coatham started to grow into the Redcar town that we know today. This discovery kick-started a housing crisis in the old hamlet of Eston, due to too much employment in our now booming industry. This prompted a new neighbouring settlement to be formed, named California. Perhaps it was a sunny day in Teesside.

A number of other new areas were formed at this time, including South Bank, Normanby, Grangetown and Dormanstown, which was named after the steelmaker and former Conservative candidate, Arthur Dorman. It was these thriving towns, alongside a growing Middlesbrough, that led the parliamentary titan and free trade pioneer William Gladstone to call us the “infant Hercules”. From the banks of the Tees came the industrial revolution, and Teesside became an exporting capital that built the world. From the Sydney harbour bridge to Lambeth bridge and from the Indian railways to the London underground, cities, towns and communities around the world exist today because of Teesside steel.

Our area has moved on from ironstone mining, and our steelworks closed in 2015, but industry remains our flesh and blood. Our chemical industry in Teesside still employs more than 7,500 people locally. The Wilton International site forms part of the largest chemical cluster in the UK and the second largest in Europe. At this point, Mr Deputy Speaker, I must declare an interest, having worked and trained in the Teesside chemical industry for the past nine years. I left a job as a single-use plastics producer to become a politician. I am not sure which is more popular right now, but I am sure I will find out.

We do not just make plastics. We are home to world-leading innovation centres, including the Materials Processing Institute and the Centre for Process Innovation. We are the largest producer of bioethanol in the UK, and we also notably produce more than half of the

UK's commercially viable hydrogen, which is why I am pleased to be chairing the all-party parliamentary group on hydrogen as we look to further the hydrogen economy in the UK. For the people of Redcar and Cleveland, industry is our past and our present, and it will be our future. It will not be coal-fired or carbon-heavy; it will be the clean, green industry of the 21st century.

In this decade, I want Redcar to become home to sustainable steelmaking again, and I am supporting Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen's pledge to bring a clean electric arc furnace to Redcar so that the people who made steel for the World Trade Centre and the Shard can make steel for the world's next great buildings. In this decade, I want Redcar to become home to the world's first industrial-scale carbon capture, utilisation and storage project—Net Zero Teesside; a power plant that will not only provide net zero carbon power to millions of homes but show the country and the world how to safely remove carbon emissions from industry. In this decade—indeed, in this parliamentary term—I want Redcar to become home to one of the UK's first post-Brexit free ports. We have the deepest port on the east coast and the largest brownfield development site in Europe. We have the land, we have the plan, and we have an oven-ready free port deal ready to go. This is why I stand in this place today: to champion industry, to champion global trade, and to champion my community.

Above all, my community is important because people are important. Across my constituency I have met some fantastic people, such as Sandra Smith from South Bank, who started the South Bank Credit Union in 1989 and has dutifully served her community ever since; or Frankie Wales, who stood against me at the general election and who runs a boxing club in Redcar, giving young working-class lads purpose and self-esteem; or Norah Cooney, one of just two Conservative councillors in my constituency, who has given more than 40 years of public service to the people of Marske and New Marske.

I would also like to thank my predecessor, Anna Turley, for the work that she did for our community and for this House. Her work to bring about tougher sentences for animal cruelty is particularly commendable, and I am pleased to be supporting the private Member's Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder).

There is a lot more that I wanted to mention—parmos; lemon tops; Redcar racecourse; the Zetland, which is the UK's oldest lifeboat; Winkie's Castle, which is a cottage turned folk museum; and Ben Houchen saving Teesside airport—but I will have to save it for another time, as I want to use my final few moments to mention Redcar's famous MP, Mo.

Dr Marjorie Mowlam was one of the political giants of our age. To this day she is well thought of in Redcar by people across the political spectrum—I cannot count the number of times I have been told, "Mo was the best MP we ever had." She had an ability to see through the fog of partisan politics and recognise good intentions and great achievements on all sides. In fact, in the BBC's "100 Greatest Britons" competition, it was her advocacy for a Conservative Prime Minister that gave Winston Churchill his rightful place as our greatest ever citizen. Her co-operative spirit is something that British politics is sorely lacking today, and something that I will do my hardest to emulate.

Therefore, to finish in the spirit of co-operation, I offer my new colleagues, of all parties, some slightly paraphrased advice from the great Mo herself. There is more hope than despair, and by working together we can overcome many obstacles, often within ourselves, and by doing so we can make the world a better place.

5.12 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Redcar (Jacob Young) making his maiden speech. He has shown that he potentially has a long career ahead of him representing Redcar—certainly a longer stint than I hope to have representing my constituency in this place. He mentioned the Domesday Book, and I cannot be alone in thinking that these times of Brexit must have their own chapter in that book. Whatever his political persuasions, I am sure that he is not a single-use politician and that he will have a great career in this Parliament, so I wish him well for the coming years.

I will not detain the House for long, particularly as sport is a devolved matter and Members from Birmingham, the midlands and across England will want to speak. Suffice it to say that the Glasgow games were a world-leading event, as the Minister touched on. They were not only a sporting event but a celebration of the many cultures and people who have chosen to make Scotland their home. I hope that the Birmingham games, in a city that is also renowned for its diversity, will similarly go beyond the purely sporting aspects, cast the net wider afield and use the occasion to showcase their city and their culture.

Glasgow had dozens of giant dancing Tunnock's tea cakes at its opening ceremony, so I look forward to the sight of scores of pikelets and pease puddings pirouetting under the lights at the Alexander stadium in 2022. My wife and I were fortunate enough to be at the opening ceremony at Parkhead, after she won a pair of tickets in a local radio competition. The hardest part of that day was trying to get away from work in time, but I was lucky enough to do so.

**Mr Khalid Mahmood:** The hon. Gentleman may not have a direct connection with Birmingham, but I can inform him that the chief executive of the Commonwealth games, Ian Reid, was also chief executive of the Commonwealth games in Glasgow.

**Gavin Newlands:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, because I was not aware of that fact. Birmingham has picked well, because the Glasgow games were a huge success.

My wife and I were lucky enough to enjoy that spectacle, and the weather on that early summer evening was to set the tone for almost the entire tournament. We seem to be allowed roughly one good summer in 10 in the west of Scotland, and it happened to coincide with the eyes of the world, or at least of the Commonwealth, being on Glasgow.

There was a huge feelgood factor across Scotland in the run-up to and, of course, during the games, not just because of the weather or because Scotland was having its best Commonwealth games ever, but because it was like a 12-day party for the nation, and we do like a party from time to time north of the border.



[Gavin Newlands]

The sunshine may have left visitors with a false impression of the prevailing Glasgow weather, but the good humour and positivity that emanated from the workers, and particularly the 15,000 volunteers—the so-called Clydesiders—left visitors with a genuine, warm enthusiasm for Scotland, the place and its people, which I am sure Birmingham will be keen to emulate.

Typically, the one event for which my wife and I were successful in securing tickets in the ballot—the athletics at Hampden—took place in the pouring rain. As a form of torture, I have subjected my daughter, Emma, to quite a few Scotland games at Hampden, and it is fair to say that she enjoyed the athletics significantly more than she enjoys the football.

Scotland, of course, has a proud history in the Commonwealth games, from the first games in Canada in 1930—then called the Empire games, of course, and there might be a few Conservative Members who wish they were still called that—through to our record-breaking medal haul at Glasgow 2014 and our best ever overseas medal tally at the Gold Coast in 2018. I am hopeful that Scotland can beat that overseas mark at the Birmingham games in 2022.

I cannot mention Glasgow's games without reminding the House that the budget was entirely met from Scottish resources through the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council—not a penny of support was offered from this place. Previous Ministers have stated from the Dispatch Box that Treasury money used to fund Birmingham's games will be subject to Barnett consequential. However, there is no reason why those verbal commitments cannot be written into the Bill to ensure that devolved Administrations receive their fair share of funding to support their own sporting excellence, and the investment in infrastructure needed to improve participation still further, without going 10 rounds with the Treasury, and I will seek to amend the Bill in Committee accordingly.

The Glasgow games cost £543 million, whereas the Birmingham games are reported to cost around £780 million, some 44% more, and some reports suggest that that figure may be soft. There may be strong infrastructure and regeneration reasons for that large increase, and I certainly will not second-guess the games organisers, the local council or the Government on that, but strong controls and top-level planning resulted in a £37 million underspend of public money on the 2014 games in Scotland, which allowed the money to be returned to the public sector. The Scottish National party urges the organisers to look to Scotland's best practices to deliver similar value for money.

I hope that both the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the organising committee will liaise closely with their counterparts involved in the Glasgow games on the lessons, both good and bad, that can be learned from our hosting in 2014. The Glasgow games were widely seen as an overwhelming success for the city and for Scotland. Any event with 5,000 athletes, 15,000 volunteers, 17 sports and half a million meals served will have its issues, and I hope Birmingham will learn those lessons ahead of 2022.

In closing, I would like to add our best wishes to Birmingham. I very much look forward to the games, which may well serve as a warm-up for Scotland's first Olympic team in 2024.

Several hon. Members rose—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. I call Simon Jupp to make his maiden speech.

5.18 pm

**Simon Jupp** (East Devon) (Con): First, let me take this opportunity to thank my predecessor, Sir Hugo Swire, for his service to East Devon and this House. Sir Hugo served the constituency and his country with distinction. He held several influential roles in government, including Minister of State at the Foreign Office. I count Sir Hugo as a friend, as do many in East Devon, because his efforts helped many people I meet across the constituency every week.

This House is a broad church of opinion, skills and expertise, no matter which rosette was worn on a dark and cold night in December. Party differences should be cast aside as every Member of this House comes together to back Great Britain as we become a truly global Britain, and the Commonwealth games is a superb opportunity to demonstrate the values we hold dear: freedom, democracy, tolerance and decency. Seventy-one nations will come together in Birmingham to celebrate their vibrant cultures and community spirit, with a fair bit of friendly competition.

As we spread our wings and embark on a new journey as an independent nation, we must always remember the rallying cry in 2016 from communities who felt left behind—many still do. I am incredibly humbled to stand here as the Member of Parliament for East Devon. My constituency boasts vast swathes of the Jurassic coast, rolling countryside, Georgian seaside towns and beautiful villages—and you are never too far from an honesty box or a farm shop. I was born in Devon, and my family have lived in the county for generations, with some hailing from Cornwall—we will not talk about that. Devon has given me some incredible opportunities during my career. I was part of the launch team for Radio Plymouth, a truly independent radio station for my home city. It is still going strong 10 years later, and I was delighted to attend its birthday celebrations last month. However, my career in journalism and politics took me away from my county, family and friends. London and the south-east continue to lure our home-grown talent, many of whom never return. That must change, but it is possible only if Devon speaks up, with one voice. Devon has largely backed my party for many years, and that loyalty must be rewarded. I look forward to working with the Government on repaying the people's trust in us. Throughout the election campaign, people on doorsteps across East Devon told me they wanted to get Brexit done. We are getting it done, but we must deliver more.

Although many people flock to Devon for our stunning coastline and countryside every year, it is clear that our transport network leaves a lot to be desired, and never more so than now. Until last week, Exeter airport, based in my constituency, provided regular flights across the UK, the Channel Islands and Europe. The collapse of Flybe is devastating for Devon, and my thoughts are with those looking for new jobs. I went to Exeter airport on Friday to speak to staff and offer my support. I saw many brave faces that day, and I want them to know that I will do everything I can to support the future of Exeter airport.

Now is the time to invest in the south-west. Never again can our main railway line, connecting Devon to the rest of the country, be literally washed away. So, we must, to coin a phrase that I hope will catch on, “Get Dawlish Done”, and that is not all. The A303 is a main artery route into the south-west. It is the road that passes Stonehenge, and many of us are treated to that historic view for considerably longer than we anticipated. It is time we saw action, not just proposals and plans. I would take great delight in getting access to the Government’s PayPal account. Alas, I fear the password may contain the words “Powerhouse” and “Northern”. Nevertheless, I know that the Prime Minister and his Cabinet fully understand the opportunities and challenges facing Devon. “I’ll do it dreckly” is a phrase heard regularly in my home city of Plymouth. It means that we will get around to doing something, at some point, maybe, in the future—a Janner’s mañana, if you will. But we do not have any time to waste—we must deliver for Devon, now.

5.24 pm

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Devon (Simon Jupp); he spoke with wit and flair and it was good to see him put Ministers on notice that he will be a doughty fighter for his constituency. It was good, too, to follow the hon. Member for Redcar (Jacob Young). We Opposition Members miss his predecessor greatly, but I know that Mo Mowlam would have appreciated the humanity and humility that he showed in an excellent maiden speech.

It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate, because in a Second Reading debate we debate the principles of the Bill, and we cannot debate the principles of this Bill without debating the ethos of the games that we wish to host. The ethos of the games is generosity, which is why I shall start with first things first, and put on record the gratitude that the House feels not only to the chairman of the games, John Crabtree, and the chief executive, Ian Reid, but to Ian Ward and the team and officers at Birmingham City Council, along with Yvonne Davies and the team at Sandwell Council, for working miracles to step in when the bid from Durban failed. They have tried to do something spectacular, which is to put together a plan for the games in four and a half years, when normally it takes seven. The thanks of this House go out to everyone in the west midlands who has been involved in pulling together the plans for what will be the seventh Commonwealth games held on these islands. The games that we plan to showcase will be the greatest Commonwealth games in history—and not just because they will be held and showcased in the most diverse, innovative and creative heart of the Commonwealth: in the west midlands and in Birmingham.

The investment brought to our region is desperately needed. Some £800 million, about a quarter of it raised locally, is desperately needed. The facilities that have come are very welcome: I was delighted to look around the fantastic new Alexander stadium with my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West); there is the fabulous new aquatic centre, which will be built in Smethwick; and of course there is the extraordinary new village that will be built in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood), with 1,500 new homes—the down payment on an extraordinary new

development of 5,000 homes—that will, in total, bring to the great, lucky constituency of Perry Barr some half a billion pounds of investment. Let no one go away from this debate without understanding clearly that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr is the greatest negotiator in this Chamber on behalf of the people he serves.

Our challenge is not simply to deliver the games and to deliver the investment, but to ensure that what is a great festival of sport is also a great festival of and a great renewal of our civic spirit. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity, and a generation should be lifted by opportunity—lifted out of poverty, out of unemployment and out of under-investment. We Opposition Members will fight like tigers to ensure that the games are a hand up for a community and not a handout for corporate sport. The Opposition know that our success will be judged not simply by the medals that we win, but by the lives that we change. We on this side of the House know that this festival of the Commonwealth games must be a festival of the civic gospel, too, which is why I turn to the father of the civic gospel: Mr George Dawson.

The story of George Dawson is not so well known today. He was a radical preacher—born in Portsmouth, I believe—who in the late 19th century made his home on Edward Street in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood). From the pulpit he preached with extraordinary power, but he was the father of civic inventiveness in our city of Birmingham. He founded the arts club and the free *Birmingham Daily Press*. He was the driving force behind the Shakespeare Memorial library. He was determined to ensure that our new city of Birmingham was not simply a city that was a democracy, but a city that had a democracy of culture. That inspired the great words that still sit above the free Shakespeare library:

“The time has come to give everything to everybody”.

That democratic ethos is what should inspire our approach to the games.

George Dawson had an extraordinary congregation: around 12 of them went on to be city councillors and around six of them went on to be lord mayors, including one Joseph Chamberlain. Together, they ensured that at the end of the 19th century our city was known as the best-governed city in the world. That is the ethos that should shape our approach to this Bill. With that in mind, what would George Dawson say about the Bill that the Minister has presented to us this afternoon? Well, the first thing he would say is that the games should be built in a genuinely inclusive way. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) says that we will try to amend the Bill to include our determination to ensure that the Commonwealth games is an accredited living wage employer. Why is that important to us? It is because, across our region, 571,000 people are paid less than what they need to live on. That is one in four workers in our region. Only one in 1,000 businesses in our region is actually accredited as a living wage employer. That is why we are determined to make sure that ours is the first living wage region in the country, and why we want to see the Commonwealth games lead the way. I hope that the Minister will agree to the amendment and not seek to have it voted down by Members on his Benches.

[Liam Byrne]

I hope that the Minister gets a chance to discuss this matter with Mr Lee Barron, our fabulous general-secretary of the TUC in the midlands, who is bringing together a Commonwealth collective to argue the case for a much stronger social charter, but accreditation of the living wage is absolutely front and centre of our demands.

Secondly, I hope that the Government will bring forward a report that ensures that, in the village, we will deliver at least 471 homes for social rent. Why is that important? It is because the number of homes that we have built for social rent in our region has fallen by 80% since 2010. We are building council homes so slowly that it will take us until 2052 to clear the council waiting lists. That is why I hope that, when the Minister comes to Birmingham, he will meet Saidul Haque and the Citizens UK team, which has been defining some of our demands to make sure that the village that we build on the games site is genuinely a village of homes that everyone can actually afford.

The third thing that I think George Dawson would have done in this debate is to quiz the Minister on how we make sure that the Commonwealth games genuinely creates a new foundation for disability sports. We are so proud that the Commonwealth games is coming to Birmingham, and we are also proud of the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine, which sits just seven miles south of the Alexander stadium. I hope that, when the Minister next comes to Birmingham, he will ask for meetings with people at the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine and with the Commonwealth games team to inquire how we can create a genuine foundation for the Invictus games in our city for years to come. The Commonwealth games has a proud record of inclusivity, but we want to use it as a catalyst for transforming the strength, power, depth and stretch of the teams and the facilities that we have in our city for disability sports.

Fourthly, let us try to make sure that the legacy of our Commonwealth games is not simply nice new facilities, but lives and a generation that are changed once and for all. Crucially, how do we use the games to bring forward a new generation of leaders? We have had cuts to the youth service in our region two and a half times harder than anywhere else in the country, so let us look at the money that the Chancellor announced for youth services—some £500 million over the years to come—and have £100 million of it in the west midlands. Let us put it together with the legacy team from the Commonwealth games and create a young Commonwealth leaders programme where, in every single ward in our region, we equip, train and give a platform to a young leader to show how we can bring together communities for the future, animated by that spirit that we have more in common than that which divides us. Let us bring forward the investment in a generation of young leaders who not just bring our community closer together, but strengthen the links between our region and those of Commonwealth countries.

**Mr Khalid Mahmood:** I appreciate what my right hon. Friend is saying about the young leaders programme. We have more than 160 nationalities living in Birmingham. The Commonwealth programme will be hugely welcome and hugely appreciated, but, more importantly, it will provide the leadership for the next generation, and I thank him for raising that.

**Liam Byrne:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who represents one of the youngest constituencies in our country. His constituency has suffered greatly as a result of cuts to youth services over the past few years. Let us use the possibilities of the Commonwealth games to begin turning that around. The final thing I think Dawson would say if he were here is that we should use available tickets to reward our local heroes. That has been suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green, and is one of the great ideas to come from the hosting of the Olympics. We in the west midlands would appreciate having the chance to honour the people who make the world of difference to the city and region that we share.

We are so proud to be a poster child of a diverse community that lives together well. We are so proud that we will have the eyes of 1.5 billion people on us. We want to dazzle them, not simply with the greatest Commonwealth spectacle of sport that the world has ever seen, but with the kind of society that we have helped to build—a society that is dedicated to the Commonwealth principles of democracy, tolerance, inclusivity and peace, a society that we will have built not just with words, but with deeds.

5.35 pm

**Stuart Anderson** (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak after the maiden speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for East Devon (Simon Jupp) and for Redcar (Jacob Young), who both delivered passionate, powerful and sometimes humorous speeches.

I am delighted to speak in this debate for several other reasons, and not just because it is about the west midlands. I have always been a keen sportsman, but would I call myself an athlete? I do not think I would fit into that category. However, in preparation for the London marathon—I am running for the Good Shepherd Ministry in Wolverhampton—I have experienced training on a low level, and I can only be inspired by the athletes who are coming to take part. Also, as a soldier I served alongside many outstanding service personnel from the Commonwealth and forged relationships in hard times that will last a lifetime. I support the Royal British Legion's "Stop the Service Charge" campaign; the brave men and women from the Commonwealth who have served should have their service recognised and should not have to pay for visas.

Earlier in the year, I delivered my maiden speech in the debate on global Britain. I now find myself speaking in a similar debate. The Commonwealth games will host 71 nations and territories, bringing with them 6,500 athletes and officials to showcase to 1.5 billion people. This is clearly a demonstration of global Britain. In the Olympics, we saw how well the country can do; now we will see how well the west midlands can do. Economically, the games are huge for us in the west midlands. We will benefit from just under £800 million of sports investment and £300 million of contracts, of which an estimated 4,000 are expected to be awarded to small and medium-sized enterprises. This will clearly be welcomed in the region.

I certainly would not be doing justice to my constituency as the MP for Wolverhampton South West if I did not mention our great city. I firmly believe that Wolverhampton has been left behind for decades, and that it needs levelling up. I am glad to see that it has recently got off



to a great start with £390,000 for investment into homelessness in the city, £20 million for disabled access at the train station and £45 million from different funds for our high street, but more will be asked for. With three quarters of a billion pounds coming to the west midlands for the games, Ministers can be assured that I will be banging the drum for Wolverhampton.

The west midlands will be delighted to host visitors from all around the world for this event, but we need to ensure that we have everything we need to deliver it. The impact of the games on local transport infrastructure should not be underestimated. West Midlands Mayor Andy Street has produced an outstanding transport plan on connecting all areas of the west midlands over the next decade. I know that this will not be in place for the start of the games—it is not intended to be—but some work can be expedited. Funding should be brought forward for developments such as Tettenhall railway station, which would result in less traffic on the roads, and would assist supporters going to and from the games.

It would be easy to see the focus as being on Birmingham, but the west midlands will stand strong together and we will see that a world-class event is hosted. There are many great parts of the region. I do not think that anyone could visit the games without tasting Black Country battered chips or seeing the “Man on the Oss” in Wolverhampton. It all adds to the experience.

I want to ensure that I do not digress too far from the sporting legacy that we have in Wolverhampton. With Denise Lewis, Elvis Gordon, Tessa Sanderson and Vikram Solanki, we know how to deliver great athletes. So that I do not upset other hon. Members, I will not even start on the great run that the mighty Wolves are having at the moment. With pedigree like that in and from Wolverhampton, it would only be right that part of the games is hosted in the city. We have a great facility in Aldersley Leisure Village—one that I think of fondly because it is where I was announced as the MP for Wolverhampton South West. Or how about having some of the events run through the roads of Wolverhampton and experiencing some of the hills that I found in my marathon training?

There are many opportunities to showcase the whole of the west midlands at the games. It would surely be sad if Wolverhampton and all the other locations were not included in some way—and we want to make sure that we are not short-changing the visitors. It is evident that the Commonwealth games will showcase not just a truly global Britain but an outstanding west midlands, and that is why I will be supporting the Bill.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I call Navendu Mishra to make his maiden speech.

5.41 pm

**Navendu Mishra** (Stockport) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would like to start by congratulating the hon. Members for Redcar (Jacob Young) and for East Devon (Simon Jupp) on their excellent maiden speeches.

It is the greatest honour imaginable to serve the people of Stockport. I am indebted to the residents of my constituency for believing in me and for giving me their support at the ballot box. I am also grateful to my family for their love and encouragement over the years, without which I would never have been able to stand as a candidate.

My predecessor, Ann Coffey, served Stockport from 1992 to 2019. Her work in the all-party parliamentary group on runaway and missing children and adults is admired on both sides of this House. As a former social worker, she campaigned tirelessly against child sexual exploitation, and her work on this very important subject has left a lasting legacy for the better. I wish her luck with her future endeavours. I would also like to thank Andrew Bennett, the former Member for Stockport North and then for the neighbouring Denton and Reddish seat. Andrew was a source of great advice and inspiration during the general election campaign.

If the House will indulge me, I would like to mention another fellow Stopfordian: Samuel Perry, who attempted unsuccessfully to become the MP for Stockport and was subsequently elected as the Labour/Co-op Member for Kettering. Samuel is famous for his work as national secretary of the Co-operative party and as the father of another famous Stopfordian—Fred Perry, the Wimbledon champion and founder of the iconic clothing brand.

I am incredibly grateful to my election agent, Mr Chris Gleeson, and all those in Stockport Labour party for the hundreds of—often unsocial—hours that they dedicated to my campaign. In the Labour movement, we believe in the collective, and I am very lucky to have such a hard-working and dedicated team around me.

My constituency of Stockport is a beautiful part of the world, and, in my unbiased opinion, the jewel in the crown of our beloved north-west region. It has many iconic buildings and structures—and, of course, some of the warmest people in the world. Many people know Stockport because of our train station and the famous Stockport viaduct. At the time of its construction, it was the world’s largest viaduct and a major feat of Victorian engineering, and it is, to this day, one of the world’s biggest brick structures, with around 11 million bricks. It is an iconic feature of the Stockport skyline, and has inspired authors and artists alike. L. S. Lowry seems to have been haunted by the viaduct; it features in several of his works from the ’50s and ’60s. The paintings and drawings evoke a thriving, if grimy, industrial town.

Author and theorist Friedrich Engels described the viaduct in his book “The Condition of the Working Class in England”. Although many across the globe admire Engels’s political analysis, I do not share in his bleak and unflattering description of Stockport. In 1844, Engels wrote:

“Stockport is renowned throughout the entire district as one of the duskiest, smokiest holes, and looks, indeed, especially when viewed from the viaduct, excessively repellent.”

I am glad to report that, while Engels’s analysis of the capitalist exploitation of working people remains true today, his words about Stockport do not. These days, the smoke-belching chimneys are a thing of the past. In recent years, Stockport has had the fastest-growing economy in the north-west, with relatively high-value jobs. It is a brilliant place to live and to represent. The historic town centre, featured on film and TV, is a great place to be, especially if it is Foodie Friday.

Stockport is a varied and diverse place to live, but like many similar working communities across the UK, it is a tale of two towns: the haves and the have-nots. If you live in Heatons South, you can expect to live a lot longer than if you live where I live, in Brinnington and Central—10 years longer if you are a man, and eight if you are

[Navendu Mishra]

a woman. And it is not just how long you live; your chances of living with serious illness also vary enormously across the constituency.

Our town has a proud 400-year-old hat-making heritage. I was delighted to learn from my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) about the history of hat making in her constituency, but I am pleased to share that Stockport's Hat Works is the only dedicated hat museum in the UK.

Although Stockport trumps Luton in terms of hat museums, both our local football teams are known as the Hatters. Recent performances in the national league give us hope that we will soon be returning to the football league. My local football team, Stockport County, was founded in 1883 as the Heaton Norris Rovers, and changed its name in 1890. The club has a long history that includes the wonderful seasons in the early '90s when it was managed by the revered Uruguayan Danny Bergara. I have made a commitment to help promote our local club and look forward to working with the fans and the new owner in the coming years.

Stockport is a vibrant market town with a lively town centre. We have a thriving civic society, and our people take great pride in their community. It is those people working and volunteering in our third sector who are the backbone of our community. We have some excellent local organisations that support people from across the north-west, and I want to use my maiden speech as an opportunity to highlight just a few of them.

I have been lucky enough to visit the Wellspring centre several times and see the work they do. Over the years, they have helped over 1,500 rough sleepers into accommodation. Their annual rucksack appeal helps people in need with warm clothes, food and other essentials in the winter. Jonathan and his team of staff and volunteers inspire me every day, working hard to support some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

I have also had the wonderful opportunity to visit Smart Works in my constituency, a registered charity that supports women with interview preparation and professional clothing. I met some of the staff and volunteers based in Stockport, and I was pleased to learn about the number of women who have had support over the years. The appalling rise in inequality and poverty is illustrated by the alarming increase in the use of food banks in my constituency.

One of my main priorities for my constituency is housing. All those years ago, the poor quality of housing impressed itself on Engels. These days, the situation is different, but the legacy of the right-to-buy policy and demographic and financial changes have resulted in huge pressures on housing in Stockport. We need to make sure that Stopfordians do not get priced out of living and thriving in our town. I want to ensure that high numbers of good-quality social and affordable homes are built in Stockport.

Another important pledge in my campaign was bringing high-quality green jobs into Stockport, to make sure that people have access to good jobs locally, rather than having to travel long distances for work. Improving public transport is also an issue close to my heart. We need reliable, affordable and frequent bus services, as

well as the Metrolink tram brought back into our town. The leader of Stockport Council, Elise Wilson, is a long-standing campaigner for better public transport, and I look forward to working with her to ensure that this issue gets the priority it deserves.

Yesterday was International Women's Day, so it would be remiss of me not to mention Suffragette Square in Stockport, which was named to commemorate four important women in Stockport's history: Gertrude Powicke, Elsie Plant and Hannah Winbolt were Stopfordian women who were all active in the suffrage movement, and Elizabeth Raffald was a pioneering Stopfordian from the 1700s. Another woman who has inspired me is Mrs Jayaben Desai, of Indian heritage, who famously led the Grunwick dispute of mostly women workers, which was a landmark strike in the fight for fairness and equality in Britain.

Stockport and the north-west have a proud history of radicalism and protest—whether it was the Chartists, who fought for working-class rights and influence; the suffragettes, who campaigned for women's right to vote; the Kinder Scout mass trespass, which helped to establish the right to ramble; or those who marched for democratic rights at St Peter's field and were slaughtered at the Peterloo massacre. People often think of Byron or Shelley when they think of poetic accounts of Peterloo, but Samuel Bamford was at St Peter's field on that bloody day and captured the struggle of ordinary Stopfordians in his 1816 poem "The Fray of Stockport".

The brave workers at the Roberts Arundel engineering works in Stockport fought for the right to organise against poverty wages and an oppressive employer. The Roberts Arundel dispute started as a local strike involving 145 workers, but became a dispute of national significance as millions of workers threatened a concerted solidarity strike across the north-west. Hugh Scanlon, the late president of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, said that

"the Roberts Arundel dispute in Stockport had a small and seemingly 'parochial' beginning, yet exploded into an issue that had great repercussions for the Labour movement nationally and internationally".

I would like to pay tribute to the late, great AEU Stockport district secretary John Tocher, who fought on behalf of workers in my constituency all those years ago, and his comrade David Heywood, who continues to be a source of advice and inspiration.

As socialists and representatives of the trade union and labour movement, we stand on the shoulders of giants. One such giant was my dear friend and Salford councillor John Ferguson, who would be delighted to see me in this place making my maiden speech. Sadly, he passed away just before the election. John was a giant of north-west Labour politics and a lifelong trade unionist, and he always had the wisest of words to offer when the going got tough.

Personally, I owe so much to the trade union movement, which has supported me throughout my working life. From courses on workplace representation to political education, my union Unite has always stood with me. In fact, my maternal grandfather, Mr Awadhesh Pandey, was involved in the All India Railwaymen's Federation, and active in the 1974 national railway strike, standing up for better pay and conditions for his fellow workers. I hope to do justice to my grandfather's memory by standing up against exploitation. The history of our



movement shows us that we can achieve so much when we stand up collectively to fight for what is right and just. We owe so much to the social movements that won us fundamental rights. Yet, unfortunately, the injustices, inequalities and exploitation that inspired these movements remain.

Public services in Stockport have been decimated by a decade of Government cuts and brutal austerity. Over £100 million has been stripped from our council's budget. Our local NHS trust has been underfunded by £170 million, and there is an £8 million funding shortfall in our schools. Austerity was not inevitable; it was a deliberate choice by the political elite to make ordinary working-class people pay the price for an economic crisis they did not create. As Stockport's new MP, I stand with these ordinary working people. I vow to continue our town's proud tradition of radicalism and protest, and to stand up for hope, equality and justice. Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for allowing me to make my maiden speech.

5.52 pm

**Tom Randall** (Gedling) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Redcar (Jacob Young) and for East Devon (Simon Jupp) on their excellent maiden speeches, and it is a pleasure to follow the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Stockport (Navendu Mishra). It may not surprise him to learn that I do not quite share his conclusions about the relevance of Engels today, but it was a very passionate and informative speech about the history of Stockport, and I look forward to hearing more contributions from him in his time in this House.

With the sometimes unsettling news around us, including talk of self-isolation, it is very pleasing that I can speak in a debate that will celebrate and look forward to a time when lots of people, from far and wide, will meet to cheer on international athletes who have travelled to this country to achieve their personal best. The return of the Commonwealth games to the United Kingdom so soon after the Glasgow games is exciting and full of promise—so exciting, indeed, that this committed east midlander finds himself thrilled for the people of the west midlands.

As the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) identified, we are hosting these games without the usual lead-in time. Durban had been awarded the 2022 games by the Commonwealth Games Federation, but this offer was withdrawn after Durban failed to meet several obligations in its bid. That said, I believe that we are in a very strong position to host the games. The Commonwealth games in Manchester in 2002 demonstrated to the world generally, and to the International Olympic Committee in particular, that the United Kingdom was capable of hosting a large-scale, multi-nation sporting event. This was, I am sure, one of the key factors in London's success three years later, when it won the bid to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games. I see that this Bill will create an organising committee along the same lines as the organising committee created for London. This model worked very well then, as it later did in Glasgow, and I trust that it will also be a success in Birmingham.

I am, alas, not a natural sportsman, but my enthusiasm for these games is personal. In 2011 and 2012, I was employed by the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. For 18 months, I had the privilege of working alongside colleagues

from across the globe, helping to stage what is widely regarded as the best-organised Olympics games ever. This enthusiasm was widespread: for the first and I think last time, I saw strangers on the London underground excitedly chatting to one other during those games. My own team, which included 50 volunteers, ranging from students to lawyers and diplomats, gave up hours of their time and worked hard but unwaveringly to make the games a success. I have no doubt that the army of volunteers soon to be recruited for Birmingham will have a similarly deeply rewarding experience.

I was lucky enough to be the person who handed the Union flag to Sir Chris Hoy before he carried it into the Olympic stadium at the opening ceremony. At the closing ceremonies, I handed the Olympic and Paralympic flags to the then Mayor of London, before he handed them over to the mayor of Rio. These experiences enabled me to see, at close quarters, the power of the games: the ability to draw people together in a unifying national moment; the way that the games inspired the public, especially children; and, of course, the regeneration of east London. I look forward to seeing the Birmingham games do for Perry Barr what the London games did for Stratford—transforming the area with desirable housing, as well as the planned creation of thousands of new jobs.

If I may, I will turn very briefly to the substance of the Bill. The restrictions on advertising and trading might appear draconian, but they are needed. These sporting events do rely on corporate sponsorship to succeed, and without the kind of brand protection envisaged in the Bill, the games would not be possible. Similarly, the creation of a games transport plan with dedicated games lanes, might appear onerous, but they are necessary. As a games lane user myself during London 2012, I saw how they are vital for the delivery of a large, multinational sporting event—something that I understand was learned from painful experiences in previous games.

Finally, I am pleased that this Bill has broad cross-party support. The guiding hand of Tessa Jowell is sadly no longer with us, but I think the fact that she was one of those who, along with Lord Coe and others, demonstrated to the world that we can do this sort of event and do it well means that Birmingham 2022 will be part of her legacy. The motto of London 2012 was “Inspire a Generation”, and it did. The motto of Birmingham 2022 is “Are you Game?”, and we are. I wish the Bill and these games every success.

5.57 pm

**Mr Khalid Mahmood** (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will briefly pay my respects to Councillor Keith Linnecor, whose funeral I attended this morning. He served in my constituency for 24 years, and he was a great stalwart and a great local councillor. The only currency he believed in was his shoe leather, and he spent a huge amount of it in the constituency and in his ward. I express my condolences to all of his family.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to take part in this debate on the Commonwealth games. As a number of colleagues and friends have mentioned, I am the Member of Parliament in whose constituency most of the games will take place. I was the first Member of Parliament in Birmingham to call for the Commonwealth games to be brought to Birmingham, before we actually

[Mr Khalid Mahmood]

got them. During the initial competition for the games I raised the issue, but I got slightly non-committal responses from a lot of the leaders across Birmingham. I thought it was a fantastic opportunity, because I believed it would give us a huge opportunity for investment in my constituency. I wanted that to happen because it would give us a chance to celebrate the many cultures we have across Birmingham, and as I have said, I wanted that investment in Birmingham and my constituency.

The Minister has raised most of the issues, and I had the privilege to meet him beforehand to discuss some of my concerns. The first point he raised, among others, at the start of his speech concerned the road regulations for the games and effective co-ordination between the relevant transport and traffic authorities. I accept that the other points were also very valid, but I would like to look at that issue. It is very important because we have had a number of significant meetings in my constituency.

I am a trainee of another famous Brummie, who came from Norwich. Sir Richard Knowles was a great local government leader who managed under the Conservatives to be able to get the NEC, the International Conference Centre and the National Indoor Arena; he was a great Brummie—an adopted Brummie—who believed that the best possible way to negotiate was to move forward and to be able to do what is right for the people of Birmingham. He knew how to get the best possible deal for the people of Birmingham. He did that during the huge demise of the great industries that we had; in Birmingham we had over 1,001 trades, but unfortunately they are not there now as much as we would like. I am grateful in my constituency to what used to be the EEF—the Engineering Employers' Federation—for our engineering and manufacturing training school. It is flourishing: there are three times more students than seven years ago, and it is doing a fantastic job.

We are concentrating today on skills—on the skills needed for the housing programme in relation to these changes. I wholly welcome the 1,000 houses and the promise of a further 4,000, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) mentioned. I strongly support that, but I ask that there be more social housing. We are hugely underserved in terms of housing; we want more housing to be built and we want to support that programme. One of the reasons why I originally pushed for the Commonwealth games to be held here is the huge investment in terms of housing that it would give.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell)—for the royal borough, or town as he calls it, of Sutton Coldfield—spoke about the legacy. I wanted there to be a huge legacy for my constituency; that is why I pushed for this originally. I wanted a legacy that was positive and that would lead my constituents to prosperity, and the whole of Birmingham to prosperity—and Sandwell and the rest of the adjoining areas.

However, there is a sad tinge to that. My constituents currently feel that they are being pushed not towards a legacy but towards strife: the strife that they will face locally on a daily basis—the work they will have to do to overcome some of the road infrastructure changes being proposed. I and my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz)—who is not here—have

had a number of meetings and we have had over 400 people coming to them. That is unprecedented, and this has gone on for over a year and a half—two years, almost—ever since the initial plans came up. I want to support Birmingham City Council and I want to support the games. I have had a very good and positive relationship both with the chairman of the games and the chief executives. We have regular meetings to discuss some of the issues, including the integration of the local community in carrying out some of the work and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill said, how to look after the youth.

The games organising committee is very supportive of that and so is the executive structure within it. But the trouble I have at the moment is twofold. The first is with Birmingham City Council in terms of trying to knock off a flyover—I use that term advisedly. It is the thoroughfare from Birmingham city centre to the M6 and Walsall, crossing West Bromwich East just slightly on the left-hand side—I see the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Nicola Richards) in her place. There is huge concern, certainly from the hon. Lady, the Members for Wolverhampton and me, about the transport infrastructure that will be put before us, because it will isolate my community. It will create a number of issues that I want to address.

The community is so concerned that the A34 safety action group has put forward a pre-litigation letter to the council—to the leader and the cabinet member—on particular issues that it is not happy about. For instance, there have not been any road safety audits. The usual procedure is to look at the displacement effects and the effect on traffic safety and traffic flow. I have taken the time to go and look at the modelling that Birmingham council has produced. I still await the figures on how the modelling was developed, however, because the modelling it showed me bore no relation to the traffic in that area, and it was very difficult to see how that traffic would be managed. A direct access out through the flyover is being removed and solid traffic lights are being put in, and access is being restricted to the One Stop shopping centre. That is a huge issue, because that centre is essentially an island: we have a railway line on one side, and it is landlocked on the other. The main road is the only access, so if work is started to remove the flyover, there will be problems.

There will be issues getting business through my One Stop shopping centre, which is essentially the town's shopping centre so far as we are concerned. Many good brands have come in, and they have done so because of the huge trade they do. Its Asda is one of the largest trading Asda stores in the west midlands, and we also have Clarks and Marks & Spencer, and a number of banks and other institutions, but we also have some very good local traders, and their livelihoods will be put at risk because of the roadworks that need to be done to deliver this. It is therefore very important that the Minister looks at the consequences. We are talking about legacy, but there will not be a positive one, certainly not for the shopkeepers or other people who will have to use it afterwards. The modelling shown to me is, I believe, not accurate in any sense at all.

No value-for-money analysis has been done, and the litigation process that my constituents have put through shows how desperately they feel. In any procedure there would be a value-for-money analysis. I agree with my

right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill: Birmingham has been deprived of funding. During the past 10 years Birmingham was deprived of funding and has lost over £700 million. I accept that, but if Birmingham then goes ahead with this folly, spending much more money, my worry is where that money will come from. Is the Minister prepared to underwrite that money because of the Commonwealth games? I have been told that the Government will underwrite the money for that. I do not want more money coming out from the already-deprived citizens of Birmingham, so it is very important that I get some answers.

There has been hardly any constructive consultation on this issue. A number of people have been trying to get information. The initial consultation was very narrow, covering literally just 50 yards off the highway, and most of that was industrial areas that those conducting the consultation wanted to consult on. This is not a model consultation. Also, the initial consultation was done in July and August, which is of course a very good time to do a consultation for those who do not want to hear what people are thinking: the majority of parents and others are on holiday and will not be present.

Referring to the geographical areas of my constituency, there was no consultation at all in Handsworth, Newtown, Kingstanding, and Boldmere and Pheasey, and very little consultation in Birchfield, Lozells and Aston, the areas immediately surrounding the flyover and the centre as well.

The Labour party regularly does an equality impact assessment for the BAME community, and indeed we should do that, but there has been no equality impact for the BAME community in that area. We rightly asked the Government when the changes are coming in and what the assessment is of the effects on the BAME community. The ward of Aston, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Shabana Mahmood), is 85.5% BAME, Birchfield ward in my constituency is 79.2%, Lozells in my constituency is 88%, Newtown in the constituency of my right hon. Friend is 70%, Handsworth in my constituency is 80%, and Handsworth Wood in my constituency is 80%, Perry Barr in my constituency is 48%, Soho in my right hon. Friend's constituency is 60%, Oscott in my constituency is 30% and Kingstanding is 30%.

I believe the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Gary Sambrook) is still a councillor for that area. I congratulate him on the sturdy work he has done on this matter to support his constituents. All those issues have not been dealt with properly and that will leave a huge bad taste in the mouth at the election.

The aggravation for my constituents is such that they are prepared to demonstrate—the elderly, single mothers, people who are ill, those in wheelchairs, parents and individuals. I have been to a number of their meetings. People who have served in the police force and as civil servants are all prepared to act because they believe that this is not the right way to treat the people of my constituency. I am sad that I have to stand here. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill says that I am a good negotiator. I hope that raising these issues on the Floor of the House will bring those points to the fore. There has been no work on compensation if this is to go ahead. The livelihoods of smaller tradespeople

in the One Stop Shopping centre and across the area will be hugely affected. That is not the legacy I want for my constituency.

My constituents, including the A34 safety action group, are also concerned about the new Sprint bus service—the bendy bus, as we commonly call it. It has essentially failed everywhere in the country. It was stopped in London in 2004-05. It did not work. The buses were over 57 foot long. They used to be called the free bus: they were stopped in part because people would get on through the back doors and not pay for their journeys. The buses that Transport for West Midlands and the Mayor are considering will be diesel, and this is where we have a real issue with the environment. I am very concerned. We need to reflect on why the Mayor and Transport for West Midlands are adamant about pushing that. The effect, particularly on Walsall Road, which is a run-through and has parking bays, will be that the infirm, the ill, the elderly and young children will not be able to get a bus to their homes. There has been no consultation and only one meeting with the Mayor. He did not come back again. We took a number of key people to a meeting with the chief executive of Transport for West Midlands. She has not come back to us or to me. I managed to steal another meeting while she was meeting my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South. The proposal now is not to move the bus into Walsall South, but to keep it in Perry Barr.

We have an excellent bus service called the X50. If Transport for West Midlands has the money, I would prefer it if it made the buses electric. They would run faster than the proposed Sprint bus system it wants to introduce and they would be much cleaner. Their frequency could be increased. With the money the Mayor will have—some £110 million across Birmingham—fares could be reduced. If we want better, cleaner air in the centre of Birmingham, we should have green buses and affordable fares for families, people not in work and the elderly. We want to support them by having clean air in Birmingham by changing our transport system from diesel to electric. That has been my argument throughout, but the Mayor and the chief executive of Transport for West Midlands have not bothered to listen to a single word from my constituents.

Those are the two key issues I wanted to raise, because they are important to my constituents. It is important that the Commonwealth games is not shown in the media with people protesting across the A34, which is next to the Alexander stadium. I do not want to see that. I want to see a happy and joyous coming together of the Commonwealth community. I want the people of Birmingham and the people of my constituency to be proud of their heritage and to be part of a legacy that increases the local economy, housing and so on. There is a transport obligation on the Government, so if these issues are not looked into, I will be looking to table an amendment in Committee.

6.15 pm

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): It is a pleasure to rise to support this important and necessary Bill. I do so as a Black Country MP and as chair of the all-party group for the Commonwealth games. It is a particular pleasure to speak after so many excellent maiden speeches. I am sure the grandfather of the hon. Member for Stockport (Navendu Mishra) would have been prouder



[Mike Wood]

than he could imagine to watch him making his maiden speech. There were also excellent maiden speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Redcar (Jacob Young) and for East Devon (Simon Jupp). My hon. Friend the Member for East Devon made the rather brave confession that some of his family hail from Cornwall. It is very much in that spirit that I make my own confession: I am a very proud Black Country man, but I was in fact born in Birmingham—in the old Sorrento hospital in Moseley.

As 10-year-old Dudley schoolboy, I remember watching in October 1986 with my classmates and the teacher the announcement that Birmingham had sadly missed out to Barcelona on the chance to host the 1992 Olympic games. Finally, 30 years later, we have an opportunity to bring one of the world's biggest and greatest multi-sport events to the west midlands. We need to ensure that the games will be a success. We know that they will be a sporting success. We know that the organising committee will be led by Ian Reid. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood) mentioned, he has some experience in this area. I think he was actually chief finance officer of the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth games, rather than chief executive. However, having done so much to help to make Glasgow 2014 such a success, I am confident that the sporting organisation of Birmingham 2022 will be in the very safest of hands.

More than sporting success in summer 2022, what modern sporting events on this scale are judged on is the legacy they leave behind after the sportsmen have gone. It will be fantastic to welcome 6,500 athletes and officials from 71 Commonwealth nations and territories. They will be watched by 1 million spectators in the stadium, in the other venues and on the roadside, and by 1.5 billion people worldwide. However, what will make a real difference for my constituents and for people across the west midlands is creating a Commonwealth games legacy. Since the Manchester Commonwealth games in 2002, the economic legacy built up and left by Commonwealth games has increased at a rapid pace. The 2014 games in Glasgow are understood to have brought £740 million to the regional and national economy—in Glasgow and wider Scotland—while the 2018 Gold Coast games are projected to have delivered a £1.3 billion boost to the economy in Queensland. That is the economic legacy that we want for Birmingham, the west midlands and the country as a whole.

However, more than just the economic legacy, we are looking for a sporting legacy, with greater participation, greater interest and greater levels of activity. Speaking as the father of two school-age children, I know that someone being able to see sporting success when they are growing up—particularly when that sporting success is happening just down the road—is a major contributing factor to their interest in competitive sport and their inclination to get involved and compete at whatever level. It is great that we will see the refurbished Alexander stadium and the new aquatics venue in Smethwick, but we want the sporting legacy to be spread out across the west midlands.

It was good to see the Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris), on the Treasury Bench earlier in the debate, because I know

how much work he has done with Halesowen athletic and cycling club in his constituency. We are proud of it across Dudley borough—it is genuinely one of the great cycling clubs in the country. It has produced former Olympians such as Jess Varnish and Helen Scott, the Paralympic, world and Commonwealth games multi-gold medallist. It is an exceptionally well run club, which engages the community right across the borough and beyond extremely well, and its level of success deserves the very best facilities. It is about time that we had a world-class cycling facility—a world-class velodrome—in the west midlands. The campaign has been run by David Viner of Halesowen cycling club, and my hon. Friend has been doing so much to support it. I very much hope that the Government, the games organisers and all those involved in planning how to secure this sporting legacy will give the most serious consideration to how they can help make a world-class velodrome happen.

Beyond the sporting legacy, we have the opportunity to transform so much of the regional economy. In terms of the direct investment in the games, £300 million-worth of contracts will be available, 4,000 of which will have values of less than £175,000 to allow a greater range of small and medium-sized enterprises to bid, get involved and get a share of the economic value of contributing to the west midlands' first major multi-sport event. I very much hope that a large number of those contracts will go to west midlands SMEs, so that as well as the sporting legacy and the direct investment legacy, we can attract the high-quality jobs and develop the high-quality skills that the Black Country and the wider west midlands need and local people deserve.

This is an incredibly ambitious programme. It will help to move people into real jobs and will offer experiences that will be beneficial to their long-term career prospects. Beyond that, it will be beneficial to raising aspirations relating to what it is possible for young people leaving school and people training now in the west midlands to achieve, and what they can hope to build in their careers. We can do so much to shape that.

The games will be a huge showcase—not just a sporting, but a cultural showcase. They will be a trade and investment showcase not just for Birmingham but for the Black Country and the wider west midlands, and they will be a showcase for the 1.5 billion people watching. We have to get this right. The Bill is necessary for us to get it right, and it has my complete and absolute support.

6.25 pm

**Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to discuss the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill as a Birmingham MP, and as someone who has been excited about the games since they were first awarded. This morning, in front of the iconic Birmingham library, the official Commonwealth countdown clock was unveiled, revealing the 870 days remaining until the opening ceremony. I cannot wait for 2022, when the people of Birmingham will warmly welcome thousands of people from around the world to our wonderful city. We will have the eyes of over 1 billion people on us as we deliver what I am sure will undoubtedly be one of the greatest Commonwealth games ever.

As I am sure the Minister knows, I have been working closely with the leader of Birmingham City Council, Ian Ward, the chair of the games organising committee,

John Crabtree, and Ian Reid, the chief executive. I have been really impressed with their desire to produce a games that delivers for everyone and I look forward to continuing to work with them to bring this vision to fruition. I am proud that my constituency will play host to some of the events, and I look forward to cheering on our athletes at the University of Birmingham, which is providing venues for squash and hockey, and the world-famous Edgbaston cricket ground, which is hosting all the women's cricket matches.

The potential legacy impact cannot be overstated, and we have already seen plans for new homes. More sustainable transport links are being developed and built.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making some extremely important points. As a neighbouring MP in the west midlands, I welcome the games coming to our region. She talks about Edgbaston being a world-leading cricket venue. Leamington, of course, is the world-leading venue for lawn bowls—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I thank hon. Members for their encouragement. While we welcome the event coming to Warwick and Leamington, sustainable transport is one of the issues that we face. Does she agree that we need to see this as a fantastic chance to invest heavily in restructuring the sort of transport links that we need for the future?

**Preet Kaur Gill:** My hon. Friend makes a really good, important point, and he reminds us of the game of bowls in the Commonwealth games, which is very important too.

The Commonwealth games provide the chance for local residents to gain skills and vital employment opportunities, and they are an opportunity for other positive social changes as well. The west midlands has one of the lowest levels of living wage accreditation in the country. Birmingham City Council has been accredited by the Living Wage Foundation since 2012. The games have the opportunity to deliver good-quality, well-paid jobs by following suit, and I am really pleased that this is being championed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), Labour's metro Mayor candidate for the west midlands, who we heard earlier making a fantastic speech.

While I support and welcome the inclusion of promoting sustainability in the annual reporting requirements of the organising committee, I urge the Minister to amend that to include specific mention of the sustainable development goals. Tokyo's sustainability concept for the Olympics this year specifically aims to

"contribute to the realisation of Sustainable Development Goals...through the delivery of the Games."

This is a real opportunity to do the same with the Commonwealth games, using them as a call to action to eradicate poverty and inequalities and improve health and education, alongside sustainable economic growth and tackling climate change.

The additional costs of delivering many of the services and infrastructure around the games will have to be met by local authorities, and unfortunately, the Bill does not contain any information about steps to raise additional revenue so that the cost of the games is not passed on to the people of the west midlands, either in increased taxation or in a reduction in service frequency or quality.

What assessment have the Government made of other forms of revenue—for example, a hotel levy—during the games to counter the additional pressure that attendees and visitors will put on local services? Many cities around the world already do this.

I hope the Minister will take on board my suggestions. As a strong supporter of the games, I would welcome the opportunity to meet him to discuss these ideas further to ensure the games are the best they can be, both for the three weeks they are held and for the legacy that Birmingham and the wider west midlands deserve.

6.29 pm

**Gary Sambrook** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, as I still serve as a Birmingham City councillor. I echo the words of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood) about the late Councillor Keith Linnecor, whom I have known since I was 15; he was a good guy, a stalwart of local politics in Birmingham, and will be sorely missed. I saw a picture on Twitter earlier of some flowers at his funeral with woolly hedgehogs on them. He would have loved that as he had a nigh on obsession with hedgehogs. I also congratulate those hon. Members who made their maiden speeches today, the hon. Member for Stockport (Navendu Mishra) and my hon. Friends the Members for East Devon (Simon Jupp) and for Redcar (Jacob Young); they were excellent first contributions, and I look forward to many more to come.

I am proud that the Commonwealth games are coming to my home city of Birmingham, the city where I have lived my entire life, and I recognise the enormous positive contribution they will make to the city for years to come, in terms of jobs and skills, housing and health—I personally hope to benefit from the latter in the coming years—but I have huge concerns about the athletes village, which is the element of the games that is solely the responsibility of Birmingham City Council. I know the area fairly well as I went to university there. It is the site of the old Birmingham City University. It has now been flattened. When the games were touted a couple of years ago, the leader of the city council, Councillor Ian Ward, in order to get the idea through his own group, said in a crunch meeting that it would have no impact on the revenue budget of the city council. Unfortunately, we now find that it will have an impact of £2 million a year for the next 40 years—and that is before the new business model is released tonight, in time for next week's cabinet meeting. I urge the Minister to look closely at this when it is published, as it is important that the council leader and the council keep their word and that services on the frontline are not disrupted by their financial mismanagement of the athletes village in Perry Barr. Some 93% of the construction budget has already been allotted to only 72% of the bed spaces, and that is before a single brick has been laid. I have huge concerns about this. Also, just next door is the former National Express depot. In the original budget, the cost of moving it just a couple of hundred yards down the road was put at £2 million. Thanks to the council's mismanagement, that has spiralled to £15 million.

An equally controversial element of the games in the city at the moment is the removal of the Perry Barr flyover, at a cost of £27 million.

**Nicola Richards** (West Bromwich East) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that Birmingham City Council should listen to residents from across the west midlands, including mine in West Bromwich East, who know that the demolition of the flyover will cause nothing but chaos in the area and that this is not the legacy we want in Great Barr from the Commonwealth games?

**Gary Sambrook:** That is perfectly true. It will have a huge impact and ripple effect in the local area. The council needs to listen to local people, including the 15,000 people from Birmingham alone who have signed a petition, and those in neighbouring authorities who have also complained to the council that it will have an adverse impact on transport.

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): My hon. Friend, who is making a powerful speech, mentions neighbouring authorities and transport. Wycombe lies between London and Heathrow and Birmingham, and I am slightly concerned that the powers in clause 26 to put in place temporary prohibitions or restrictions on roads are drawn very widely. Would he join me in inviting the Minister to say that there are no plans to restrict the M40 between London and Birmingham? We would not want any unintended costs to fall upon the people of Wycombe, who like me, I am sure, are looking forward to watching the games.

**Gary Sambrook:** I was worried for a moment that my hon. Friend was about to quiz me on my knowledge of clause 26—I was starting to panic—but I am sure the Minister will have heard his intervention.

As well as the neighbouring local authorities, Highways England has also complained about the impact the removal will have on local people. This is not just a party political point, or opposition for opposition's sake; as proven by the comments of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr, this is a cross-party issue that is really impacting on Birmingham. It is literally the only source of negative publicity around the games and unfortunately the only bit that is wholly the responsibility of the city council.

I am also concerned that the village will not provide enough social and affordable housing locally. The last figure I heard was that only 4% of the housing on the site was to be social housing, which was six percentage points lower than the 10%—

**Liam Byrne:** I think the latest figure is 22%, not 4%.

**Gary Sambrook:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman—I will have a look afterwards. A couple of months ago, the figure was only 4%, but I will have a look at that.

**Liam Byrne:** Keep up.

**Gary Sambrook:** I will do.

In conclusion, we need to ensure that the legacy of the games in Birmingham includes that ripple effect of regeneration around the city as far south as my own constituency and provides the jobs and skills we desperately need. Let us hope that the legacy does not include 40 years of debt for the city council because unfortunately it has been unable to manage a budget yet again.

6.37 pm

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Gary Sambrook) and to have listened to some excellent maiden speeches. I am pleased to take part in this debate, not least because I had an important statutory instrument Committee on coronavirus at 6 pm, so had to slip seamlessly out of and back into the Chamber. I am grateful for your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I welcome the fact that the 2022 Commonwealth games will be held in Birmingham. It is a brilliant opportunity for the country, especially the west midlands—which, I am sure hon. Members have noticed, I am not from. I wish to focus my remarks on part 3 of the Bill, specifically with regard to ticket touting. As the House will know, I have campaigned against abuses in the secondary ticketing market for over a decade, and it can rest assured that I will not stop until fans stop being ripped off. We have had some notable achievements, in the last 18 months especially, but we are not there yet. The Bill provides the Government with an opportunity to address some of the issues relating to the secondary ticketing market. The Minister outlined some of those in his opening speech and I will be excited to see the detail when it works its way through the House.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): The hon. Member is making an excellent point about ticket touts. Does she agree that it is very important that people across the UK can attend the games, no matter their socioeconomic class or how much money they have in their pocket, and that the organisers take ticket pricing extremely seriously?

**Mrs Hodgson:** I totally agree, and I shall say more about that shortly. I know that the Minister and, in particular, my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State share our passion for fairness in this regard, and I hope that the Bill will be a strong instrument in sorting out some of the worst aspects of touting in the ticket marketplace.

Part 3 says that touting tickets for the games will be prohibited. Hear, hear: that is excellent news. It will help the organising committee to ensure that tickets are both accessible and affordable for genuine fans, and I welcome that aim. The ethos of the sporting industry is to give people who will not necessarily ever have attended a sporting event—people who are typically young, or from a low socioeconomic background—access to affordable tickets, so that they can attend events and engage with, and potentially take up, the sport involved. They may then become the grassroots that can keep a sport alive. It is outrageous that ticket touts, operating outside the law, can take that opportunity away from people who might need it and sell tickets, many times above their face value, for personal profit.

Ticket touting does not benefit the sport, the players, the organisers or the venue; it only benefits the tout. Tickets for the games will be rightly sought after and I am sure that we will all try to get hold of some, so how will the Government enforce the regulations? What support will Birmingham Trading Standards be given to enforce them, in the form of finance and resources, and will West Midlands Police be given additional funds to support Trading Standards? Given that much



of the touting activity targeting the games will be online, will the National Trading Standards e-Crime Team receive additional funds to tackle online breaches of the legislation?

Birmingham Trading Standards does not have the expertise or, currently, the trained staff that are needed in this highly specialised area. A Minister in the other place, Baroness Barran, said:

“Enforcement officers already have a suite of investigatory powers available to them through schedule 5 to the Consumer Rights Act 2015”.—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 25 February 2020; Vol. 802, c. 200.]

However, enforcement officers do not have the funding and resources that they need to implement these powers, and the “deterrent” in the Consumer Rights Act 2015 does not work. I hope that the convictions, just two weeks ago, and the sentencing of two ticket touts in Leeds will deter ticket touts; but they, too, will know that enforcement agencies do not have the necessary resources to do anything about their illegal behaviour. There are simply too many touts for an under-resourced agency to deal with.

Touts have been able to get away with it scot free for far too long, and the Bill must ensure that that is a thing of the past. According to the Department’s press release about the Bill last year,

“buying tickets will be clear, simple and affordable.”

However, the Minister will be aware that Google has allowed Viagogo to have “paid-for ads” for most events at the top of its search engine. Will the Government ensure that Google does not take sponsored ads for games tickets from secondary sites such as those of Viagogo and StubHub? As the Minister knows, ads for Viagogo that appear at the top of Google searches give consumers the impression that this a trusted and verified website, but that could not be further from the truth. Will he please tell us who, if the ads do appear and tickets are found on the secondary ticket websites, will be responsible for reporting the existence of those tickets? The games organisers will have enough to do without having to search and check that there are no fraudulent tickets for sale online. What guidance and support will the organising committee be given to establish a mechanism to reassure those who buy tickets that they are buying them from official ticketing platforms for the games?

London 2012 showed that we can protect tickets for events. That worked really well, and the Commonwealth games, or any other ticketed event, should not be any different. As we saw in 2012, ticketing regulations must be supranational, and ticket touting must be made an offence anywhere in the world. People operating abroad or using servers that are abroad, and selling tickets to the games, must be subjected to these regulations if we are to protect consumers and the reputation of the games. It should not matter where a person is, or where the server that that person is using is: ticket touting must be an offence anywhere in the world.

The Government can and should protect consumers from the abuses of the secondary ticket market. The Commonwealth games need not have a special status; the Government can use the points that I have briefly made as a blueprint for other high-demand music, sporting and theatre events that attract visitors to the UK. I urge the Minister to look into this issue as a matter of urgency. The Government need to fund enforcement agencies properly, so that we can stamp out ticket abuse once and for all.

6.45 pm

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a pleasure to wear the same badge as the Minister to promote the wonderful Commonwealth games.

This has been an excellent debate, in which we heard several maiden speeches. We heard from the hon. Member for Redcar (Jacob Young), who has very big shoes to fill, as his predecessor was a force to be reckoned with in the House. We heard from the hon. Member for East Devon (Simon Jupp), who expressed passionate concern for the Flybe staff who had tragically lost their jobs in such a sudden and shocking way. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his passion, and I wish that there had been more support for those staff members. Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Navendu Mishra) described a tale of two towns, and the health inequalities in Stockport. I hope that the Bill will create a vision for dealing with the health inequalities in Birmingham, which, like Stockport, has corners of deprivation that we hope the games will help to address.

What has shone through all the contributions we have heard today is the passion that we all share for the Commonwealth games, and our determination to make a success of this event. Last week I was at the Alexander stadium with my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Ian Byrne)—and my, what a fine Mayor he would make! He talked of his vision of an ethos of generosity—I know that the people of Birmingham are extremely generous—and a sense of civic spirit to lift the underinvested corners of the Birmingham and west midlands region and promote the arts more generally. Those who visit Birmingham absolutely must see the best collection of Anglo-Saxon gold in the country, the Edwardian tea rooms, and, of course, the jewellery quarter, which shows off the best of Birmingham.

We know from the London 2012 games—and we can see forward to the finals of the Euros this summer—that, once again, we can show not only that we are fantastic at elite sports and at hosting events, but that we have that “trickle down”. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin), there are substantial areas in which the Bill could be improved, but while we seek assurances and improvements, we are in general very supportive of the games.

Let me deal directly with those areas that need improvement, so that the Minister has some homework to do before Committee. First, many Members on both sides of the House have mentioned the living wage. It is important that the games happen not just “in” the west midlands but “with” the west midlands, and we want every contractor, and every sub-contractor, to benefit from an improved hourly rate. What an impact that would have! We know from people who move from the minimum wage to the real living wage what a difference it makes to them not to have to do two jobs, but to do one job and be paid properly for it. I also hope that the Minister will reflect on the concept of young Commonwealth leaders, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby. That fantastic idea would go some way towards replacing the terrible lack of youth work in the Birmingham and west midlands area.

Secondly, the games must be free to air. Contracting them out would be a real mistake, given the excitement that they can generate. If people have to sign on, start logging on and paying extra money, that will seriously

[*Catherine West*]

detract from the allure of the games. Thirdly, there is the issue of sustainability. I note not only what was said about lawn bowls by my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western), but what my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood) said about the importance of high-quality green transport, including an electric fleet. I thought that diesel fleets were yesterday's transport, not tomorrow's, so I hope that the Minister will raise the issue with the local contractors.

**Mike Wood:** As the hon. Lady will know, the main bus operator in the west midlands is National Express. Will she join me in welcoming its announcement that it is not buying any more diesel buses in the UK?

**Catherine West:** I will indeed. I was hesitant to single out any one contractor, but as the hon. Member has done so, I remind him that it would be wonderful if National Express shared that vision with us as quickly as possible so that we can phase out diesel and bring in electric vehicles in time for 2022.

The hotel levy was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill)—does not the word “Edgbaston” make you think, “Cricket, fantastic! It will be wonderful to see cricket in the Commonwealth games”? She was right that council tax payers in Birmingham and the west midlands should not have to stump up the extra cash for overruns on the contracts. An element should come from a levy of £1 per night per room, which could bring more money into Birmingham and the west midlands to pay for those tiny overruns that occur at these events.

Finally, I hope that the Minister takes the question of legacy seriously. Tragically, in London, a couple of years after a fantastic Olympic games that had so much magic, the number of youngsters playing basketball, swimming or doing other sport dropped due to cuts to local government. We still struggle with that level of inactivity among young people, which is inexcusable in this day and age. Let us use this as an opportunity for a genuine legacy—not just an elite legacy, but a legacy for all the people of Birmingham and the west midlands, so that they can jump on a bicycle, so that basketball can be played locally, so that swimming can be affordable at the wonderful Sandwell swimming baths when they are open, and so that we end up with a genuine grassroots approach to sport, exercise and fitness, which all means an improvement in mental health.

The facilities used for the games—the bigger and better Alexander stadium, with hugely increased capacity; the Olympic-sized swimming pool; the cycle lanes; the green and sustainable bus routes—all sound wonderful, but in end we want to know whether in 10 years' time, in 2032, Birmingham youngsters will know the rules of Olympic games. Will they be inspired to swim 50 metres? Will they be able to run round the athletics track, as we hope they will right now? We need a vision for the future. Will they have £1-per-swim, which we had during the Olympic games for every single under-18-year-old, and which has kept going long after the games? We have an opportunity to show off as world leaders in seismic sporting events once again—not just for elite sports, but for each and every one of us.

6.53 pm

**Nigel Huddleston:** With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank hon. Members for their remarks and contributions and for the constructive tone of the debate on both sides. I shall endeavour to respond to as many of the matters raised as possible, but some may have to wait for Committee, which I am sure will be exciting.

The UK has a strong track record in hosting successful major sporting events. London 2012 is the most obvious example, but let us not forget that in recent years we have staged the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth games, the 2015 rugby world cup, the 2017 world athletics championships, and the 2019 netball and cricket world cups, as well as the UCI road world cycling championships, to name but a few. I know that Birmingham 2022 will be just as successful and will rightly earn its place on this illustrious and growing list.

I welcome the cross-party support that the Bill and the games have received, both in this House and in the Lords, and the consensus across the House on the need to maximise the benefits of the games for our constituents, for Birmingham, and for the west midlands. We must remember that the games will be staged in record time. The organisers and, indeed, the House, need to be utterly focused on delivery of their contributions, and I am confident that we shall be. We can now all count down to the games in live time over the next 870 days, with the unveiling today of a countdown clock sponsored by Longines in the heart of Birmingham's iconic Centenary square, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) mentioned.

The games will be a catalyst for change in Birmingham and the west midlands, and the benefits will be lasting—felt long after the 11 days of sport are over. We are working with games partners to secure a lasting legacy from the games that begins to benefit the region right now. In addition to the lasting physical legacy and fantastic facilities that the games will leave, the Government are working with games delivery partners and local stakeholders in the region to harness the power of the games to leave a wider social legacy. As well as being a catalyst for physical change in the city, our mission is to harness the power of the games to bring people together, improve health and wellbeing, help the region to grow and succeed, and put Birmingham and the west midlands truly on the map.

A wealth of opportunities will be created for the people of Birmingham as a result of hosting this event. As well as creating more ways to get involved in sport and culture within the local community, the games will create new jobs, volunteering positions and opportunities, particularly for young people, to develop skills, as mentioned by many hon. Members, including the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood), and my hon. Friends the Members for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey), for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson), for Dudley South (Mike Wood), and for Birmingham, Northfield (Gary Sambrook).

The organising committee intends to create a wide range of entry-level positions for apprentices and to establish an in-house training academy, which will host three cohorts from autumn 2020, January 2021, and April 2021. The Department for Education recently announced a £20,000 investment in Birmingham to

encourage more young people to become volunteers and coaches in sports clubs and the local community in the run-up to the games. In partnership with the Spirit of 2012, the organising committee recently confirmed the launch of a new £600,000 west midlands challenge fund, which will award grants to local organisations that create projects that bring disabled and non-disabled people together to participate in arts and cultural activities.

The Government and all our games delivery partners are committed to delivering a fantastic, memorable and lasting legacy from the games. I am grateful to my hon. Friends for their insightful contributions on this matter. I will keep the House updated on progress. Before I respond to key matters raised in the debate—

**Liam Byrne:** When the Minister does so, will he clarify for the House whether anyone in his Department has told the organising committee that it should not become an accredited living wage employer? I tabled a parliamentary question on that, and it is fair to say that the answer was not crystal clear.

**Nigel Huddleston:** I shall indeed come on to those comments, and I am sure that we shall discuss them in Committee.

Before I respond to the questions asked by colleagues, I should like to praise the three maiden speeches that we heard, from my hon. Friends the Members for Redcar (Jacob Young) and for East Devon (Simon Jupp), and the hon. Member for Stockport (Navendu Mishra). I hope you will forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker, but as a sports Minister, my key comment is “Back of the net, gentlemen!” They did a fantastic job, and their constituents will be proud of what they have done today. They have represented them well, and they were incredibly articulate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar mentioned quite a few things that I was not expecting—California, Winkie’s Castle, and sustainability. We will all remember him forever for his hard hat, which I hope is on his official parliamentary picture for many years to come. My hon. Friend the Member for East Devon gave a clear warning that the Treasury can expect many requests for cheques from his constituents over the coming years, and the hon. Member for Stockport mentioned many things in his contribution, including Engels, football and hats. He also mentioned the inequality in his constituency, and I am sure that he will be a champion for his constituents for many years to come.

I turn to other contributions. The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) commented on the Barnett formula. The UK Government contribution to the Commonwealth games budget is indeed subject to the Barnett formula, which the Treasury will apply in the normal way, as set out in the statement of funding policy—not in the way he wishes, but in the normal way.

The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson)—not surprisingly, as she is a great champion of these issues—commented on ticketing provision and enforcement. As she knows, the Government are committed to tackling fraudulent practices in the secondary ticket market and support the work of enforcement agencies in that area such as the Competition and Markets Authority, trading standards, and the advertising industry’s regulator, the Advertising Standards Authority.

We are working with the organising committee, local authorities, trading standards and West Midlands police to develop a co-ordinated approach to enforcing the provisions. More generally, the Government are working closely with national trading standards to ensure that they have adequate funding to tackle consumer detriment in the ticketing market. The hon. Lady and I, and others, will work on this phase over the coming weeks and months.

My hon. Friends the Members for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson) and for Gedling (Tom Randall) mentioned volunteering. Birmingham 2022 is committed to delivering volunteer programmes that are inclusive and diverse and that deliver a real and lasting legacy to the city, the region and the community. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling spoke powerfully about his own experience in the 2012 games. He also mentioned games lanes. It is too early to say what temporary measures might be needed, but it is possible that temporary restrictions on sections of roads near games locations might be required. Any temporary measures will try to minimise disruption for transport users.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield both mentioned many other transport issues. I cannot answer all of them today and, of course, they know that some of those questions are largely matters for the local council, Birmingham City Council, and the combined authority to consider, but we will facilitate discussions, encourage co-operation where possible and engage with the Department for Transport and other bodies where appropriate.

With regard to the velodrome facilities mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood), I understand that British Cycling is working with Birmingham City Council on research into the overall cycling facility needs in the west midlands. That research will be published in the coming weeks.

The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) and several others mentioned broadcasting. We know that the Commonwealth Games Federation and Birmingham 2022 are committed to ensuring that as many people as possible can access the games via their TV, mobile phone, computer screen and tablet. As it is a listed event, broadcasting rights for the Commonwealth games must already be available to the qualifying free-to-air terrestrial broadcasters. The games have had excellent live coverage for many years on free-to-air television. The organising committee is in the middle of a competitive commercial process with potential rights holders that cannot pre-empt the outcome of those negotiations.

Many Members raised the question of a hotel tax. As they would expect, there is a constant dialogue between Government and the council on all aspects of the games, including the budget. Birmingham City Council is committed to meeting its financial contribution for the games budget and it has published a plan for doing so without the need for a hotel tax. This will obviously be an ongoing debate, but it is worth noting that any new tax is ultimately a decision for the Treasury. It would also set a precedent, which we would have to consider carefully. Any such tax would also need to be balanced against the additional burdens on businesses in the hospitality sector, which, as we know, is facing challenging times at the moment. With my tourism hat on, I have to say that I am not convinced of the argument for a hotel tax at the moment.



[Nigel Huddleston]

With regard to the games village, we have confidence that all the games partners will play their part in delivering a truly world-class Commonwealth games in 2022. Birmingham City Council is currently finalising its full business case for the village, and a review of anticipated expenditure and funding arrangements is due for discussion by its cabinet on 17 March. I would like to reassure the House that we continue to work closely with the council and the rest of the partners to ensure that we have a great games.

Several Members raised the question of the living wage. I am confident that the games are already setting an excellent example on fair pay. The organising committee's pay scales are set in line with civil service pay rates and all direct employees of the organising committee will therefore be paid above the level of the Birmingham living wage, and of course, all organisations awarded games contracts will be required to pay at least the Government's national living wage. I am pleased to say that the national living wage is set to receive its biggest cash increase, rising by 6.2% from 1 April. Alongside this, we also need to consider the wider picture, which I have mentioned earlier, and we are ensuring that there will be lasting benefits for those living and working in the region, with many skills-enhancing opportunities.

There is a real commitment to ensuring that sustainability is a key pillar of the planning and delivery of the games. The organising committee has signed up to the UN sports for climate action framework, which aims to combat climate change and raise global awareness and action through sport. This is a proud first for the Commonwealth games movement and a key commitment to working towards our global climate change goals. The organising committee is in the process of developing its sustainability strategy for the games, and it will be released in the spring.

Regarding sponsors, the House will agree that it is critical that we raise sponsorship for the games in order to manage the public sector investment. Securing sponsorship and granting authorisations to associate with the games are a matter for the organising committee. It is still early days in terms of securing sponsorship partners, with three announced to date, but I would like to provide reassurance that my Department is in active discussions with the organising committee on the importance of promoting the games and their value through its sponsorship programmes. All potential sponsors will have to demonstrate their alignment with Birmingham 2022's vision and mission, and an ongoing commitment to social values set out in the organising committee's social values charter.

This is clearly a great opportunity for the United Kingdom. There is already great excitement and interest in the games not only in Birmingham and the west midlands but right across the country. We have many matters still to discuss, and I am looking forward to working with Members across the House in Committee to ensure that this important legislation reaches the statute book very shortly.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

### **BIRMINGHAM COMMONWEALTH GAMES BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME)**

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill [Lords]:

#### *Committal*

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

#### *Proceedings in Public Bill Committee*

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 24 March 2020.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

#### *Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading*

(4) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

#### *Other proceedings*

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—  
(*Rebecca Harris.*)

*Question agreed to.*

### **BIRMINGHAM COMMONWEALTH GAMES BILL [LORDS] (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 Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State under the Act.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

*Question agreed to.*

### **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

*Ordered,*

That at the sitting on Tuesday 10 March, the business determined by the Backbench Business Committee may continue until 7.00pm or for one and a half hours after its commencement, whichever is the later, and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of, and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—  
(*Mike Freer.*)

## Commonwealth in 2020

7.7 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Commonwealth in 2020.

May I wish you a happy Commonwealth Day, Madam Deputy Speaker? It is a great honour to have been reappointed as the Minister for Africa for the UK Government, this time working across Foreign Office, international development and Commonwealth issues.

Since I began working for Barclays in Swaziland—now Eswatini—in the 1990s, Africa has been a huge influence on my life, both personal and professional, inside and outside this place. The same is very much true of the Commonwealth. I have had the privilege of working, living or travelling in 18 of the 19 Commonwealth countries in Africa. I exported my only brother to the Commonwealth: he went to Australia. I met my wife in Eswatini and we travelled on our honeymoon anticlockwise around the outside of Zimbabwe. It was a Commonwealth member at the time we met, and I hope that it will rejoin us. I previously served in the Foreign Office covering the Caribbean, and until recently I was chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the reins of which I assumed from and return to my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger).

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): I thank the Minister for his comments, and also for the work he did as chairman of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association over that period. I should also like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans), who is now a Deputy Speaker. May I ask the Minister to dwell, at some time in his speech, on the success of the scholars that we bring here from all around the world? I know that he has chaired many conferences. Will he also mention what we do for the young people of the Commonwealth that we bring from all over the world to learn and to exchange best practice with us?

**James Duddridge:** I thank my hon. Friend. The conferences that the CPA runs are superb, and I thank him, the executive committee and Jon Davies, who works tirelessly on behalf of the Commonwealth and colleagues. I was well rewarded for my role as chair of CPA UK, as it gave me this rather nice tie as a leaving gift. *[Interruption.]* I think the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) disapproves of my tie, but he too wears racy ties on occasion—I am glad to see him sporting a slightly more conservative one today.

I was a member of the parliamentary delegation for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in 2018. Now that I have a role in Government, I am looking forward to delivering some of the commitments made in 2018. I trust that the House understands why it is such a pleasure for me to mark Commonwealth Day on behalf of the Government.

**David Mundell** (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): As a relatively new Back Bencher, I am now able to take part in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegations for the first time,

so I reiterate the Minister's point about how worthwhile they are. They should be commended to Members across the House who are perhaps not so familiar with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I recently had the opportunity to travel to Botswana, where we encountered a very enthusiastic parliamentary delegation. These bonds are part of the important underpinning of our Commonwealth.

**James Duddridge:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. I fondly remember having a tour of the Parliament of Botswana when I worked there a number of years ago. I strongly commend the CPA to new Members, as it is a brilliant way to get to know the Commonwealth—it is also brilliant to get involved in the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which has a slightly different remit and does things in a slightly different way. The CPA allows us to reach out beyond the United Kingdom and to understand why we help the Commonwealth in the way we do. Also, in all candour, it allows us to reflect on our positions here and to get to know colleagues from other parties, as we do on Select Committee—the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle), who is nodding on the Opposition Front Bench, knows me only too well, and not only from CPA visits but from serving on the International Development Committee. On such trips we realise how much we have in common and that in our mission there is more that unites us than divides us, as someone once famously said.

The Commonwealth brings together 54 countries and nearly 2.5 billion people—a third of the world's population—from every corner of the world. Its value and appeal are not only enduring, but growing. The Maldives re-joined only last month, and a number of countries, including most recently Angola, have expressed their enthusiasm for joining the Commonwealth family and sharing in all that the organisation stands for and delivers.

Some cynics have suggested that it is a cliché to describe such a diverse group as a family, but I wholeheartedly disagree. In fact, the Government's Front Bench is the most diverse in British history, and there we find the reality of what the modern Commonwealth family means for modern Britain. A number of ministerial colleagues have to go back only one generation to show that we in the UK are literally a product of the Commonwealth—from India, Pakistan, Sierra Leone and, in my case, less exotically and interestingly, Bristol.

Commonwealth Day offers an opportunity to celebrate those bonds. It is also a chance to take stock of our co-operation and the opportunities ahead. The Commonwealth charter acts as a guiding light for our shared values. It commits member states to developing free and democratic societies, and to promoting peace and prosperity. The ambition and vision for what we collectively want to achieve are shaped by the Heads of Government meetings, which are held every two years—a number of colleagues will have participated in those.

At the most recent London summit, leaders agreed that the Commonwealth should be a global force for good and should play a full role in tackling the major challenges of the century, from reducing plastic in our oceans to increasing our resilience against cyber-attacks. We have also made major commitments, such as the commitment to 12 years of quality education for all.

**Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab):** That is all very well, but the vast majority of Commonwealth citizens live in countries where homosexuality is illegal, where they could be sent to prison, and where they suffer all sorts of different forms of homophobia. Why did the declaration that followed last year's CHOGM contain not a single mention of that?

**James Duddridge:** The Commonwealth charter refers to rights for all, and that should include rights for sexuality. Some countries in the Commonwealth and internationally have made significant progress, but many have not. Many countries, as the hon. Gentleman knows, throw back in our face the fact that those are our laws from a bygone age. We should do more to encourage people in the Commonwealth and around the world to modernise and have rules that reflect the charter and what we describe here as modern Britain, which should be the modern Commonwealth and the modern globe. I encourage there to be more discussion in Kigali in June specifically on these issues. Like me, he knows that with such matters sometimes a strong voice behind closed doors is more effective than a loud voice in public.

**Chris Bryant:** I gently suggest that sometimes we want both. I have an idea: why not allow all British high commissioners in Commonwealth countries to fly the rainbow flag when there is a pride demonstration going on in that country?

**James Duddridge:** I used to fly the pride flag in my office when I was a Foreign Office Minister, and I think that was done at the discretion of the local ambassador and high commissioner. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says from a sedentary position that that has stopped. I think we should probably review that again because it was a good policy, so I will look into why there has been a change. We should do more in this area. My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), who I do not think is in the Chamber, will be twinning people who are either from the LGBT community or supportive of it with each country in the Commonwealth and globally so that we have that connection, parliamentarian to parliamentarian, which I think will be very effective.

At CHOGM 2018, the Heads of Government agreed a range of actions to build a Commonwealth that is fairer, more prosperous, more secure and more sustainable. As chair-in-office, we have worked closely with member states, accredited organisations and the secretariat to drive co-operation to achieve those goals. We have focused our efforts in four key areas: delivery, reform, solidarity and voice.

Delivery is about implementing each and every one of the commitments that we have made, and more than £500 million has been set aside to support that work. Our funding not only boosts our trade, safeguards our oceans and enhances our cyber security but promotes equality, inclusion, democracy and good governance, which the hon. Member for Rhondda touched on.

Our reform agenda is about ensuring that the Commonwealth secretariat is as effective and transparent as possible, liaising with all other Commonwealth organisations. Solidarity is about increasing the collaboration between member states in international

organisations, which I know my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) is keen to see more of through the CPA.

The Commonwealth represents a quarter of the UN's membership, so we will have more influence in New York if we work together more. That is why the UK has initiated monthly briefings for Commonwealth member states to come together at the UN to share ideas and understand each other's priorities.

Our fourth focus is on ensuring that the voice of the Commonwealth is projected and heard on the international stage. As a global organisation representing a diverse range of countries, the Commonwealth is well placed to give a voice to the marginalised, and we have real clout when we speak as one. That is why we want to amplify the voices of smaller states, at the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation, at which we represent quite a large bloc.

**Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con):** I am pleased to hear the Minister refer to smaller states and marginalised voices. How can the overseas territories, the Crown dependencies and other external territories be represented more forcefully in the Commonwealth, because at the moment they have no status, which I think is an oversight? In today's world surely Bermuda should have as much of a voice as Tuvalu, which is a much smaller nation state. Is there some way we could work on that to ensure that such places are properly represented?

**James Duddridge:** My hon. Friend is a passionate advocate for the overseas territories, and I was glad to see some of them at the margins of the last CHOGM with observer status. As he knows, there are significant issues in recognising them as countries at either the Commonwealth games or CHOGM, but we want to ensure that we engage as closely as possible with our overseas territories and the broader Commonwealth family. I will personally strive to do that, as will other Ministers.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** Does the Minister agree that Her Majesty the Queen's reference to diversity and its strength is duly poignant? As we launch into a new Brexit world, the strength of the Commonwealth can and will be the cornerstone of a future built upon the foundations of the 54 Commonwealth countries.

**James Duddridge:** Absolutely. I will touch on the opportunities for projecting our global vision beyond our exit from the European Union and for looking to some of our traditional friends and neighbours that are further away, rather than some of our less traditional, closer European partners.

When the Heads of Government come together in Kigali, we will have to make sure that our co-operation remains strong. This will be a great opportunity to develop relationships with each of the Commonwealth countries in line with the global Britain that the hon. Gentleman highlights. We considered the potential of the Commonwealth when we considered how we will upgrade our new embassies and high commissions. For the first time, we have a high commission in Samoa, which I am pleased to report has had a wonderful day. Samoa's Prime Minister went to celebrate Commonwealth Day in that newly opened high commission.



In 2018, when he was Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced his intention to expand our presence with eight or nine embassies, which are now functional. Not all of them have been officially opened, but those bricks and mortar demonstrate that our commitment is both genuine and enduring. I look forward to returning to Eswatini to open the high commission formally, and I will be returning to formally open the high commission in Maseru, Lesotho later this year.

Commonwealth citizens are rich in talent and ability. We also share a common language, which places Commonwealth citizens very well in the new points-based immigration system. We will be able to attract the brightest and the best from around the world, including scientists, innovators and academics. The points-based system supports the English language, which most of the Commonwealth have as one of their main languages.

The UK Government's commitment to the Commonwealth and its shared values remains as steadfast as ever. Of course, no one can surpass the commitment of Her Majesty to the Commonwealth. I believe she was at Westminster Abbey today alongside Mr Speaker, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Minister for the Commonwealth to celebrate all things Commonwealth. It is a great convenor. Alas, in my preparation for this debate, I was unable to go myself, which is ironic given that I was able to go last time when I was not a Minister. I will rectify that next year, whatever I am doing.

We used the summit to raise our ambitions, and as chair-in-office we have delivered the commitment to expand the diplomatic network. We have also facilitated co-operation and a swathe of mutually beneficial projects and programmes, which I hope we will touch on in this debate.

The Kigali Heads of Government meeting will be a major milestone on the road to achieving the 2030 sustainable development goals, in which the UK is ready to play our full part as a leading actor on the world stage. As we mark Commonwealth Day, I welcome the views and insights of hon. Members as we work to fortify this fantastic institution and network for the benefit of future generations.

7.24 pm

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister and wish everyone a happy Commonwealth Day. I know his passion for Africa and the Commonwealth from the inquiries and trips we did together on the IDC.

As the shadow Foreign Minister covering the overseas territories, I want to mention their important role in the Commonwealth while highlighting that five of them—these are not even Commonwealth nations—do not recognise same-sex marriage, and it was this Government who, last year, rejected the recommendation of the Foreign Affairs Committee to make Orders in Council to require them to recognise same-sex marriage. If we cannot get it right for even our overseas territories, one wonders if we have any hope of persuading our Commonwealth friends. I will come on to that in a bit.

The Commonwealth is more important than ever as we leave the European Union in a world in which there is currently a grave lack of global leadership, in which the credibility and relevance of our great international

institutions are under daily threat and in which human rights and the rule of law are being disregarded by dozens of Governments and deprioritised by dozens of others. In a world like that, we desperately need global leadership and co-ordinated international action, and that is what the Commonwealth should and can offer.

We desperately need a strong and united Commonwealth to demonstrate to the rest of the world why such institutions are so important. We desperately need a Commonwealth that will defend and promote respect for human rights and the rule of law. If the Commonwealth can do all those things, it will remain a vital force for good in our world and a centre point of Britain's multilateral relationships, because we see the Commonwealth countries not simply as trading partners but as essential partners in the challenges faced by the world and by each of our nations.

With our common history and common future, the Commonwealth should be about sharing our wealth and knowledge, but we cannot deny that much of that history was not of a common wealth but of the UK taking, stealing and mistreating the countries that form most, but not all, of the current Commonwealth. Although we have impoverished those countries, we cannot change history or rewrite the past, but we can do the brave thing and apologise when we need to apologise and, where necessary, make concerted efforts to improve the lives of those who, by our colonial laws, are still discriminated against or who, by our discriminatory payments, lost out when serving to keep our country safe.

**Anthony Mangnall** (Totnes) (Con): Rather than focusing on the far history, perhaps the hon. Gentleman might do better to focus on the recent history in which Commonwealth members joined together to sign up to the preventing sexual violence in conflict initiative, showing that, actually, this is an organisation that is alive and well and working together on matters of great concern.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle**: I am glad the hon. Gentleman has raised recent things because, even as we promote the Commonwealth now, we must be honest about places that have gone backwards, not forwards, over the past year and more in promoting peace, democracy and human rights—places where the Commonwealth is needed even more.

We think, of course, of the current tension in India and Pakistan and the violence in Delhi over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, but we also think of the democratic instability we have seen in Sri Lanka, a country I must have visited more than a dozen times, and in Nigeria and Kenya in recent months and years. We think of the deteriorating human rights situation in Uganda, Singapore and elsewhere, and the dreadful impunity of the regime in Cameroon. We think of the discrimination that continues against the LGBT community in far too many Commonwealth countries. That is the recent history of our Commonwealth. Of course we must celebrate some of the progress that is made, but we must not have rose-tinted glasses when Commonwealth citizens are being discriminated against around the world, their human rights are being denied them and their democratic participation is being taken away. Therefore, it was a missed opportunity when this Government failed to put the issue of LGBT rights formally on the agenda at the

[Lloyd Russell-Moyle]

CHOGM in April in London. It was not only a missed opportunity, but a dereliction of our historic duty to right our wrong.

To avoid wasting another opportunity, may I ask the Minister what he has done since Britain became co-chair of the Equal Rights Coalition in June to make it a priority to persuade members of the Commonwealth to join that coalition? After all, it cannot be right that the ERC, which exists to promote human rights of the LGBT community, currently has just six of the 53 members of the Commonwealth as signatories to its principles—none of the African, Asian or Caribbean Commonwealth countries have signed. If we are not putting pressure on those other countries to join, is it any wonder that they are doing the exact opposite and seeing how far they can roll back LGBT rights in their countries, including via grotesque proposals to punish same-sex relationships with the death penalty, as in Uganda? I have visited that country a number of times and met LGBT activists there, as many Members have done. Even in countries where the laws are not so draconian, the social situation is dire. In Jamaica last year, the global LGBT+ rights all-party group met many activists. How are those activists getting the support they deserve from this Government to overturn our imposed homophobia?

**Katherine Fletcher** (South Ribble) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton)**: Order. The hon. Lady will have to move on to the Benches.

**Katherine Fletcher**: My sincere apologies, Madam Deputy Speaker. That was newbie mistake No. 473. I commend the hon. Gentleman for his concern for the LGBT community, but surely one of the best things we can do is invite the Commonwealth of Nations to this functioning democracy and show everybody that love does nobody any harm, and they can then take those examples back to their communities.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle**: Yes, we did that two years ago, in 2018, at the CHOGM London meeting, but the Government failed to put this on the agenda of that meeting and to include it in the communiqué. I agree that we should be leading by example, but that means that when we have the chairmanship of Commonwealth positions and we do not raise these things, even gently, we are failing.

**Alicia Kearns** (Rutland and Melton) (Con): The hon. Gentleman raises the issue of what was on the agenda at CHOGM, but does he recognise that the majority of diplomatic work that is done to achieve genuine difference is done behind the scenes? It is not about dragging our partners to the front of the stage and shaming and embarrassing them; it is about working behind the scenes to change their minds, showing them alternatives and working with them to achieve real change, so that they can own that change, rather than having it be seen as imposed as some neo-colonial viewpoint.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle**: I worked with the Commonwealth secretariat and I have worked at the United Nations on these issues, so I know exactly what the hon. Lady is

referring to. However, the proof is in the pudding, and I am afraid that the pudding is going rotten—things are going backwards. The situation of LGBT rights in these countries is deteriorating, not improving. If this is all done through private discussions, which are important, those discussions are going very poorly. Perhaps there comes a time when gently—we do not have to embarrass people—we publicly say, “We don’t think enough progress has been made on this, and we would like to move forward.”

It is important to say that all those countries have laws on their statute books because we imposed them. Those laws were not there before colonisation. In many of those countries, there was no legal discrimination and we imposed it. We have rightly seen our historical mistake and we have changed how we do things here, but we have a duty then to support others on the ground. It was right that the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), apologised last year. It was a brave thing for the Government to do, but it is time now for actions. Not only did the Government fail to put LGBT rights on the agenda, but the communiqué from London failed to mention them even once. Let us contrast that with what happened at the Commonwealth youth forum, where LGBT rights were raised in the opening and in the calls for action.

**Mark Fletcher** (Bolsover) (Con): I am struggling a bit with the hon. Gentleman’s mental leap. He seems to be saying that we are responsible for all the problems with our colonial past and the laws that were created, and we are equally now responsible—he is lambasting the Government for this—for not forcing other Commonwealth countries to live up to our standards. I cannot see how we are responsible for the former and we are also responsible for letting them have free countries.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle**: Usually, where someone goes into a shop and smashes a vase, they have a responsibility to fix it, or at least to pay for it to be fixed or replaced. If we go around the world smashing some people’s civil rights up, we have a responsibility to help sort it out. The question I asked the Minister was: how are we supporting the activists on the ground in those countries to make sure that they can pressure their Governments on laws that we imposed? I am afraid that if the hon. Gentleman cannot understand that, we are not going to see eye to eye on history or diplomatic relations.

Going back to where there is perhaps a glimmer of hope in the Commonwealth, the CYF brought together 500 delegates from around the Commonwealth, and it started to show us the future direction of many countries. Some 60% of the Commonwealth’s 2.4 billion population are under 30, so what are our Government doing to ensure that those young people’s voices are heard and amplified? As my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) suggested in the previous debate, we need to start to take Commonwealth youth service seriously, so that we can support those young people to hold their leaders to account. Will the Minister commit to training and funding young people to ensure that they are able to participate in the Commonwealth youth forum at this year’s forthcoming CHOGM? I am talking about supporting people from Britain and from some of the poorest countries from around the world that are Commonwealth members.

I have attended three CHOGMs, and this year's will be the first to be held in a country that has never been a part of the British empire or part of a realm of the Crown. It will be held in a country where gender equality has been achieved by its Parliament, where the median age is 22.7 and where 69% of people are under 30. The CHOGM in Rwanda provides a real opportunity for gender equality and young people to be at the heart of the Commonwealth, and to put right some of the missed opportunities we had in London.

**Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab):** I had the privilege of being on the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association executive and of visiting Rwanda 18 months ago. One concern about the Rwanda CHOGM relates to press freedom. It was alarming that Senators and Members of Parliament, all of whom are very good people and who have made huge achievements on gender equality, including on women's budgeting issues—I thought that was extraordinary, and we could have done it here many decades ago—still had an issue about allowing reporters and mainstream media into Rwanda, because they believed that those people were not reporting exactly as the President would like. That problem needs to be addressed at the CHOGM in Kigali.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** I quite agree. I have been proud to work with the Commonwealth secretariat in promoting press freedom, youth projects and, in particular, the youth development index, which includes an index based on freedom of speech. It is vital that we continue that important work. The Commonwealth Youth Ministers meetings happen regularly, and I have attended the last two. The Government have failed to turn up to a number of them in the past few years. I hope that with a new, revitalised ministerial team, we will see a change in that. Of course, I was personally proud and delighted to attend with Malala Yousafzai, who was honoured at the palace for the work she has done on girls' education.

**Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP):** The shadow Minister is making an extremely good speech on gender equality. Does he agree that it is extremely important that we encourage and support Commonwealth countries to move forward and make progress on disability equality? That is an issue on which the Department for International Development in East Kilbride in my constituency is working hard. We should do our utmost in Parliament to champion movement on disability equality.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** I do indeed agree. When I was at the most recent Commonwealth Youth Ministers meeting in Uganda two years ago, there were extensive discussions on that issue with some of the international disability organisations. I am pleased that in our presidency year London was host to a summit on disability and development. This country and the Government are doing things on disability, and for that they must be congratulated. They must continue that work.

If the Government believe that we need to develop new links around the Commonwealth, now is surely the time for them to develop schemes to make sure that young people and Commonwealth citizens can travel to meet and exchange with each other. A Horizon 2020 or Erasmus scheme for the Commonwealth—not just the

poorly funded but very well managed Commonwealth Exchange programme that we currently have—must be on the agenda.

Let me turn to a couple of issues that cause so much pain among veterans in this country and in the Commonwealth. Every year since 2018, we have recruited 1,350 men and women from Commonwealth countries to serve in the British Army. That means that we currently have more than 6,000 Commonwealth personnel keeping our country safe. These men and women have come here, fought for our country and made lives for themselves. After four years, they are entitled to settled status, but they are forced to pay a punitive fee of £2,383, of which a large amount is profit to the Home Office. It is more than it costs to administer. Many of those who have come here have young families; for a partner and two children, they will be looking at a bill for more than £10,000 to stay in the place that they have protected, fought for and worked for, and that they now call their home. How can people who have volunteered to fight for us and our country—who have made their lives here—be treated so poorly? What discussions has the Minister had with his colleagues in Commonwealth countries about this issue? Will he speak to his colleagues in the Home Office about the Royal British Legion's call for the removal of the fees for Commonwealth veterans? It is an issue on which we can probably find agreement throughout the House.

Let me finish by raising another issue. We literally owe an historic debt to members of the Commonwealth—Opposition Members have raised that issue a number of times. As the Minister will know, this time last year it was revealed that when the men of the East Africa Force—hundreds of thousands of black, white and Asian soldiers drawn from the British African colonies—received their demob pay at the end of the second world war, it was strictly calibrated according to their race, with black African soldiers from the same regiment paid a third of the amount given to their white counterparts of exactly the same rank. Many of those soldiers who faced discrimination are still alive today, but they are yet to receive even an apology from the Government, let alone any compensation.

The Opposition are yet to receive any answers to repeated letters asking the Government the following questions. First, how many surviving veterans were affected and are now contactable? Secondly, did the racial discrimination also apply to the demob pay of soldiers of the British Indian Army and the Caribbean Regiment in 1945? Thirdly, if so, do the Government know how many servicemen were affected in total across all regiments, and how many are still alive? Fourthly, what do the Government plan to do in response? They have had a year to provide answers to those questions, so will the Minister update the House on his actions going forward? When can the surviving men of the East Africa Force, and the other affected veterans, expect to receive an apology and acknowledgement? That is the very least that they deserve.

A Commonwealth must be more than just a name and more than just a glint in the eye of the past; it must be about honouring historic injustices, and it must be about a joint history. A Commonwealth must be about honesty if it is about anything at all.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—



**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** It is a pleasure to call James Sunderland to make his maiden speech.

7.45 pm

**James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con):** It is the privilege of a lifetime to be elected to Westminster and to take my seat on these green Benches alongside so many new and talented one nation colleagues. While there is some personal irony to being referred to as “the cavalry”—not least because I cannot ride a horse—none of us is immune to the nature of the previous Parliament, nor to the need to make up for lost time now. I express my thanks to Members on both sides of the House for their warm welcome. The whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts.

Entering Parliament for the first time is daunting: while I am slightly institutionalised by nature, this is a different kind of institution altogether, and I will admit to suffering the occasional bout of imposter syndrome. For those who pause for breath, the Palace is an ancient and inspiring place, full of echoes, whispers and the ghosts of those who have gone before. Indeed, the giants of our political history still sit among us. Who would dare to tread in their footsteps? But we have a chance to be a force for good, and it is incumbent upon us to do so.

It was during the Brexit doldrums of last October that I was fortunate to seize upon a fresh wind—I thank everyone at the Bracknell Conservative association for seeing something in me—and I left the Regular Army after proudly serving my country for 27 years. Handing in your ID card after a long career is no easy feat, but to do it with only six days’ notice was both unprecedented and unnerving. To any veteran who may be listening, I want to tell you that I absolutely get it. But the Army has done me proud, and I am grateful to everyone at the Ministry of Defence for showing me the door so quickly and allowing me to soldier on here.

It is customary at this point to pay tribute to my predecessor, but I would like to mention two, if I may. Andrew MacKay served as the MP for Bracknell for almost three decades before 2010. He was a loyal, much-loved and effective local politician. He is still spoken of fondly on doorsteps today, and has been a good friend to me since I was elected. More recently, Dr Phillip Lee also served this place with distinction, ploughing his own furrow as a man of conviction and always championing the causes dear to him. I thank both men for their huge contributions to Bracknell and for the legacies that they have left.

What of Bracknell itself? Nestled between the M3 and the M4 in east Berkshire, it is a new town, built in the late 1940s to offer an alternative to post-war London. It is characterised by one of the lowest rates of council tax in the country, a buoyant job market, near full employment, high-tech research and development facilities, and an abundance of international companies. It is indeed the silicon valley within the Thames valley, full of optimism for the post-Brexit economy and blessed with opportunity, as symbolised by the superb new Lexicon shopping centre.

It is no coincidence that Bracknell Forest Council has been able to get things done as a unitary authority that always balances its books. It is led by Mr Paul Bettison,

one of the longest-serving council leaders in the UK; I commend him and all his staff and councillors. They serve their community with distinction, and I look forward to building a lasting relationship that is based on both give and take. We will also work closely with our friends at the neighbouring Woking Borough Council.

Bracknell is a great place to live, work and play, and has many open spaces that we must preserve from unsustainable house building. As a local boy, I am also fond of its people: they are hard-working, straightforward and blessed with a great sense of humour. During the election campaign, I was proudly informed by one constituent—please forgive me for quoting exactly—that “you could win in Bracknell by pinning a blue rosette to a dog turd”.

I did, of course, thank him for what I took to be a compliment, but there is a serious point. I hope never to take this support for granted, and I am grateful to the people of Bracknell, Crowthorne, Finchampstead, Sandhurst and the uniquely named Wokingham Without for placing their trust in me.

I was proud, in 1993, to march up the steps of the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, in the constituency that I now represent. In that time, I enjoyed some seminal experiences in amazing places with inspiring colleagues. Our recruiters will simply say that they are ordinary people doing extraordinary things, but the reality is much deeper. They come from all over the world to serve all over the world, notably from our great Commonwealth nations. They are multi-faith, male and female, gay and straight, black and white, and bisexual and transgender, and I have been proud to serve alongside every single one. Conversely, for those who have suffered the frustration or indignity of working alongside me, I can only apologise.

Right now, more than 10,000 people are serving in operations across the globe, away from friends and family, doing what they do without fuss and with complete humility. For some, the stakes are high, but military service is not just about fixing bayonets. For our combat and combat support arms, I have the highest regard, but it is also about everyone in the chain doing what they are paid to do. I would like to pay tribute to all those who sustain, particularly to the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, the Royal Logistic Corps, my own corps, and our civil service and contractors. More than 230 personnel from my own unit, 27 Regiment Royal Logistic Corps in Aldershot, are today manning the green line in Cyprus, and a further 14 soldiers from 19 Tank Transporter Squadron in Bulford are in Estonia supporting our combat forces. I am proud of the work they are doing and I miss them greatly.

As for the future, our armed forces do not need a magic wand, but they do need to know that they are valued, supported and resourced for what they do. That is why we have a golden opportunity now, with the forthcoming strategic defence and security review, to get this right. Our combat capabilities are among the best in the world, but we also need to tackle the threats that come from the other domains, too, notably space and cyberspace. Greater exploitation of remote technology, information systems and autonomous platforms will be needed, and our surface naval fleet will require more ships if we are to maintain a global presence.

**Alicia Kearns:** But you’re an Army man.

**James Sunderland:** Indeed. Quantity does, of course, have a quality all of its own. We should also focus on those strategic enabling capabilities that allow us to maintain a fully expeditionary posture, such as additional airlift, transport ships and utility vehicles, plus specialist logistic capabilities such as port and railway operators, movers, drivers, tank transporters and air dispatchers.

Operating freedoms and resilience do come at a price, but—here is the big but—the SDSR, when it comes, must be aligned to a defence industrial strategy, which places British manufacturing at the heart of what we do. We already have some of the best research and development facilities in the world and a coalition of the willing, so let us design British, build British, buy British and sell British. Once we have reassured those who have boldly continued to preserve our nascent defence manufacturing capability, we can transform this impetus to other commercial sectors, too, so that we boost all of our exports and put the UK back on the map.

That is my vision for post-Brexit global Britain—a proud, united, and independent nation with a strong economy based on manufacturing and services trading freely all over the world and creating the wealth that we need to pay for our public services. To protect British interests, we will need an agile and influential Foreign Office, robust defence capabilities and bucketloads of soft power. We already have the right tools for this with our diverse multicultural society, our unrivalled diaspora, our media outlets and our fantastic Commonwealth, but there is a snag. If the Government are to avoid writing foreign policy cheques that they cannot cash, then the Ministry of Defence will need more than 2% of GDP in its account. Perhaps then, by employing the best brains and linking all of these essential ingredients into a single global strategy, we will have a golden thread that should see us right through to the next epoch and beyond.

Here at home, I will, of course, be proud to get behind the blue-collar domestic agenda of our manifesto. I believe that the offer is good for health, education, social care, employment, and law and order. Plus, there is yet more to come across the political spectrum. I look forward to doing my bit for Bracknell, too. Indeed, this one-nation Government will make the UK a better place, boost economic growth, enhance opportunity and preserve the enviable way of life that we have in this country. But not everyone has a house on the hill. In fact, very few do and we have a moral duty to support those less fortunate than ourselves. The scourge of poverty is one priority that we must tackle now, but there are two other areas where we, as a nation, are furthest from where we need to be.

Mental illness is the modern day epidemic and affects more people than we know. Many years ago, I lost my best friend to suicide, when he was just 28 years old, and that trail of devastation continues two decades on. To my mind, it is unthinkable that, in 2020, anybody should feel disenfranchised in our society, not just on the basis of their colour, creed or sexuality, but in the area of mental health. We have work to do to put this right and to overcome the stigma of asking for help. For those affected, it is okay to not feel okay, but we also need to invest more so that mental health gets some parity with physical health. Secondly, our collective approach to special needs education for our children is woeful. As an affected parent, my heart goes out to all those who

are waiting for assessments, waiting for educational health and care plans and waiting to be taken seriously. Like mental health, this is the time bomb of our age, and we owe it to every child to see that they fulfil their potential, irrespective of what special gifts they have been given.

If there is a single theme in this maiden speech then it is service. I wish to finish, if I may, by saluting all those who put themselves in harm's way to serve others. Our police, ambulance and fire services do an amazing job, so please spare a thought for those who watch over us throughout the night as we sleep safely in our beds. I also want to acknowledge the chefs, porters, kitchen staff, cleaners and Doorkeepers in this place—they are the true lifeblood of Parliament. Elsewhere across the UK, our nurses, teachers, careworkers, refuse collectors and other public servants on low incomes do so much for others, and the heroes of the voluntary and charity sector also selflessly give their time for free. It is they who breathe fresh air into our country. To those who do so much in support of the armed forces covenant, I salute you. It is also about parents everywhere. They, like my own, make sacrifices to ensure that their children have a better deal than the one that they had. It is this power of humanity and generosity of community spirit that sets us apart as a nation and truly binds our Commonwealth together.

Finally, what about us as politicians? To my mind, politics is not just about what we achieve, but the manner in which we deliver it. My humble instinct as a new MP is that politics should be about inclusion over exclusion, talent above ambition, friendship above division, and substance over image. We should also perhaps do more to heal those negative influences in society that still exist to undermine us today. The one thing that I do know, and that every single Member of this House shares, is that politics is ultimately about service.

7.59 pm

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) on a passionate, and in some ways quite prescient, maiden speech. He has picked a pretty appropriate debate in which to make it, and I wish him and anyone else making a maiden speech today all the very best. Some of us were also elected at pretty short notice back in 2015, and it is absolutely appropriate to remark on the welcome we received from the support staff, the Doorkeepers and so on.

It is great that we are able to debate the future of the Commonwealth and Britain's relationship with the Commonwealth on Commonwealth Day itself, as the service has been taking place in Westminster Abbey and as the House has agreed to the Second Reading of the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill. It is great to see the Minister in his place; I was looking back at *Hansard* and I do believe that he moved the motion in the debate on Commonwealth Day last year in Westminster Hall, as a Back Bencher—a debate in which I responded on behalf of my party. The debate is a little higher in profile today given that it is happening in the main Chamber.

The presence of the Earl and Countess of Dumbarton, making their last appearance in their current roles, has given a bit of added focus to the celebration in Westminster Abbey. We wish them all the best as they move on to

[Patrick Grady]

pastures new. Another attendee in the abbey, as well as Mr Speaker, was the Speaker of the Malawian Parliament, the right hon. Catherine Gotani Hara, whom I had the immense privilege of meeting when I was in Malawi last year and with whom I enjoyed a very nice lunch this afternoon. The bringing together of such a number of different people from a number of different backgrounds and different parts of the world shows the effect of the Commonwealth.

The theme for Commonwealth Day in the year ahead is “Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating and Transforming”. It certainly will be a year—indeed years to come now—of innovation and transformation in the UK’s relationship with the rest of the world, and not necessarily for the better. I hope that Scotland’s constitutional future and international relations will also be transformed; I might say a bit more about that later.

It is worth reflecting, as others have, on both the history of and the recent developments in the Commonwealth. Last year’s debate was marked the 70th anniversary. That milestone has come and gone, but the institution continues to demonstrate its relevance and interests to the member states. We welcome, as others have, the readmission of the Maldives to the Commonwealth at the start of this month, following a period of internal democratic reform that resulted in its becoming the 54th member. That shows how the Commonwealth can be a force for good.

The UK’s term as chair-in-office is coming to an end, and the position will be taken on by Rwanda. As the shadow Minister remarked, that is unusual and a first, because Rwanda is not a former British colony. It is also a member of La Francophonie collection of nations, so it has a very interesting dual role.

Like the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore), who made a brief intervention, I was on the delegation of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association that was part of the preparatory work for Rwanda taking on the chair-in-office. We noted features of its democracy, including its high level of female participation and representation in Parliament, and its stable and growing economy—remarkable in that part of the world and given the country’s history. But there are also concerns around freedom of the press and freedom of participation, and it is right that such issues should be raised. The delegates at that conference will have much to learn and discuss.

I pay tribute more widely to the role of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I was an executive member between 2015 and 2017, and found it a valuable experience. The CPA plays an important role in connecting parliamentarians, and promoting mutual learning, sharing and partnership. It does not simply say, “Look at what a great example we can set here in the United Kingdom”, but asks, “What can we learn from different Parliaments around the world?” I mean, a number of members of the Commonwealth still include hereditary members of the aristocracy in their legislatures—Tonga, Lesotho and a small island state known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: it is not our job to go and lecture other members of the Commonwealth on the ideal models of democratic participation. We should all be in learning mode.

One of the most celebrated features of the Commonwealth is, of course, the Commonwealth games, which leave a lasting legacy wherever they are held. I was taught to swim in the Commonwealth pool in Edinburgh, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in January. The 2014 games in Glasgow also left a lasting and visible legacy in that city. Over the period from 2007 to 2014, the games contributed £740 million to the city’s gross value added, so Birmingham has very much to look forward to in the years to come. I just hope that it gets weather as exquisite as we had for those two weeks in 2014, which has not been repeated.

As well as looking at the past, I want to look at the future, and how the institution will develop in years to come. I am not sure whether it has been touched on yet, but we cannot ignore questions about how the secretariat is funded, financed and run, because we have to keep the house of the institution in order. Failings in that area might lead some members—there are plenty of voices in Australia, for example—to question the value of the entire institution, which would be pretty unfortunate. That is why we have to look back to the principles of partnership, mutual learning and accountability.

The bigger challenge that the Commonwealth has faced, and which has been touched on, is the difference between the declarations and statements made and the ambitions that the Commonwealth has for itself, and then the reality in many of its member countries. It champions—and we want to champion—democracy and human rights, but there are gaps and standards that are not lived up to, and that is particularly true on the question of LGBT rights, about which the shadow Minister spoke so eloquently; I entirely agree with him.

I admit that Malawi—a country that I have close and fond relationships with—is behind the curve in recognising the rights and freedoms that the LGBT community should have. If the Commonwealth is to be a force for good and make a difference in the modern world, these are the kinds of issues that it must seek to address through its structures and among its membership. That brings me to the role of the United Kingdom and its relationship with the Commonwealth, and how it fits with the concept of a global Britain.

For all the undoubted value that the Commonwealth brings to its members, it can never be a substitute or alternative to membership of the European Union. The fundamental differences are clear even from the names of the organisations. The Commonwealth is about a shared heritage and shared ambitions. The European Union is a political, economic—and, yes, a social and cultural—union. Membership of the EU has delivered economic benefits that are simply not possible for our relationship with the Commonwealth to replicate. The relative size of the economy, the nature of the trade in goods and services, and the sheer facts of geography and requirements of transport, mean that no trading relationship with Commonwealth countries could match what we had with the European Union.

If the Government do want to strike ambitious trade deals with Commonwealth countries, there will have to be arrangements, and give and take, on both sides. India, for example, has already signalled that it would want to see an easing on visa restrictions and travel opportunities. Therefore, although Brexiteers might rejoice in the ending of freedom of movement within Europe, the reality is that modern trade relies on the movement



of labour, irrespective of our trading partners. People will still want to travel as a consequence of any future trade deals that might be entered into.

What the Commonwealth certainly is not, and should not be thought of as, is some route back to the bygone days of an empire or Britannia ruling the waves. Even if some of the more extreme elements on the Tory Back Benches were to think this desirable, it would quite understandably be resisted by the other member states. When the UK Government try to brand these islands as “global Britain”, we have to ask how that reality matches the rhetoric, because even for Commonwealth countries—the countries with which we are supposed to have the most historic ties, which so many Brexiteers saw as somehow preferable to our historic European ties—access to the UK is limited and constrained. I, and colleagues who are with me in the Chamber, have repeatedly raised concerns about the ability of artists, academics and businesses to get visas—not to stay, settle down, take jobs away or cream off the welfare state, but just to access the country to attend conferences and cultural events—yet they still face massive and expensive bureaucratic hurdles.

When I was in Malawi last year, we went to visit the British high commission, and it was festooned with “Britain is GREAT” branding, and adverts saying, “Come to the United Kingdom and take part in the Chevening scholarships”. Yet the night before we had been discussing with young Malawian members of civil society the fact that they could not even apply for the Chevening scholarships because they were not getting their visas. We hear time and again of visitors who come here, invited by the British Council and by the Commonwealth Secretariat, and who are denied their visas and access to the United Kingdom. So the notion of Britain being open for business—of global Britain in some new, glorious era—simply does not match reality.

Nowhere is that clearer—again, I echo the shadow Minister on this—than on the issue of the visa charges for Commonwealth citizens who have served in the UK armed forces. When personnel who are Commonwealth citizens leave the UK armed forces and wish to apply to continue to live in the country that they have served for years, they face fees of thousands of pounds to do so. The Royal British Legion reckons that a service leaver with a partner and two children will be presented with a bill of almost £10,000 to continue to live in the UK, despite their years of sacrifice and service. Without leave to remain, these veterans are cut off from being able to access employment or state support, leaving them and their families reliant on charitable funds or facing repatriation to their country of origin. We wholeheartedly support the Royal British Legion and others who are campaigning for these fees to be scrapped for Commonwealth service leavers.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): For the record, there are a huge number of people on the Conservative Benches who entirely agree with that point. We should look after these men. I have served with Fijians of great distinction. They have the right to stay here, and we should not charge them for it.

**Patrick Grady:** I thank the hon. and gallant Gentleman for his comments. Perhaps if we put forward some amendments to an immigration Bill, when it comes, we can achieve some cross-party consensus on this.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): We are hearing from members of the armed forces and the Royal British Legion that these people have been recruited because we are not meeting our own recruitment targets here in the UK. We are going out to these countries and actively recruiting; promising the earth and then delivering very little for their families. It really is not how we should be operating.

**Patrick Grady:** I entirely agree. My hon. Friend speaks with some experience on these matters. The mismatch between rhetoric and reality is a bit of a theme on a number of issues in this debate, particularly the final one that I want to touch on. Again, this will not be a surprise to the Minister, because we have exchanged words on it in Westminster Hall on many occasions.

The issue is, of course, the UK’s role in the question of sovereignty over the Chagos Islands. Mauritius, which claims sovereignty and whose sovereignty has in fact been recognised by a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, is a fellow member of the Commonwealth. Where is global Britain in all of this? Mauritius has had to seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice. The UN resolution stated that the United Kingdom should surrender the British Indian Ocean Territory unconditionally, and the deadline for that was breached in November 2019. Where is global Britain in all that? Where is the respect for the partnership of the Commonwealth of Nations?

**Andrew Rosindell:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Patrick Grady:** Yes, I happily give way to the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on overseas territories.

**Andrew Rosindell:** I totally understand and accept the points that the hon. Gentleman is making about the Chagos Islands and Mauritius, but will the Chagossians be consulted on whose sovereignty they wish to fall under? As we have that policy with all our overseas territories, such as Gibraltar and the Falklands, which have had a referendum, surely the Chagossians should be the people who should determine their destiny of their own homeland.

**Patrick Grady:** As the hon. Gentleman well knows, I am a huge fan of popular sovereignty and very committed to the concept of self-determination. But I do not want to make light of his comment; he is absolutely right. The point that I am trying to make is in the context of how the UK Government respect the rules-based order and the decisions coming from multilateral institutions that they claim to want to take part in and respect. Absolutely—the Chagossian community themselves should be at the heart of the decision-making process about their future and the future of their islands. I look forward to hearing from the Minister on that. It is probably not the last he is going to hear of it, if it falls within his wider ministerial remit.

This is the challenge regarding the question of Britain’s role in the Commonwealth in 2020. The reality that we have experienced with Brexit is that it is a fundamentally narrow, isolationist decision that will reduce the UK’s role on the world stage, and its relationship with the Commonwealth should not be used as a fig leaf to cover that reality. That stands in contrast with the ambition of my party and an increasing number—in fact, perhaps now a majority—of people in Scotland

[Patrick Grady]

for a Scotland that plays a fuller role on the world stage as an independent country that defines its independence by its membership of supranational, international multilateral organisations like the Commonwealth of Nations, the United Nations and the European Union.

The more the United Kingdom bangs its isolationist drum and soaks up to superpowers at the expense of the established multilateral system, the sooner the day of Scotland's independence and its membership as the 55th member of the Commonwealth of Nations will come.

8.15 pm

**Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): May I first say what a real pleasure it has been to be part of this debate today and to hear the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland)? How welcome he is to this House, and how delighted we are that he is now the new—Conservative—MP for Bracknell. I thank him for his gallant service to Queen and country—particularly, of course, in the Falklands—and welcome him as one of the new vice-chairmen of the all-party parliamentary group on the Falkland Islands. I commend him for his maiden speech today.

It is an honour to take part in this debate about the Commonwealth in 2020. It is right that the Government have made time to debate this. It is very important that we never forget the Commonwealth, because we are the Commonwealth. This is our family, and we should be proud to speak about it more freely and more regularly than we do. It is also vitally important that we celebrate Britain's special relationship with our Commonwealth friends not just by having this debate here in the House but with ceremonies and commemorations across the United Kingdom. I am looking forward to celebrations that we are having in Romford on Saturday, with a "Love the Commonwealth day" in Romford market when it will be open to everybody to come to celebrate our Commonwealth heritage.

We do celebrate the Commonwealth in my constituency. Last Friday we welcomed the Australian high commissioner down for a tour, a dinner, and visits to churches and local businesses. We are having that huge Commonwealth event on Saturday. Today I am proud to say we once again raised the Commonwealth flag from Havering town hall, with a lot of local community members and representatives of all different Commonwealth backgrounds. I pay tribute to the mayor of Havering—our first British Jamaican mayor, Councillor Michael Deon-Burton—and also to Felicia Boshorin, who runs Havering BME Forum. We have many Commonwealth-themed events. I encourage all Members to promote this idea in every constituency, because it really is truly inclusive for all people. We are very proud to do that in the London Borough of Havering.

I was also proud today to attend the wonderful Commonwealth service at Westminster Abbey in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen and other members of the royal family—and, indeed, the Prime Minister. It was a wonderful celebration here in the heart of Westminster. The Commonwealth service is an annual event attended by quite a number of MPs, but perhaps more of us should attend next year to show our true commitment to this wonderful family of nations. May I also say what a splendid sight it is to see the fantastic

flags flying in Parliament Square? Every single Commonwealth nation's flag is displayed for Commonwealth Day in Parliament Square. I urge the Minister—please do not take them down tomorrow. Let us see them for at least a week. I really get disappointed when the DCMS officials turn up and take the flags down so quickly. Let us see them flying for at least a week so that people can celebrate the Commonwealth and be reminded of the importance of celebrating our friendships with all the nations and territories of the Commonwealth.

We must not forget the 31 territories and dependencies. We talk about the Commonwealth of Nations, but territories and dependencies are not given proper recognition within the Commonwealth. They do not have their flags flown or attend Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings officially. They do not have full participation in the Commonwealth, and I would like the Minister to take that on board. Too often they are forgotten, left out and missed off, and that is not right. There are 31 external territories, dependencies and realm states within the Commonwealth. Most of them—21—are British, and the others are Australian and New Zealand external territories and realm states. Let us ensure that they are included in all things to do with the Commonwealth.

**Bob Stewart:** I commend my hon. Friend, who is a really good friend. I have been to his constituency on many occasions for dinners—he is a terribly generous fellow—and every time there have been representatives of the Commonwealth present, including dependencies. He does sterling work in that respect, and the House should commend him for it.

**Andrew Rosindell:** I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. This is something that we should all do with pride. This is our history—this is who we are. I know there are things that people might say about the past and things that have happened or should not have happened, but overwhelmingly this is a positive family of nations who choose to be together, work together and co-operate. We could do so much more, and I look forward to working with Members on both sides of the House to make that a reality.

As our nation escapes the clutches of the European Union, this must surely be a time to strengthen our global ties with our Commonwealth allies, who we have too long neglected over the past five decades. There is a natural interest in the Commonwealth today because it is Commonwealth Day, but it is an annual celebration, and I hope that our Government will take up the cause of the Commonwealth in a much more proactive way, because there is so much more we can do.

The United Kingdom is the chair-in-office, and we have tried to make use of that period, but we still have a little way to go, and I hope the Minister will ensure that we use the opportunity in the last few months to make an impact. The theme of our period as chair has been "A connected Commonwealth", and there are so many things that connect the Commonwealth countries. There is our shared history, our shared culture and our reverence for Her Majesty the Queen as head of the Commonwealth, but what I believe most tightly binds us together is our shared values, which are outlined in the Commonwealth charter. Those values of democracy, freedom of speech, human rights and the rule of law are more important today than ever before, and I am proud that this fantastic

organisation has done so much to promote and maintain those values among its members. There is a lot more work to be done—I freely admit that—and Britain should be there helping and advising and ensuring that things are going in the right direction. I truly believe that they are going in the right direction and will continue to do so in the months and years ahead with our support.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is one of the key organisations that does so much work to uphold and promote those values—in particular, that of parliamentary democracy, and I stand here today in the mother of Parliaments. As a member of the CPA executive for the past 10 years, I have had the privilege of working with CPA members, in particular the current chief executive, Jon Davies, and his brilliant team. I would like to thank them for all they do at CPA UK. We are privileged to have them work so hard to promote Britain and the Commonwealth in the way that they do.

It is important to recognise the CPA's work in providing training of parliamentarians and administrators across the Commonwealth and the UK overseas territories. I am involved in the CPA's overseas territories project—a fantastic operation that assists our territories with good governance, particularly through public accounts committees, which some of them did not have. That has had a huge positive impact, developing good practice across Commonwealth countries. The CPA's work observing elections, providing public finance scrutiny and lobbying to increase representation of women in Commonwealth Parliaments has had some remarkable successes.

Organisations such as the CPA are what make the Commonwealth so special. It is a truly modern organisation from which other multinational structures could learn a huge amount. Members have no legal obligations to one another, but instead co-operate on the basis of bilateral agreements, human networks and the numerous associated organisations such as the CPA that work alongside Government and Commonwealth structures. These organisations are based on mutual interest and understanding and are often far stronger than some of the outdated, inflexible and undemocratic legal structures of the organisation that we have now left—the European Union. The Commonwealth has a great future with Britain playing a central part within it.

Some have criticised a renewed focus on the Commonwealth as being backward-looking, outdated and looking to empire and “Rule, Britannia!” I disagree with those people; I do not think it is. It is part of today's world. It may be our past, but it is very much a part of our future, so that could not be further from the truth. We should be proud of what the Commonwealth is today but work to expand it and make it even more successful.

While many Commonwealth countries are former British colonies, I am glad that we have welcomed new members of the Commonwealth such as Rwanda and Mozambique, which have hardly any historical connections to Britain at all. These countries wanted to join the Commonwealth of Nations, and the fact that they have chosen to do so shows how much they respect this organisation on the global stage and how much it can offer its members. It also shows just how important the Commonwealth should be for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Britain must take advantage of these Commonwealth links by pushing an agenda that places the Commonwealth at the heart of global Britain. That means investing even more in the Commonwealth institutions and supporting organisations such as the CPA. We have already built up massive good will in many Commonwealth countries, thanks to our development funding, while helping to save lives, boosting local economies and leaving permanent infrastructure in place. We should strengthen these bodies by creating special programmes in the Department for International Development, with a focus on delivering for the Commonwealth of Nations and the British overseas territories.

Another way to strengthen the bonds between the UK and the Commonwealth is through mutual immigration and the exchange of human capital. We already have so many Commonwealth immigrants living in our country who have contributed a huge amount to the value of our country, as well as creating a permanent bond between their countries of origin and the United Kingdom. But now that we are leaving the European Union, we can finally end the discrimination against Commonwealth citizens, so that everyone can be in this country equally and fairly.

**Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman rightly highlights the contribution that so many Commonwealth citizens have made to our country, including of course those who came over on the Windrush. That also includes the 160 Commonwealth citizens identified by the Public Accounts Committee who may find themselves in the same position as the Windrush generation, but whom the Government are refusing to track and contact. Does he not think that we owe it to our Commonwealth brothers and sisters to do that work to make sure they do not have to go through the pain that so many have already gone through?

**Andrew Rosindell**: I do not think anyone should go through that pain, and what happened with the Windrush generation should never be repeated. I know that the Government are doing everything they possibly can to ensure that that does not ever happen again. If the hon. Lady thinks they are not, then I know the Minister will have heard what she said, and he will take that up with the Home Office Ministers responsible.

I hope that our newly balanced immigration system, along with exchange programmes such as the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, will allow this dynamic interchange of people between the UK and the Commonwealth of Nations to continue well into the future.

Alongside immigration, the area where we will see the most dramatic change in our relationship with the Commonwealth in the short term is trade. The United Kingdom is becoming a beacon of free trade once again, I am pleased to say—returning to our traditional role as a global, outward-looking, seafaring nation. The Commonwealth countries represent the future of global trade, with rapid economic and population growth being the norm across the Commonwealth. New trade agreements should be struck rapidly with Commonwealth countries to take full advantage of our departure from the European Union.

The United Kingdom has neglected the trading aspects of the Commonwealth for far too long. I was glad to see that the Government recently increased its funding for



[Andrew Rosindell]

the Commonwealth Standards Network, which plays a key role in breaking down non-tariff barriers between Commonwealth states. We must support initiatives such as the CSN and continue to promote free trade not just between ourselves and other Commonwealth countries, but across the entire Commonwealth. Free trade is in the interests of all members, and it is clearly in the interests of Britain to promote it now more than ever before.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** It is a great pleasure to call Claudia Webbe to make her maiden speech.

8.30 pm

**Claudia Webbe** (Leicester East) (Lab): Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech. First, I want to express my deep gratitude to the people of Leicester East for electing me to this place. It is truly an honour to represent the city where I was born and where I grew up—the city my parents made their home. Leicester, of course, is full of surprises. I mean, who would have imagined that it would become home to the most famous car park in the world, where the remains of King Richard III were found, and who would have imagined that Leicester City football club, ranked 5,000-1 outsiders, would be crowned premier league champions in 2016?

Leicester is bursting with talent and inventiveness. We have the National Space Centre on the edge of my constituency, vibrant theatres and concert halls, and our world-famous Diwali festival on the Golden Mile. Leicester's Attenborough arts centre is one of only five in the country to be purpose-built for disabled artists and audiences. You know, in any fish and chip shop across the country, you will find no better pie than Leicester's Pukka Pie. There is no better cheese than Red Leicester, no better packet of crisps than Walkers and no better vegetarian curry house than in my constituency of Leicester East.

I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Keith Vaz, the longest-serving British Asian MP, who represented Leicester East for 32 years. The 1987 election, when Keith Vaz was elected, was a watershed moment in the history of race relations in this country. There had been no black MPs for over half a century. Keith Vaz became only the third British Asian ever elected to this Parliament. That election also brought to this House pioneering black MPs Paul Boateng, Bernie Grant and—my inspiration—my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), the first black woman ever elected to Parliament. I am proud to be part of the Parliament with the highest number of African, Asian and minority ethnic MPs ever. Over his long parliamentary career, Keith Vaz advanced the cause of representation and race equality while also holding major positions, including Minister for Europe and, famously, Chair of the Home Affairs Committee. Keith is of course a passionate campaigner on the issue of diabetes. He also did truly important work in highlighting the UK's involvement in what he rightly called the "forgotten war" in Yemen. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sure you will join me in wishing Keith Vaz and his family well in his retirement from this House.

As a feminist, it is a privilege to be addressing this House as the first female Member of Parliament for Leicester East. I am also proud to be the first British-born Member of Parliament of African descent from the beautiful Caribbean island of Nevis. My parents came from Nevis to the UK and, remarkably, given a Nevisian population of just 11,000, they met for the first time here. They settled in Leicester, where I was born, so Leicester of course runs through my veins.

I am a daughter of the Windrush generation, and we must never forget the history of struggle of African, Caribbean and Asian people in this so-called United Kingdom, without whose blood, sweat, toil and tears there simply would be no kingdom and no form of modern prosperity. I have no doubt that my ancestors are here with me today. And I share the pain of their suffering because of the historical injustice of slavery and colonialism, but I also share their joy at the liberation that brings me to this place today. Throughout the centuries my foremothers argued for and suffered and died for the freedoms I enjoy here today in this place. With my presence in this House, Commonwealth history and the British empire cannot hide.

We cannot talk about the present without recognition, apology, returning what was stolen and reparations for the past. One fifth of the billionaires in Britain owe their wealth to the transportation of my ancestors, because they benefited from the compensation of the equivalent of £20 billion in today's value for the "human property" they somehow lost at sea. It is to our shame that Members of this House during the mid to late 1700s represented slave plantations, and let us not forget that British colonialism reduced India from holding 23% of the world economy to 4% by the time the British left.

How many in this House know or care about the British torture camps in 1950s Kenya, where members of the Kikuyu tribe were systematically tortured, starved, beaten, mistreated and raped? How many in this House know or care about the massacre committed by British colonial groups in the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar massacre? And let us not forget that working people here from all over the Commonwealth died in their thousands in both world wars, only to see their descendants shackled and deported in the continued shame that is the hostile environment.

My father, along with his his identical twin brother, worked as an engineer's hand at the former Wadkin factory on Green Lane in what is now my constituency of Leicester East, but those unionised factories, jobs and industries of the past were destroyed, along with Leicester's manufacturing base, by Thatcherism in the pursuit of free-market capitalism.

Leicester is considered the home to the garment industry. My mother was a home-worker, skilled as a dressmaker, a seamstress and an overlocker. But in Leicester's garment industry today many workers, overwhelmingly women, earn well below the minimum wage—as little as £3 an hour in conditions that most people would find unthinkable in modern Britain.

That is the legacy of Tory deindustrialisation, yet Leicester is the place where working women fought back. It was Asian women who went on strike for equal pay at Leicester's Imperial Typewriter Company factory, and it was those women who led the way in equal pay, race equality, and employment. I pay tribute to them.

I am incredibly proud that Leicester is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse places in the UK. Our city's identity is forged from a proud history of immigration from the Commonwealth and beyond. Over two thirds—68%—of my constituents are from an African, Asian or minority ethnic background, and nearly half of our residents were born outside the UK. We are home to 240 faith groups across 14 different faiths and our residents hail from 50 countries across the globe.

This is what makes Leicester East so special. We are the city where the minorities make up the majority, and we are richer for this vibrant exchange of cultures. But racism and the far right have left an indelible stain on the history of my constituency. Enoch Powell's racist "rivers of blood" speech in 1968 gave rise to the National Front and its message of hatred and intolerance across my constituency, but the history of Leicester's anti-racist activists, campaigners and organisers who fought back against the rise of organised racism is a source of great pride and inspiration. In April 1979, when the National Front organised a 1,000-strong rally in Leicester starting at Welford Road recreation ground, they were confronted by 2,000 anti-racist protestors who withstood police violence to send the message out loud and clear that racism shall not pass through Leicester. It was a turning point in the decline of the National Front. We even renamed Welford Road recreation ground: fittingly, we renamed it Nelson Mandela Park.

The right for different communities and cultures, and for people of all faiths and none, to live side by side has been won through generations of struggle. I do not take our unity and solidarity for granted. This Government, a Government for the super-rich, the oligarchs the tax dodgers, are still trying to divide our communities based on the colour of our skin, our religion or where we come from. I know only too well the hurt that my constituents feel when the Government legitimise the dehumanisation and marginalisation of African, Caribbean, Asian and minority ethnic communities by deporting our people and embracing institutionalised racism, as was revealed by the Windrush scandal and the hostile environment. The continued detentions, deportations and charter flights are simply barbaric.

In communities like mine, this Government have normalised hunger, poverty and hopelessness. It should be a national disgrace in the sixth richest country in the world for a single person to be without food, and for just one parent to have to choose between heating their home and feeding their children. Yet more and more families in my constituency are relying on food banks every year, and fuel poverty is growing. Nearly 40% of children in Leicester East are growing up in poverty. As the 1% increase their share of the national wealth, our regions are pulled further and further apart in terms of income inequality and life chances.

Leicester was recently shown to be one of the most polluted cities in the UK. I vow to fight for clean air. I vow to fight for clean energy and climate justice, so that my constituents and people across the world, particularly the global south, can have a liveable future. It is vital that those responsible for climate chaos, the fossil fuel companies and big polluters, are not allowed to profit from climate breakdown, and instead pay their fair share so that future generations can inherit a habitable planet.

I am proud of my party. I am proud of the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) in opposing austerity, opposing corporate power, tackling inequality and the climate emergency, and for having rewritten the terms of political debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I stand before you today in the lineage of people who fought to keep our culture and traditions alive, and to keep the shackles off our feet. I come from a people who survived: survived the evils of slavery. Today, and every day, I am grateful that they never gave up. I vow that as Leicester East's new Member of Parliament, I too will never give up. I will work hard to protect all my constituents and fight against those who wish to pit our communities against each another.

Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for allowing me to make my maiden speech.

8.44 pm

**Sir Paul Beresford** (Mole Valley) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leicester East (Claudia Webbe) on her maiden speech. She has broken the ice and is on the way. It was a powerful speech with some key markers, so it is going to be interesting to watch her, although I do not quite agree with everything.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) on his maiden speech. Some time back, he said to me, "I'm an Army officer and I want to be a MP." I said, "Why?" We then discussed why not, and after that, we discussed why he should. I left him walking away with a puzzled look on his face, but he obviously decided that the positive things were the way forward, and he is here.

The first thing I have to do is admit to being a dual national. I carry a New Zealand passport in one hand and a UK passport in the other, and that gives me a special interest in this debate. The Commonwealth works together very hard, and it competes—no more so than in sport and no more so than between Australia and New Zealand, particularly on the rugby field. If people do not come from one of those two nations, the banter between them sounds vicious, but, in fact, it is not. I was a little disappointed when the Minister said that his brother had gone to Australia, and I surmised that it was because New Zealanders would not let him in. I also did not remind him, but I will now, that the venom between the two countries—it is unreal, but joking—can reach quite a pitch, as it did some years ago, when the then New Zealand Prime Minister said that anybody from New Zealand emigrating to Australia lifted the IQ of both countries, but we will not go into that any further.

The amazing thing is that—despite the comments made by the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady)—the Commonwealth works. It is predominantly countries collected in the British empire's growth and, as has been referred to, it was not always that gentle. Post Brexit, we are looking for a huge expansion in our trade deals, hence Britain is in a unique position as head of the Commonwealth. As the Minister will be aware, Commonwealth states have, for some time, been working on economic connectivity. The goal is to expand investment and boost intra-Commonwealth trade to £1.5 trillion by 2030. Member states are offering capacity building

[*Sir Paul Beresford*]

to support trade liberalisation, helping one another to realise the full economic potential and deliver prosperity for all their people. It is what we would expect from a British background.

Considering that we now have the opportunity and desirability to expand our trade, this moment could not be more opportune. Commonwealth states together comprise 14% of global GDP, or over £8 trillion. The Commonwealth's people, as has been mentioned, make up 33% of the world's population, of which over 60% are under the age of 30. Factors including historical ties, similar administrative and legal systems and a common language all contribute to what we can call the "Commonwealth effect." This helps to facilitate trade, accompanied with an ease of doing business between members. Furthermore, as it is desirable for us to reach a trade agreement with the Trans-Pacific Partnership, it is extremely helpful to have Commonwealth friends within the TPP.

The Commonwealth brings together a family of 54 diverse member states, all committed to the development of free and democratic societies. We all seek the promotion of peace and prosperity to improve the lives of all our people. We have a Commonwealth charter, which reminds us of our shared language, culture and history and our shared values and principles.

It is worth reminding the House, although it is not necessary, of the huge support Britain and Europe received during the second world war from Commonwealth nations, including south-east Asian nations, Canada, Australasia, the Pacific Islands and the southern African nations. For some of those nations, the losses, as a percentage of the adult male population, were staggering, particularly in my original country, New Zealand. On Remembrance Sunday in my constituency, I frequently attend a service at one of my villages during which the names of those who died from that village are read out. I have also been to a service on Anzac Day—remembrance day—in my wee village in New Zealand where they do not read out the names because it would take too long.

If one is visiting Canberra and Australia, I would highly recommend a visit to the Australian war memorial. The number of names inscribed on the memorial walls of those who lost their lives fighting, predominantly over here, in the second world war, is breathtaking and deeply sad. The explanation for that support, particularly from the Commonwealth nations, lies in the extremely strong kith and kin relationships. As I have said, my direct knowledge is predominantly about New Zealand, although I have lived for longer in the UK—I return to New Zealand occasionally to tone up my language and refresh my accent. New Zealand is a little country, being but 104 square miles greater in landmass than the United Kingdom, with a population of only 4 million, far away the majority of whom live in the north of the two islands. It is in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by amazing oceans, with phenomenal countryside, as anyone will know who has seen the "Lord of the Rings" films. In terms of saving the environment, New Zealanders are extremely green.

It is fair to say, however, that the Commonwealth group of nations also rank saving the earth high on their agenda. In 2018, a key outcome of the Commonwealth blue charter was an unprecedented multilateral commitment

by the Commonwealth states to work together on ocean conservation and to meet the commitments for sustainable ocean development, which is particularly important at a time when the threats confronting our oceans are numerous and deadly. Some 47 of the 54 Commonwealth members are coastal states, and they include most of the world's small island developing states, which are the most vulnerable to ocean degradation and climate change and face the appalling prospect of disappearing under rising sea levels. Together, they cover more than one third of national marine waters globally and are home to 42% of coral reefs. The Commonwealth group of nations do then have a huge stake in the future of our oceans. I rank islands such as the Fiji islands among the most beautiful for idyllic beach holidays. Here, you will be hosted by some of the most lovely and friendly people you could ever hope to meet. Fortunately, Commonwealth member states continue to work together to combat these threats to our marine environment. I hope to see the great promise of this work fulfilled in years to come, and I urge the Minister to continue with it.

It is great to be British—even if my accent is odd—but it is even greater to be British and a member of the Commonwealth.

8.53 pm

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): It is a great pleasure to be here today on Commonwealth Day and the day of the Commonwealth service, when all 53 flags are flying in Parliament Square—a day when the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill was brought before Parliament and the Minister has arranged for us to have a Commonwealth debate.

I think I arranged the first such debate in 2012 as the founding chair of the all-party group on the Commonwealth and, at that stage, Parliamentary Private Secretary to the first of two Ministers for the Commonwealth. It is a great treat to be here with him—the comeback kid of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. He puts the "C" firmly back into the FCO: three times returned to the FCO to keep that C flag flying. If he has been to only 18 out of the 19 Commonwealth countries in Africa, surely his officials have an opportunity to arrange a trip to the 19th—we could even have a sweepstake on which one he has not been to.

It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), the living symbol of UK-New Zealand partnership in this Chamber. His speech followed two maiden speeches of great distinction. My hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) typifies the concept of service before self, having moved seamlessly from the Army to Parliament, where I know he will put his constituents first. I shall return to one of his Commonwealth themes later.

We also heard a passionate speech from the hon. Member for Leicester East (Claudia Webbe). I have no doubt that everyone who lives in the Nevis Islands will celebrate her speech and her presence in the Chamber. She shared with us all a vivid talent for focusing on some of the crimes of the past, while perhaps skating lightly over some of the more recent scandals. We welcome her to the House. The Commonwealth is part of her, but it is also part of me, because I am a child of the Commonwealth. I was brought up in Kenya, and the atrocities in Hola to which she alluded were part of my childhood.



In the Chamber, although many of its Benches are empty at this late stage of the evening, people from all over the Commonwealth are celebrating today and what it means. This is a moment for congratulations, but also for us to reflect, each year, on what the Commonwealth means and how it is progressing. I must say that I do not share the intrinsic gloom of the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle), who was ashamed of the past, apologetic for the present, and gloomy about the future. That, I am afraid, is my summary of his lengthy speech. He described finding “glimmers of hope” in the Commonwealth, but I think we can do better than that.

Let me give just one example of the symbol of the success of the modern Commonwealth and the countries within it. The whole business of being able to conduct financial transactions over a mobile telephone was not invented in some rich western country, or even by state-sponsored technology innovation programmes in China; it was invented and formed in Kenya. It is possible to travel over large chunks of that most lovely country and find Masai herdsman nestling a spear in one hand while looking out over their goats and, with the other hand, transacting their business over their mobile telephones, often returning in the evening to their huts where the telephones can be recharged by a miniature solar panel. There is much to be proud of in all parts of the Commonwealth: there is innovation, and much more than “glimmers of hope”.

There has been huge progress on eliminating malaria and reducing blindness, and on the Prime Minister’s campaign in promoting 12 years of education across the Commonwealth and, indeed, across the world, supported by the Department for International Development. I believe that, in future, this country in particular will be able to offer considerable expertise to help other parts of the Commonwealth to thrive. Cyber-security is incredibly important to us all, and, as we know from what happened in the headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa, there are all sorts of reasons why it should be strengthened—not just across that continent, but in other parts of the Commonwealth, including the parts where I spend some of my time nowadays as the Prime Minister’s trade envoy in the far east: Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore, three nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which are members of the Commonwealth.

**Fleur Anderson** (Putney) (Lab): May I present another offer of hope, and a glimmer of light from the Commonwealth? Will the hon. Gentleman join me in congratulating Rwanda, where the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting will be held? It has made enormous strides in respect of water and sanitation, which is especially impressive because it is such a mountainous country. Many other Commonwealth countries need to go further in those respects to achieve health and wealth: through the Commonwealth and our work with DFID projects, we can achieve that as well. Water and sanitation need to be part of CHOGM, and part of our work with the Commonwealth.

**Richard Graham**: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her considerable intervention, which demonstrated her love of Rwanda. No doubt she has spent a great deal of time there. I am occasionally in touch with a former Anglican bishop of Rwanda, who is equally proud of some of the great progress that has been made in that country.

There is a slight warning note about Rwanda, which is a remarkable member of the Commonwealth. Her history is different, as she joined 28 years ago—something like that—and there is a caveat for all of us: not to put its leader on a pedestal. We are all human, and we all have feet of clay. I remember vividly the disappointment felt by many hon. Members when Aung San Suu Kyi became Prime Minister of Burma, but then presided over one of the world’s saddest periods of internal conflict and possible genocide against the Rohingya people. That was a period in which those who had strongly supported her opening the new Labour offices when she visited London had cause to reflect on the fragility of all of us as humans.

I return to two or three things that I should like to ask the Minister. During our time as the chairing office, various initiatives were launched, all of which I supported strongly—for example, the new business Commonwealth standards network, the world trade-based trade facilitation agreement, the Commonwealth clean oceans alliance, and the marine economies programme. All those were good news, and worthy causes. Will the Minister give us a brief update on how they are doing, and whether the progress made during our time in the chair can be continued?

Will the Minister also consider something else, so that we can end on a note of great consensus among Members all parties in the Chamber, including the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), who made a very good speech on the Commonwealth, wrapped in a more traditional speech about the European Union? The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell about Commonwealth servicemen and women having to pay considerable amounts of money when applying for the right to remain here after five years’ service is something about which many of us feel strongly. In fact, I attracted 125 signatures to a letter that I wrote to the then Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), last year. He was sympathetic, as were Ministers in the Ministry of Defence, who said that it was a Home Office decision.

I encourage my hon. Friend the Minister to take careful note of today’s debate and the feelings on this issue. I understand that there are problems—there always are—of precedence and cost. There are lots of different problems, as we want those Commonwealth servicemen to be motivated by the concept of serving in our armed forces rather than purely being attracted to the later possibility of being able to bring their whole family here. I understand all those problems, but my hon. Friend, who is nodding from a sedentary position, would probably agree on something about which many of us feel strongly, as does the British Legion. There must be an opportunity for the new Government to do us all a favour by taking a closer look at what can be done to help Commonwealth servicemen and women on Commonwealth Day, in a debate in which there is much good will across the House to make the Commonwealth prosper.

9.3 pm

**Tom Hunt** (Ipswich) (Con): May I begin by paying tribute to some of the speeches that have been made? My hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) spoke passionately about a number of issues, particularly special educational needs, which I am incredibly passionate

[Tom Hunt]

about as well. We need to make sure that we do something on that in this Parliament, otherwise we will have huge problems as a country. I predict that I will disagree with the hon. Member for Leicester East (Claudia Webbe) on quite a few issues in the next however many years, but she made a very good maiden speech. I am not saying that just because it is customary to say so; she is clearly a powerful orator. She mentioned her ancestors, and I am sure that they will be incredibly proud of her and the speech that she made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) spoke about the reaction of the Opposition Front Bench to the debate, and the glimmers of hope that he sees. While acknowledging that the history of the British empire was chequered, to say that no positive contribution was made at all is wrong. The incessant need to prioritise apologising for our country the whole time and not saying anything good about us as a country and our history and why we are special is the reason why lots of patriotic voters up and down the country abandoned the Labour party at the last election, because it turned its back on them. By the looks of things, it will continue to do so.

It is a privilege to speak on Commonwealth Day in this debate on the Commonwealth of Nations in 2020. The historic bonds between the 54 countries of the Commonwealth are of immense personal significance to many people in Ipswich, as well as to millions of people across the country and around the world. Unfortunately, however, although those bonds have endured in people's hearts, this country's relationship with our Commonwealth partners has been neglected over the decades. As we have been shackled to the European Union and tied into the dogmatic pursuit of ever closer union, we have been drawn away from some of our closest friends and most loyal allies in the Commonwealth. This has left many around the world, including me, with a deep sense of regret.

Before our exit from the European Union on 31 January, we were members of an artificial and Babylonian construct that sought to govern the peoples of Europe and attain the power to coerce their elected Governments. Rather than bringing people together, this form of supranational government often drives people apart. This outdated and undemocratic model—which former European Commission President José Manuel Barroso likened to the creation of a new empire—stands in stark contrast to the values and principles of the Commonwealth. Our Commonwealth of nations is based on a voluntary association of sovereign states, with no country exercising power or dominance over any other. Commonwealth countries retain their right to opt out of any arrangements, and there is no obligation to hand over legal or regulatory powers to unaccountable bodies. This intergovernmental system reflects the sense of security that Commonwealth countries have in their own identities, and the respect that they hold for each other as equal members of our Commonwealth community. It fosters a working environment based on agreement and respect that makes positive and consensual co-operation possible.

Unlike the EU, which is driven by the idealism of an elite few, the Commonwealth is grounded fundamentally in what unites its peoples. These bonds are practical and tangible, but also immensely personal in many ways.

They were forged in our shared history, trade, common culture, the language we speak, common law, shared values and the movement of people, and even as brothers in war. These are the elements we must consider as we debate the Commonwealth in 2020 and as we look to our global future.

If we are to reignite our relationship with this modern and dynamic community of countries, free trade must be at the heart of our efforts to make up for lost time. We must not forget that free trade was laid down in the Commonwealth's Singapore declaration as one of our core common values and goals. Trade between Commonwealth nations is already estimated to be worth approximately £425 billion a year, and it is projected to rise to over £532 billion this year. Some 60% of the Commonwealth's 2.4 billion population are aged under 30 and it also has some of the world's fastest growing economies, so the opportunities for mutually beneficial trade are enormous.

Now that we have taken back control of our trade policy and left the stagnant and protectionist EU bloc—which frequently raised tariffs to the rest of the world as it struggled to get its own trade deals over the line—there is no reason why we cannot grasp the opportunities of intra-Commonwealth trade with both hands. The EU has trade agreements with 23 Commonwealth states but those deals represent only a small fraction of what is possible. India-EU negotiations have been ongoing since 2007 without success, and the Canada deal, which did eventually pass, was almost vetoed at the last moment. We could not rely on the EU to prioritise our Commonwealth links.

That is why I welcome the targets set out by the Commonwealth Heads of Government to boost intra-Commonwealth trade to £1.5 trillion by 2030. We must be ready to play a full role in building new trade deals with our partners on the foundations of the legal, linguistic and cultural norms we already share. While these important aspects are already in place, this country must also be prepared, as I have said before in this place, to be nimble, flexible and determined in the world as we seek to free ourselves from the EU's protectionist customs union. India alone has a population of 1.3 billion, which is double the size of the EU's. We must have the right tools in place if we are going to embrace our future as a truly global free-trading nation. In the past, Belgium has often traded more to India than we have. The European Union has been a barrier to our embracing the growth that was happening in India. If we are going to embrace this opportunity to trade with the Commonwealth, we must have first-class infrastructure to support ports such as Ipswich and Felixstowe, and to ensure that all parts of this country share in the benefits of increased trade.

If this country is to broaden its horizons to the Commonwealth and the world, we must also have a laser-like focus on the parts of the country that have untapped trading potential. The new role that we can play in the Commonwealth will be determined more than anything by our investment and belief in places such as Ipswich and the east of England.

A great deal of belief and investment in our town has already been made by the great number of Commonwealth citizens and Commonwealth-origin Brits who have made Ipswich their home, and I also want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to them. Among them are members of

the Indian community, who play a vital role in our town, with many dedicating themselves to caring for others by filling many of the roles in our local NHS. We also have a great Bangladeshi community, which has produced some of our town's most successful business owners and entrepreneurs. Their care for the wider community must not be understated either. The Bangladeshi Support Centre in Ipswich supports not only vulnerable people from the Bangladeshi community, but people from over 50 different nationalities across the town.

I have been lucky during my time as an MP to have many positive interactions with these communities, and of course that has been aided by the common language shared throughout the Commonwealth—I am of course referring to the language of cricket. Some Members might have spotted that I am wearing the tie of the all-party parliamentary group on cricket. We need to have a big screen in Ipswich town centre for the next cricket world cup, and indeed the next time there is an England-Bangladesh game or an England-India game. We need to embrace the festival of cricket to a far greater extent than we have in the past.

**Jim Shannon:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand how important it is to support Ipswich Town football club as well. My eldest son supports Ipswich Town, who are well known as the Tractor Boys. They are not doing so well this season, but they are still a team worth supporting.

**Tom Hunt:** Absolutely. Things are not great at the moment for Ipswich Town—we are 10th in the third division and things look pretty bleak. Only four weeks ago we beat Lincoln 1-0 and we were top of the table, so how quickly things can change—maybe I was a bad omen. Cricket unites Commonwealth citizens across the continents and is truly a great symbol of what we share, as last year's world cup demonstrated.

**Richard Graham:** One of the things that I hope the Minister will celebrate when he winds up this evening is the role of the Commonwealth within the United Kingdom today. As my hon. Friend has mentioned, we all have Commonwealth citizens serving in our hospitals and often in our armed forces, as has been mentioned. In many areas of life the children of the Commonwealth are playing such an important role, and we need to celebrate that this evening.

**Tom Hunt:** I could not agree more. They truly are the best of us, and that needs to be recognised to an even greater extent.

One point on which I agree with the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) is the issue of Commonwealth citizens serving in our armed forces. Currently, when Commonwealth personnel have served for at least four years and wish to continue to live in this country, they face fees of nearly £2,400 per person for indefinite leave to remain. That means that a family of four faces a cost of over £9,500. The House does not need to be reminded of the enormous sacrifices made for us by those countries now in the Commonwealth during the great conflicts of the 20th Century. At least a quarter of those who laid down their lives for Britain's cause in the first world war were not British. Commonwealth citizens still fill the shortages in our ranks today.

Those who sacrifice so much for our country, and who have travelled far from their families to do so, should not face such exorbitant fees to stay in the country they have served. I urge the Government to waive the fees for brave Commonwealth troops serving in the British military, as they did in 2018 when they waived immigration fees for Afghan interpreters who had aided British forces in Afghanistan. If anybody should not be considered a foreigner in our country, it is them.

This country's decision to leave the European Union was not inward-looking or isolationist, but an opportunity to pursue a global future as an independent, sovereign country. It is an opportunity because leaving the European Union by itself is just the beginning of that effort. As we take our first steps as an independent country, reaching out to our partners in the Commonwealth should be one of our highest priorities. The theme for this year's Commonwealth Day is "Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming". It is a message that we must embrace wholeheartedly. Whether it is trade, immigration, integration or co-operation, so many of the right preconditions already exist to create more Commonwealth success stories. People strongly believe in the Commonwealth links we share, in Ipswich and across the country. Let us act on these human relations and turn them into a reality for this country's new relationship with the Commonwealth.

9.14 pm

**Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con):** I welcome my friend and mentor the Minister to his place, and I welcome his experience and passion. Many have mentioned that this is not his first time at the Dispatch Box in a similar role, and I know he will serve us and our Commonwealth friends diligently.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), who does great service to the Commonwealth. If he ever needs an apprentice, he can find one here ready to be put to work.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland), who spoke so movingly—I am sure his words touched many of us. And I welcome the hon. Member for Leicester East (Claudia Webbe), my constituency neighbour. She was heartfelt in her words, and I am sure she will be heartfelt many more times in the Chamber.

There is a hierarchy of countries in this world. There are the big players—we all know who they are—and the smaller states that are too often left adrift, but the Commonwealth is not like that. There are few organisations in the world in which the Prime Minister of Antigua and the Prime Minister of Australia can sit side by side not just as friends but as equals. It is because of that equality that the Commonwealth has, in the words of perhaps its greatest citizen, Nelson Mandela, made the world safe for diversity.

The Commonwealth encompasses the 12th-richest country in the world and the fourth poorest. It includes the world's largest democracy by population, India, and the world's largest by area, Canada, which is also the only other country in the world to call its lower House the House of Commons. The Commonwealth Members in this Chamber will also be keen to note that our Dispatch Boxes were a gift from our faraway friends, the Kiwis, which I am sure will hearten my hon. Friends



[*Alicia Kearns*]

the Members for Guildford (Angela Richardson) and for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford). When the Commonwealth speaks, the world speaks.

The equality at the heart of the Commonwealth is not a recent innovation but one moulded at its founding in 1867, which was perhaps the first time in history when power was relinquished without a shot being fired. Power was given to the people of Canada in that founding act of 1867, which was followed by Australia's independence in 1901, New Zealand's in 1907 and all the way to Saint Kitts and Nevis's in 1983. That demonstrates a model of peaceful transition based on mutual respect and democratic values, a model of which we can be justly and enormously proud.

However, not all the transitions have been so peaceful, nor has the Commonwealth's history always been quite so glorious and, if I may, I will take a moment to mention when the United Kingdom itself did not live up to the principles so eloquently expressed in the Commonwealth's founding documents. Importantly, it was our Commonwealth allies who answered the call as we dragged our feet.

I speak, of course, of our response to apartheid. Although it should still fill us with shame that the United Kingdom was too slow to respond to the depravity and human horror of apartheid, we should be filled with pride that it was our brothers and sisters in the Commonwealth who pulled us out and made us speak truth. Most notably, it was Conservative Prime Ministers, Malcolm Fraser of Australia and Brian Mulroney of Canada, who led the Commonwealth's opposition to that hateful regime, and I am proud that the United Kingdom has learned from that moment.

The Commonwealth is an equal body when it speaks, and it speaks with uncommon moral force. Seeking unanimity, the United Kingdom led the charge to kick out Zimbabwe in 2003 and to suspend Pakistan after the overthrow of the Government in 1999, to suspend Fiji in 2009, and to suspend Nigeria in 1995 until a civilian President was elected in 1999.

Together with our leadership, the Commonwealth has become one of the great beacons of human rights and a champion of the values that unite us and all the democratic peoples of the world, but we must show leadership again today. LGBTQ+ rights, on which we must fight within the Commonwealth, have been raised multiple times today. We must ensure that we stand strong on domestic abuse and women's rights, as well as on climate change—my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) rightly mentioned our work on oceans—on disability, as raised by the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), and on terrorism. We must stand strong against the shared threat we face.

What is more, the Commonwealth's ties do not end every other year at the Heads of Government meeting. Together we find common cause at the WTO, in the UN, in the UNHRC and in the Five Eyes network. In every major forum in which the United Kingdom plays a part, our Commonwealth friends are there with us ready to make the case for markets, for democracy, for serving together and for the universal values that make the Commonwealth a great inheritor of perhaps the world's greatest traditions.

It is also the Commonwealth through which we can tackle shared concerns. The Commonwealth provides a platform to tackle the current divisive rhetoric and actions between India and Pakistan, and it can create dialogue to end division. Here in the UK, as many Members have mentioned, including my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt), we must tackle our not having given the Commonwealth soldiers who served alongside us the right they deserve to remain in this country, and they should not face exorbitant fees to do so.

Now, as we seek to rebalance our engagement with the wider world—I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich for his passionate statement of support for our independence as we leave the EU—the Commonwealth presents us with glorious opportunities. It represents an economy of £10 trillion, which we must tap into if we are to seize the global opportunities afforded to us by leaving the EU. When we negotiate with other Commonwealth members, we will negotiate not only as business partners but as friends. In the sometimes cut-throat world of international trade, that cannot be underestimated. At the same time, we can lead with the island nations on climate change. Many of the most forceful global advocates exist in places such as St Kitts and Bangladesh. The Commonwealth may not be the only place where we can balance the development needs of the global south while recognising the imperative of decarbonisation, but it is perhaps the only place where we can be sure that all voices will be respected.

It is vital that we have a meaningful diplomatic strategy for the Commonwealth, not just a swathe of individual agreements and individual focus, country by country, but an overarching goal and objective, where the Foreign Office works together as one. There may be more effective forums, larger gatherings, more prestigious summits and more exclusive meetings, but in terms of getting the world in a room, with diversity united by shared values, and equality of aim and spirit, the Commonwealth is unparalleled. For our hand in that, we should be justly proud and seize the opportunities it presents. I thank my friends and allies across the Commonwealth for their friendship, and I look forward to our shared future.

9.21 pm

**Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): First, I would like to wish everyone a happy Commonwealth Day. I would also like to thank Members for their meaningful contributions in this debate. We have heard speeches and interventions from some 26 Members. Let me also congratulate the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) and my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Claudia Webbe) on making two excellent and passionate maiden speeches.

The Commonwealth is one of the oldest and most diverse political associations. It was established more than 70 years ago and includes 54 member states. Some 2.5 billion people around the world are members, from the Caribbean to the Americas, from Europe out to Asia, Australasia and Africa. But what does it all mean for an incredible collection of people? The core values and principles of the Commonwealth, as outlined in its charter, include democracy; human rights; peace and security; tolerance, respect and understanding; protecting the environment; and gender equality. There is no doubt, however, that the Commonwealth faces a lot of challenges,

including human rights abuses, resistance to upholding the rule of law, and persecution of minorities, but it also has a lot of potential and promise, which I will explore.

Given the rise of populist Governments, the need for a strong multilateral organisation is more important than ever. A united Commonwealth that upholds and promotes democratic culture can demonstrate to the world why institutions such as this one are so important. I would like to echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) in saying that the Commonwealth can remain a vital force for good in our world.

In many ways, I am an embodiment of the Commonwealth, having roots in both Pakistan and India, and having grown up in Britain. The UK is hugely indebted to the Commonwealth. The contributions made by Commonwealth communities are colossal and vast. The military contributions made during the second world war will never be forgotten, and their legacy must be remembered. Indeed, my father served in the British Indian Army. In order to keep these stories alive, will the Minister agree that it would be a good idea to include them as part of school curriculums?

Currently, more than 6,000 personnel from Commonwealth countries are serving in the UK armed forces, with more being recruited each year to fill technical and specialist roles. Despite the sacrifice that the many Commonwealth personnel have made, they are faced with fees of £2,389 if they wish to apply to continue to live in the country that they have served for four years. Speaker after speaker today has touched on that point, and I hope that the Minister will convey the message to the Government so that we can have change. The Government must drop the visa fees for Commonwealth personnel and their families.

With the upcoming Heads of Government meeting in June, we have a perfect opportunity to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the Commonwealth. The theme for this year's meeting is "Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming". Five sub-themes have also been identified: governance and the rule of law, IT and innovation, youth, environment and trade.

There is no doubt that the diversity of the Commonwealth is a strength, and our Commonwealth diaspora communities are at the heart of that. As Members have rightly identified, in 2022 the Commonwealth games will be held in Birmingham, a city that is rich in diversity and culture. I remember when Manchester hosted the Commonwealth games in 2002; what a proud moment that was for our city. It brought tremendous opportunity, as I am sure it will do for Birmingham. I look forward to the UK hosting the iconic games once again and celebrating the power of bringing people together and making connections across the UK and the Commonwealth.

Another strength of the Commonwealth is its 1.4 billion young people, who will help to define our future. It is vital that the Commonwealth demonstrates its relevance to the youth by representing their interests and showing commitment to tackling the climate crisis, prioritising girls' education and ensuring LGBT rights.

The Commonwealth, in all its diversity, champions religious freedom, but the ongoing violence in India and the discrimination against religious minorities in many Commonwealth countries reminds us of our shared responsibility to uphold and protect the fundamental

human right to freedom of religion or belief. No one should be persecuted for their faith. The upcoming Heads of Government meeting will provide a useful platform for discussion. It is worth noting that it will take place in Rwanda, where an unprecedented amount of human rights violations have taken place.

**Jim Shannon:** The hon. Gentleman is speaking on the issue of freedom of religious belief; it is really important that all the Commonwealth countries respect freedom of religious belief. It is about respect, tolerance and love for all. That is something that we can all take on board, but all countries need to absorb it and live it out, too.

**Afzal Khan:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments; I am looking forward to his Westminster Hall debate on Wednesday and hope to join him. I hope that the Minister will commit to raising human rights violations in the Commonwealth at this prime opportunity.

A strong and united Commonwealth must be able to tackle the crisis in the light of the current coronavirus outbreak. Will the Minister tell us what assistance the UK will provide to vulnerable countries in the Commonwealth with insecure health systems?

In conclusion, the Commonwealth is a diverse family of nations that, by virtue of historical and cultural ties and shared values, seeks to find solutions and share common goals. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown highlighted, there is a gap between the Commonwealth's emphasis on human rights and the reality on the ground in many member states. We should be focusing on promoting democratic values and developing and amplifying the voices of small states; upholding human rights and LGBT rights; and tackling global challenges such as extremism and climate change. The potential for the Commonwealth is vast, but to ensure that that potential is realised, we have a responsibility to promote the common principles throughout the Commonwealth, along with all our other human rights goals.

9.29 pm

**James Duddridge:** Happy Commonwealth Day to you, Mr Speaker. I know that you have been busy at Westminster Abbey and elsewhere carrying out duties, but I hope that you have had time to celebrate Commonwealth Day as well.

This has been a fantastic debate celebrating the Commonwealth from the perspective of Manchester, of Birmingham earlier in the day, and even of Romford, where, if I have no other plans, I will be going to the market on Saturday to join the festivities. I will just have to check my diary to see whether I am free.

The debate has been wide-ranging. I will try to pick up on a number of consistent themes. LGBT rights were mentioned, with a number of programmes on which we are focusing. I want to focus on this issue, although it is not directly within my list of ministerial responsibilities. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) asked specifically about flags. I stated the position in a previous debate and that position has not changed, but I am more than happy to have a chat to him about that. The Opposition Front Bench speakers mentioned the issue of youth. The Foreign Office was represented at director level, but I am more than happy to meet youth parliamentarians of the Commonwealth myself next time around. That is a commitment.

**Richard Graham:** The Minister will remember that a year ago, he and I sat down together and discussed a project, which is now known as CP4G—the Commonwealth Partnership for Good—between the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and other partners. As he knows, that partnership has been put together. Its focus is on trying to help youth, women, LGBT and those with disabilities into parliamentary democracy. Does he agree that this helps to answer some of the questions asked by the Opposition, and that it is proving successful?

**James Duddridge:** I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. It has been a very successful programme, which drills down into specific countries rather than being about generalities, and gives covering fire to discuss problematic issues in those countries under the guise of discussing a whole number of matters.

A number of colleagues and the Labour Front Benchers mentioned the issue of Commonwealth veterans. I have listened very carefully to those comments, and I will be seeking a discussion with the Minister for Defence People and Veterans, who is now separate from the Ministry of Defence and from the Home Office. I was asked to have a meeting with him, and I think that is the right way forward. There is also the issue of the veterans of the second world war. I have not yet received parliamentary questions on that, although I understand that there have been historical questions. I am more than happy to review those questions and to respond to further such questions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) was introduced incorrectly, I think, as a new Member of Parliament, so competent and lucid was he. However, I will never ever be able to listen to the phrase “blue rosette on a donkey” or “blue rosette on a monkey” without hearing the example from Bracknell of a blue rosette on a dog turd. I do not thank my hon. Friend for that analogy. I think he is a very modest man—we heard later in an intervention of his service in the Falkland Islands—and a very sensible man from the Logistics Corps who praised in advance the logistics of this House, which serve us all incredibly well.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) pointed out that we have served together a number of times in debates on this issue and will continue to do so. I look forward to working with my Scottish colleagues and will be visiting the joint headquarters of the Department for International Development next week in East Kilbride.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) has been an advocate for all things overseas territories and dependencies. I cannot promise him an outcome, but the trajectory of travel is to work closer and closer with the overseas territories and Crown dependencies. He raised a very good point about the flags, and he asked me not to take them down tomorrow. I can confirm that I will not take them down tomorrow, and that I will consult Government protocol to find out why they cannot stay up for longer, so that we can celebrate the Commonwealth over a longer period. I know that he has been passionate about flags, and that he has had a big flag raised at the other end of this building, and I am keen to support the celebrations further.

We had an excellent speech from the hon. Member for Leicester East (Claudia Webbe). I am not sure what it says about her parents—they spent all that time on Nevis, an island state of 11,000 people, without meeting and then they nipped over to Leicester and suddenly they were together. I am minded to say that there must be something in the water, or perhaps it is the Pukka Pies that she was advocating in her speech. On behalf of the whole House, I would like to wish Keith Vaz a happy retirement from politics and thank him for his service on the Commonwealth parliamentary executive, among his other achievements. I will now also always think of Leicester East as the minorities that make up the majority; that is rather a lovely way of describing an eclectic and interesting constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) explained to me the rivalry between New Zealand and Australia, and I welcome his putting on record that my brother is now an Australian. He also talked of coastal states and small states, and climate change—an issue that we will follow closely as part of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting and COP26.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) thanked me for being the comeback kid and for putting the C back into the Commonwealth. I did wonder what he was talking about, and then I realised that the C stood for Commonwealth. I thank him for his experience and passion, and for setting up his all-party group.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt) talked eloquently of historic bonds and mentioned the trade benefits from the Commonwealth post EU. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) talked about us coming together as equals in a tour de force of speech. I thought she was going to break the convention of not interrupting a maiden speech; she was writhing in her seat in anger at references by the hon. Member for Leicester East to Pukka Pies, because she maintains that Melton Mowbray pork pies that are the best pies in the whole Commonwealth.

This has been an excellent debate, and I hope it is an annual one. With that, I do not intend to detain the House further.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the Commonwealth in 2020.

## Business without Debate

### COMMITTEES

**Mr Speaker:** With the leave of the House, we will take motions 6 to 9 together.

*Ordered,*

#### BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

That John Howell be discharged from the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee and Paul Howell be added.

#### EUROPEAN SCRUTINY

That Margaret Ferrier be a member of the European Scrutiny Committee.



## FINANCE

That Nigel Mills and Sir Robert Syms be discharged from the Finance Committee and Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Dame Eleanor Laing and Tommy Sheppard be added.

## PROCEDURE

That Dr Kieran Mullan be discharged from the Procedure Committee and Anthony Mangnall be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

**JOINT COMMITTEE ON CONSOLIDATION,  
&C., BILLS**

*Ordered,*

That Duncan Baker, Simon Baynes, Elliot Colburn, Chris Elmore, Imran Hussein, Simon Jupp, Conor McGinn, Grahame Morris, Jane Stevenson, Julian Sturdy and Suzanne Webb be members of the Joint Committee on Consolidation, &c., Bills.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

**Flood Prevention: Rainwater Attenuation  
and Reservoirs**

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Eddie Hughes.*)

9.37 pm

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I rise to speak this evening on the topic of improving rainwater attenuation and storage, and preventing and mitigating flooding. For millennia, we have lived in this country in a temperate climate—a green and pleasant land, according to the immortal words of William Blake. We have enjoyed rain, but what we have seen in recent years and decades is freak weather, increasing rainfall and intense rainfall events. This February was the wettest month on record.

In my constituency, Welches Meadow—a field adjacent to the River Leam—has been under water for many weeks now. When I travel here by train, I pass through Warwickshire and Oxfordshire, and I see so many fields still inundated with water. Across the country, we have seen extraordinary weather events over many months, most recently with Storm Ciara and Storm Dennis, which have brought about so much devastation and damage. There have been winds of up to 80 or 90 mph, and my feelings and thoughts go out to all the communities that have been so affected: the Calder valley, Cumbria, Yorkshire, Derbyshire, the south-west, the south-east, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales—right across the country. We saw the extreme impact of Storm Dennis on south Wales just a few days ago. Back in November, there was flooding across Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Derbyshire. We were told that this was a one-in-60-years event, according to the experts. But as we saw in Doncaster with 3 inches of rain falling in 24 hours, these events are happening so much more frequently than they were a few decades ago. I think back to 2004 and the terrible flooding in Boscastle—that tragedy when the rivers overflowed and the little town was almost washed away.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising this important issue. Does he agree that the recent floods have highlighted the fact that there must be a designated strategy—we look to the Minister for that—to deal with overflow? Does he agree that the harvesting of rainwater via attenuation ponds on farmland should be further investigated and initiatives introduced to make this attractive to farmers and landowners as a way forward in solving some of the flooding issues?

**Matt Western:** The hon. Gentleman makes a terrific point, as always, and I welcome his contribution, as ever. I will come on to those points a little bit later.

In Warwick and Leamington, we have had, over the years, serious flooding events ourselves. Back in 1998 and 2007, we suffered too, so I have compassion—as do, I am sure, my communities—for those who have been affected in recent weeks and months. In the watershed that we sit in of the Leam—the Avon river that feeds into the Severn—we are quite a way upstream and so relatively less affected than places such as Tewkesbury and elsewhere further down in the Severn valley.

Key to all this is managing flooding and the attenuation of the rainwaters, slowing the flow so that rivers, drains and other natural drainage can manage. Most of the

[Matt Western]

time, natural systems can cope well, but when we see these extreme peaks, we need better management. So the priority must be for natural solutions, but they are not enough. Evidently, as we have seen, there needs to be urgent intervention and investment, but also, I would argue, a change to the planning and building regulations and how we use reservoirs.

Let me first deal with planning. Planning is of course critical—what is built where, bearing in mind the topography and the relationship with the watershed. I think back to the national planning policy framework, where too much power was given to developers to use land as the location for housing built at the wrong densities for communities in, all too often, the wrong places. I look to the south of Warwick and Leamington, where I am sure that the new residents who have moved in would have preferred to live in much higher densities with greater services, greater transport infrastructure and so on. Building over so much farmland has reduced the availability of land to absorb these high-rainfall events. Homeowners across the country have had their homes built on floodplains in areas where they can no longer get insurance, or if they can get insurance, the cost is prohibitively high and they are suffering because they cannot afford it. They are almost excluded from having insurance because of its cost.

Let me turn to building regulations. I think back to the Climate Change Act 2008, when we were promised zero-carbon homes by 2016. That was followed by the tragic Budget from the incoming coalition Government that tore up all that vision—that ideal—to see those great new Passivhaus homes built that recognised the importance of the environment in the equation. I am afraid that the Cameron Government of that time presided over the greatest act of environmental vandalism. Millions of homes have been built since, and their owners have missed out on what could have been fabulous zero-carbon or very-low-carbon homes. There was also the failure to recognise the importance of water in our environment. In his April 2011 speech, David Cameron said: “I want to rip up red tape. I want to get rid of that green cack”—I think that was the word. He got rid of the code for sustainable homes and replaced it with building regulations that did not go far enough. He wanted to save his friends the builders more money. He stated that, by changing the regulations, the builders would save £500 a home, giving them £60 million more a year in revenues. We have only to look at companies such as Persimmon, which is the most high-profile example, and the sort of profit it has made since to realise that that was a short-term and disastrous policy.

The building regulations could have included more sustainable water attenuation. Things such as sustainable urban drainage systems have been introduced, but I believe that greywater harvesting could have been the critical difference. Systems for the use of rainwater collected at source and stored are as cheap as chips, and for new build homes, they could have made a massive difference. Built at scale across new communities, they would have provided a huge rainwater storage capacity upstream, controlling the release of water into drains. When I renovated my home 10 years ago, I managed to put in a 1,500-litre capacity. For the 20,000 homes being built around Warwick and Leamington, that would have equated to 25,000 tonnes of rainwater being captured.

When researching this subject, I looked at fabulous periodicals such as *Water*. An article in July 2019 says:

“Different studies showed that, in urban catchments, the extensive installation of rainwater harvesting tanks could be an efficient support for reducing frequency and peak of stormwater flood.”

It cites some research that was done in the UK, while researchers in China found that

“the system has a good performance in mitigating urban waterlogging problems,”

reducing flood volume of 14%, 30% and 58% in the cases of maximum daily rainfall, annual average maximum daily rainfall and critical rainfall respectively.

Those are impressive figures, but as technology moves on, we see the introduction of smart rainwater harvesting systems. Another paper by academics was produced in *Water* in November last year. The study concluded that:

“smart rain watertanks operated as a system in real-time during a storm event... can significantly reduce the downstream peak runoff flow rate for a wide range of storm durations”—

30 minutes to 24 hours—and frequencies of between 50% and 1% annual exceedance probability. It went on to say:

“this is the first study to demonstrate that household-scale rainwater tanks could potentially provide peak flow attenuation performance across a wide range of storm event durations for rare events”—

in other words, a 10% to 1% annual exceedance probability. I cite that research to show that these systems are out there; we just have to adopt them as policy. That is what needs to be done, because after energy, water is a massive issue for us.

Per person, we use 142 litres of water per day, and a household uses 350 litres. If we were to introduce rainwater harvesting tanks, we would be able to assist in the demand and consumption within a property, not just the storage, which would help to mitigate flooding. We use 840 billion litres of water a year just for showers, 740 billion litres for flushing our toilets and a further 360 billion for washing machines and dishwashers. Some 25% of total water consumption is used for showers, and 22% just goes straight down the toilet. I see this as a huge opportunity to reduce bills and aid flood management. If we combine the greywater supply for toilets, washing machines and use in the garden, it would account for a third of the total and could save each household up to £150.

The third change I propose is in regard to reservoirs and detention ponds. I urge the Government to provide the Environment Agency with greater powers, to enable it to work more closely with the water utility companies, as proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) in her Reservoirs (Flood Risk) Bill. Such an approach would allow the water companies to run at lower levels in reservoirs when high rainfall is anticipated, and the trials undertaken by Yorkshire Water at six reservoirs upstream in the Calder valley have shown that this could greatly mitigate flood events if run at levels below 100%. It has trialled it at 90%, and now it is going to trial it at 85%. As I understand it, similar trials and conversations have been happening at Thirlmere reservoir in Cumbria, and at the reservoirs in the upper Don valley and at Watergrove reservoir in Rochdale.

A change in the legislation is needed. As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) so beautifully put it, we have huge opportunities, particularly with farmland. I speak to farmers in my local area, and I

spoke to those at Canalside—a community supported agriculture project just outside my constituency, with which I used to have a considerable involvement—and they cannot sow or put in onions for the next harvest because the ground is so waterlogged. That is what we are seeing for farmers all over the UK.

To summarise: what we have witnessed—not in recent weeks or months, but actually years—is that we are having more frequent, more intense and more severe weather events than we were having 30 years ago. I lived in London 25 years ago and I now of course live here again, and when I compare and contrast the sort of weather we are having now, I see that the climate has really changed in that 25-year period. It is really quite remarkable.

My thoughts are with all the communities that have been affected by these terrible floods most recently, but we have the wit and the knowledge to bring about change. If we change the planning legislation, do not build on the floodplain, change the building regulations and reintroduce the code for sustainable homes, plus include the fitting of greywater or rainwater harvesting systems, it would be as cheap as chips, as I say, for any new build property. That is what we can do: we can build storage upstream in these communities for them to use the water, or for it to be released when it is the right time to do so, and ease the pressure on the precious infrastructure that we have in our drainage system. At the same time, we could turbo-boost the sustainable urban drainage schemes, and introduce more small reservoirs, detention ponds, swales and infiltration basins.

I also urge the Government to revisit the scheme for an Abingdon reservoir, and likewise in Maidenhead and elsewhere across the country. To my mind, if we are prepared to spend £1 billion a year on flood defence measures, surely a more sensible thought is to spend money further upstream, think about how we can detain the water, think about attenuation systems—I evidenced that through the two academic papers detailing what can be achieved—and, finally, give the Environment Agency greater powers over reservoir management, as proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax, which I believe would be a very welcome amendment to the Environment Bill.

9.52 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow):** Mr Speaker, it is a pleasure, as ever, to have you in the Chair for these late-night debates.

First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) on securing this important debate. As he pointed out, it is very timely, given the unprecedented rainfall we have had and the frequent consequent flooding incidents. It is understandable that attention is now being given to how the impacts might be lessened, including the role that reservoirs might play in our water system. He mentioned that at the end, and I will refer to reservoirs quite significantly in my response.

First, I want to touch on the earlier points raised, which are specifically to do with housing. A great many of the issues raised are linked to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, because planning obviously comes under that Department. However, the hon. Gentleman made some really interesting points, particularly about sustainable urban drainage. When I

was a Back Bencher—I would say a lowly Back Bencher, Mr Speaker—it was actually one of my hot topics, and something I particularly spoke about and was encouraging.

Sustainable drainage schemes are now being given a great deal more attention, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows. In the hierarchy of the drainage system, developers are required to explore the inclusion of sustainable drainage schemes in all new developments, so we are definitely moving in that direction. The Environment Agency is working on schemes up and down the country, including some with large-scale SuDS. I visited one in Manchester recently; a huge area had been created that could flood, if necessary, to protect the nearby flats in the event of flooding. It has also turned into a lovely wildlife area and a great place to walk around. So there are lots of spin-offs and benefits.

I also want to mention rainwater harvesting. Many developments are now including rainwater harvesting—what we call grey water—and I believe we will see a great deal more of that going forward. Again, it is very much an MHCLG agenda in the planning guidance.

The question of building on floodplains was also raised. The Environment Agency comments on all applications for development on floodplains. It gives advice, but it is the local planning authorities that make the decisions about whether the housing should go forward, so it is very much a local decision and up to the local authority to have its own plans about what it thinks is correct or not. The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington raised some good points on that agenda.

**Matt Western:** I totally accept that point, and of course it is an MHCLG responsibility, but if the planning authorities had greater powers—I fear that the power balance has shifted far too far towards the developer—we could be building at far greater densities. That would mean that there was not a requirement to build on floodplains.

**Rebecca Pow:** But it still stands that it is a local planning decision to allow building on floodplains to go ahead, and that is very much an MHCLG agenda.

I want to talk about the reservoir issue that the hon. Gentleman raised. Many people are suggesting that that provides a simple answer to some of our flooding issues and also our water supply issue, but of course they are very complex issues involving a range of stakeholders and they have to be considered in relation to how reservoirs might be managed and operated throughout the year. On that, I must give assurances that flood and coastal erosion risk management is a big Government priority now, with £2.6 billion already devoted to this area in the last spending round up to 2021 and the recent announcement, to be confirmed in this week's Budget, of funding for flood defences of £5.2 billion. That will be helping a further 2,000 new flood and coastal defence schemes and better protect 336,000 properties across the country.

There are of course reservoirs at the moment that are used for flood risk management. The Environment Agency operates more than 200 reservoirs around the country, especially for flood attenuation. That is their purpose in life and the amount of water in them during non-flood conditions is kept deliberately low in order to maximise the storage available during high rainfall and storm events. Many of those reservoirs have been operated



[Rebecca Pow]

this winter, and, in combination with other flood defence measures in the catchment, have provided protection to a great many people.

**Jim Shannon:** Farmers and landowners are not averse to the idea of setting some of their land aside for attenuation ponds. Might the Minister and her Department incentivise that with some sort of grant for land set aside for that purpose? It is not just the farmer who gains, but the other people in the area, particularly householders.

**Rebecca Pow:** The hon. Gentleman will know that in the Agriculture Bill that has just gone through its Committee stage, farmers will be paid for delivering public goods. Flood resilience is included, so consideration will be given to a whole range of projects, which could include farmers holding water on their land to help with flood alleviation.

I return to the issue of reservoirs; water company reservoirs in particular were mentioned. Our water company reservoirs have a very different purpose in respect of drought attenuation—we must not forget that only months ago we were facing potential drought scenarios. Over summer 2018, the country dealt with very dry and warm weather, with water companies experiencing some of the highest demand for water for their customers. We have to pay as much attention to the risks associated with too little water as we do to those associated with too much.

10 pm

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).*

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Eddie Hughes.)*

**Rebecca Pow:** Water supply reservoirs play a significant role in ensuring that our communities, businesses and public services have ready access to water whenever they want and need it. Water companies must operate their reservoirs to meet that need, including making judgments on how much water each reservoir needs to hold at any time.

As we all know, our weather is not predictable: despite what we have experienced over the past month, the rain to refill reservoirs is never guaranteed. That does not mean that potential opportunities to use all our assets—including reservoirs, as I think the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington was suggesting—for multiple benefits should not be explored. I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the work that has been done so far in this area. I am personally keen to explore it further.

The Environment Agency is working with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Ofwat, United Utilities and Yorkshire Water on a project to identify reservoirs that might offer flood management benefits, including exploration into the impact on water supply, safety, legal and environmental requirements. This has included Yorkshire Water's trial of managing the level of the Hebden group of reservoirs above Hebden Bridge at 90%, which did give positive results during the winter of 2017-18. However, the dry summer of 2018 followed and the levels in the reservoir did not recover until the following April in 2019.

The trial builds on work elsewhere, including in Keswick, where Thirlmere reservoir has supported flood mitigation since September 2008 following the development of a partnership agreement between United Utilities, the Environment Agency and Keswick Flood Action Group, which has been very involved. The experience of drought and flood coming so close together underlines that further trials are needed to help to understand the impact of long-term changes to the operation of reservoirs. Any decisions made by water companies to manage water levels to account for flood risk must be based on supporting evidence—I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree with me on that—as well as on the effective mitigation of all the risks, including the risks to water supply and the environment. Yorkshire Water has undertaken to continue its trials.

It is not just the risk of drought that might be considered. If we are to use reservoirs for flood management purposes, it is essential that the water levels are managed so as not to add to the flood risk. Drawing down a reservoir ahead of wet weather may make a contribution to the protection of properties downstream, but it is crucial that when that water is released it is done so in a timely and controlled way. We all recognise that timing is everything. To release water when the river levels are already high and the ground is saturated, as it is right now, could have the opposite effect and increase flood risk further down the catchment.

It is true that water companies are not restricted by either current legislation or Ofwat from managing their water resources to provide a range of benefits, including flood risk management. However, as I have already explained, any decision must carefully take into account how a water company can continue to meet its water supply duties as set out in the Water Industry Act 1991. As the regulator, the Environment Agency will have to consider the ability of water companies to continue to meet that duty when making decisions. It is very important to take such considerations into account. They include the funding implications, such as the possible impacts to water companies' bills in replacing water sources or reducing the security of customers' water supplies.

The Environment Agency will continue to support and work with the water companies and local partners to further explore this issue, recognising that any opportunities are likely to be very site-specific. I very much look forward to hearing what options might be possible, because we clearly have to think of a wider range of options for all these measures, whether it is about water supply, flood mitigation or trying to achieve both.

Be in no doubt that the Government fully recognise the concern and anxiety of communities affected by flooding, as well as those who might be affected later by drought. We understand why, on the face of it, reservoirs may appear to be an obvious solution for some communities. However, the challenges of using water supply reservoirs to manage flood risk are specific and unique and we should not assume that there are simple solutions to this complex area.

We have changing weather patterns and more frequent incidents, whether they are flooding or drought, together with our growing population and its ever-increasing demand for water—and I absolutely take on board the hon. Member's comments about the use of water.

A consultation has been done recently on water consumption and how much we are all using, with a view to each of us individually cutting down our water usage.

**Matt Western** *rose*—

**Rebecca Pow:** I hope that the hon. Member has a brick in his cistern, so that he is using as little water as possible. I have.

**Matt Western:** I do not exactly have a brick in the toilet, I am afraid, but as it happens, I have grey water tanks, which we use. I appreciate the points that the Minister is making. I was staggered when I discovered that consumption figure: 22% of fresh, clean, pure water gets wasted by flushing it down the toilet. It is just ridiculous. Think about the nations around the world that do not have fresh water and here we are wasting 22% of it. Worse than that, 20% of the water supply is lost through leakage. That is staggering, is it not? I appreciate what she was saying earlier and I would very much welcome a meeting with her and my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) to discuss these proposals.

**Rebecca Pow:** We are in agreement on a lot of these things. Down the track, we need to look at the amount of water consumed and indeed, the leakage, which

many water companies now have to look at in their water plans. A great deal of work and focus is rightly going on in these areas. The hon. Member mentioned the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), who has raised issues about the utilisation of reservoirs for flood mitigation and the drought impacts. I hope I have been clear that trials are going on in this area and hopefully some good further opportunities will come out of that. I am very happy to meet the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington to have a conversation about rainwater harvesting, SuDS and all these issues, because they are clearly important to us all—and in agreeing to meet him, I am going to tick a big box with the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard).

This has been a very useful debate, and I thank the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington for raising these issues, helping to inform the House on this much wider subject. I think it has added a great deal by making us all realise that there is a lot involved in this issue, whether it is flooding, drought or water consumption. It behoves us all to deal with the issue effectively and sensibly. Thank you for being in the Chair tonight, Mr Speaker.

*Question put and agreed to.*

10.8 pm

*House adjourned.*





# Westminster Hall

Monday 9 March 2020

[GERAINT DAVIES *in the Chair*]

## Free Childcare

[*Relevant Documents: Ninth Report of the Treasury Committee, Session 2017-19, Childcare, HC 757; and the Government Response, HC 1196*]

4.30 pm

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** Before I call Catherine McKinnell, I simply say that Jessica Taylor, the House of Commons photographer, is in the room and will be taking photographs. I hope people do not mind; everyone is looking very good today.

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 255237 relating to the provision of free childcare.

It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and to lead the first Petitions Committee debate of this new Parliament. Campaigning on issues that are important to us is a vital democratic right, and for hundreds of years petitions have had the power to connect people with Parliament, to raise awareness of important issues and to help bring about real change for people and communities around the country. More than 23 million people have started or signed petitions on the parliamentary site since it launched in 2015, and it has been inspiring to see so many people getting involved and actively engaged with Parliament and democracy. I am proud to have been elected Chair of the Petitions Committee, and I look forward to taking it forward into the new decade, starting with today's debate, which has attracted interest from every part of our country.

The e-petition, which is titled, "Provide 15 hours free childcare to working parents for children over 9 months", was signed by more than 146,000 people, including more than 600 in my own city of Newcastle upon Tyne. It reads:

"After 9 months of maternity leave, most working mums do not receive any maternity pay and need to go back to work. I think all working parents should be entitled to 15 hours free childcare from the time a child is 9 months. It makes more sense to provide this funding from 9 months instead of 2 years.

Many working families struggle week to week due to the cost of childcare. You are required to go back to work after a year of maternity pay however many go back after 9 months due to funds. Once you go back the majority of your wage goes to childcare and in some cases you are better off not working. This should not be the case."

The creator of the e-petition, Harley Cuthbert, was going to be in the Gallery today to watch the debate and may well join us. I thank Harley for starting the petition. She told me that she decided to start the petition because of her own situation.

For anyone to be left feeling that they cannot afford to start a family due to the cost of childcare is truly heartbreaking. We all want to live in a society where families are able to balance work and family life and are

not forced to delay having a family or become dependent on welfare benefits to meet the costs of raising a family. Harley described her situation as being in a middle group of people who earn too much to receive state support, but not enough to be able to afford the cost of childcare. The system should encourage parents to work and contribute to the economy, while also raising a family. The provision of affordable childcare is a key part of that.

Childcare is an issue that interests the British public, and no fewer than 67 petitions in the last Parliament were related to it. They included calls for extra support for parents of multiples, for free childcare to begin earlier, such as at six months or a year, for extra support for parents with disabilities, for special schemes for the families of UK armed forces personnel and for business rates relief for nursery providers.

Ahead of the debate, our Committee reached out to the public online, through Facebook and Mumsnet, to continue the conversation about how childcare issues are impacting on families. The issue affects people in every part of our country and across the income scale, from two-parent families with two good, full-time salaries, to part-time, single-parent families on minimum wage. All said that they struggle to pay for childcare so that they could return to work. I want to share just a few of the contributions to highlight how the issue is affecting working families.

One of the strongest messages from people was that they have to pay to go to work. Jo said:

"With two preschool aged kids I was earning at a loss having to pay for childcare...working and not making money is really bad for a mum's mental health, the guilt for choosing to maintain a career and not being with your kids is one thing but to do it for no current financial gain is a real mind crusher."

Katie, who is due to return to work in June, said:

"When me and my partner were looking at me going back full time and putting my child in nursery full time it didn't make financial sense for me to go back to work. It's unfair for parents to have to choose between going back to work to break even or in some cases actually paying to work (as nursery fees are above the cost of their wage) or staying at home and having no job and no income."

A large number of respondents said that they were better off financially not working or working fewer hours than paying for full-time childcare.

Some families are paying the same amount for childcare as they do for their rent or mortgage. Claire said:

"3 days a week nursery is costing us £1000 forcing me to have to go back full time and rely on family for the other 2 days!"

Victoria said:

"The nurseries in my local area have essentially created a fixed price for childcare. Full time nursery 5 days a week is £1500 a month. That is more than my mortgage!"

We know the cost of childcare is a huge expense for families, and the childcare survey, published by Coram last month, reported that the average cost of 25 hours of childcare a week for a child under two in England is £131.61 a week, or £6,800 a year. That is a significant amount of money for families to budget for. Moreover, we know that the cost of childcare is rising above the rate of inflation. Twenty-five hours of childcare for children under two now costs 5% more than it did a year ago, and 4% more for a child aged two. Those ever-rising costs put huge pressure on family budgets and erode the incentives for parents to go out to work

[Catherine McKinnell]

when they see most of their wages disappearing to cover the cost of childcare. The financial pressures have a knock-on effect on other aspects of family life.

We have heard from parents whose careers have been permanently disadvantaged. Others must rely on family members to help, particularly elderly grandparents. Some people, such as Harley, have delayed having children or having additional children because of childcare costs. Shannon said:

“I had my baby in May and I’ve had to give up working and rely solely on my fiancé’s wage. My weekly wage before was £250 and my childcare bill would be £200 so I’m out of pocket by the time I’ve filled my car to drive to work and drop my little girl off.”

Rachel said:

“Women like me who then have to stay at home to look after children risk falling behind male colleagues at work, increasing the gender pay gap. Men who don’t have caring responsibilities are able to work those extra years and so earn more overall.”

Sandra, a grandmother, said:

“My daughter returned to work recently. Her older daughter was cared for by me until just over a year ago when she was given a nursery place. I now care for her baby almost 9 months old. I’m nearing 66 with no pension. My daughter can’t afford to pay me as she is on minimum wage. I love my grandson but 4 years ago it was easier with his sister and I now struggle with caring for him. I’m exhausted by the time she gets home, a nursery place would be brilliant.”

Another point, particularly given that we have just had International Women’s Day, is the impact on gender equality and career progression for women. A report by the TUC in 2016 found that fathers who work full time get paid a fifth more than men with similar jobs who do not have children. A wage bonus of 21% contrasts with the experience of working mothers, who the report found typically suffer a 15% pay penalty. The TUC has called for more decently paid jobs to be available on a reduced-hours or flexible-work basis to reduce the penalty paid by mothers and to enable more fathers to fit working around their fathering and parenting responsibilities.

Better childcare opportunities could also enable women who have children to continue working more hours a week, reducing the impact on their career. If we are to tackle increasing rates of child poverty and a lack of social mobility, it is critical that we address the issue. In 2017-18, 4.1 million children were living in poverty—30% of all children—which is a shocking statistic. It is expected to reach 5.2 million by 2022. The two biggest costs putting pressure on family budgets are childcare and housing. When childcare costs are accounted for, an extra 130,000 children are pushed into poverty.

We also know that the attainment gap between disadvantaged and more advantaged children is already evident by the time a child reaches school at age five, with the gap between them equivalent to 4.3 months of learning. The gap more than doubles to 9.5 months at the end of primary school, and then more than doubles again to 19.3 months at the end of secondary school. Increasing the availability of good quality affordable childcare enables more parents to get into or return to work or access education or training, while also improving the educational outcomes for their children.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. Does she agree with me that the current system is under huge pressure? In my city of Cambridge are two nurseries: one maintained and one private. One is slashing services and the other is telling parents that services will stop within weeks. Does she agree with me that the current system is not financed properly by the Government?

**Catherine McKinnell:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I will come on to make that very point in more detail.

The issue is not only a problem for individual families; it is critical to our whole economy and productivity levels. Early years education has proven to be a positive benefit to our children, too. The Department for Education’s study of early education and development—SEED—longitudinal study, published in 2018, found that increased hours per week spent in formal early education, such as day nursery, between the ages of two and four resulted in non-verbal development and better socio-emotional outcomes. The Education Committee’s inquiry into tackling disadvantage in early years found that early years education for children below the age of four has a positive impact on the life chances of disadvantaged children. However, it also found that disadvantaged children currently spend significantly less time in pre-school than children from more affluent backgrounds.

Britain has long had a publicly funded education system because successive Governments have recognised that such a fundamental service should be provided by the state and be available to all. Just as we accept the principle that family income should never be a factor in whether children receive a good school education, the same must be said of early education, which is equally as crucial. We often look to Scandinavia for ideas on effective family policy; countries there have long recognised the value of early education and have invested in it extensively.

Finland provides free universal daycare from eight months until the start of formal education at age seven. In Sweden, parents have a universal entitlement to a guaranteed childcare space, and the fees for using it are capped. The system is so accessible that 85% of children under five years attend pre-school. Parents are entitled to 16 months’ parental leave, with the first year paid at 80% of their salary. They also receive a monthly child allowance that can be used to significantly reduce the cost of pre-school. In Denmark, the cost of childcare to parents is capped at 30% of the actual cost for nurseries. Norwegian parents are entitled to a flat-rate child benefit allowance. The result is that Scandinavian countries consistently rank among the best internationally on all the indicators of children’s wellbeing. Rates of child poverty are also among the lowest in the world.

The provision of free part-time childcare places for all three and four-year-olds in England was introduced in the early 2000s. Tony Blair’s Labour Government recognised that the modern welfare state needed to adapt and do more to support parents to raise young families and balance home life with work. The introduction of free childcare, alongside tax credits, was part of a package to give parents—particularly mothers—more choice over returning to work and having more children. I am pleased that the principle of investing in early years support has received cross-party backing. There

have been some positive developments from Governments in recent years. Working parents of three to four-year-olds now receive 30 hours of free childcare, and those of disadvantaged two-year-olds can receive 15 hours on a means-tested basis.

However, although the headline picture is of a Government that continued Labour's investment in early years, beneath the surface services have been squeezed and vital early intervention support has been cut. Across the board, spending on Sure Start and early years services in England has decreased by 39% since 2014-15, and almost £1 billion was slashed from Sure Start spending between 2010 and 2018. Free childcare, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) has pointed out, has been underfunded; additional funding has not been allocated to cover the cost of minimum wage rises for nursery staff. Take-up of the two-year-old offer among children who receive free school meals varies significantly across the country, with analysis showing that in major metropolitan areas they are among the key disadvantaged groups. Access to places and differences in the types of placement on offer varies a lot, too, and can limit take-up in some areas. That is why, in 2018, the Treasury Committee conducted an inquiry, which I was pleased to be part of, into childcare policy and its influence on our economy.

I was really pleased to see the Committee—for the first time chaired by a woman—investigate the economic impact of childcare as a key aspect of our national infrastructure, in recognition of the fact that our economy is driven not only by trains, roads and IT, but by parents' ability to go to work knowing that their children are happy and well cared for in high-quality settings. We therefore looked at the overall package of Government initiatives in this area and their effectiveness. Our cross-party review found that the Treasury had made little effort to calculate the economic impact of the Government's childcare interventions. However, the evidence available suggested that the biggest impact of the Government's childcare schemes may be to make childcare more affordable to those who receive support, rather than bringing parents back into the workplace.

The Committee also found that parents may need to retrain in order to return to work, but the free childcare scheme did not support that. We recommended the removal of age restrictions on childcare support for parents undertaking training or education, which would have the greatest impact on productivity. We also identified design flaws in the current schemes. The requirement in the childcare element of universal credit for parents to pay childcare costs up front before seeking reimbursement is really unhelpful to the lowest-paid parents. Moreover, the fact that the entitlement to 30 hours of free childcare only begins the term after a child turns three means that if a parent is offered a job in January, their entitlement will not begin until the summer term; that can make a critical difference to some parents' livelihoods and decision making. If the current system of support is the starting point, the flaws need to be addressed for free childcare schemes to support people into work effectively.

Another area that has proven to be a challenge is the way in which providers are funded to deliver the schemes, and any uplift in free childcare must be accompanied by the additional funding required to make it viable. Coram's childcare survey found that around a third of local authorities thought that the 30-hour extended entitlement

had caused prices to rise for those aged three to four outside the funded entitlements. Half thought that there had been a negative impact on the financial sustainability of childcare providers. Purnima Tanuku OBE, chief executive of the National Day Nurseries Association, has said:

“High quality early education positively impacts on a child's development and therefore their lifelong education and opportunities—it cannot be done on the cheap...By short-changing childcare providers, the Government is selling families short on their promises. Parents are seeing fees for additional hours and for under threes go up as a result.”

The Treasury Committee report estimated that the average cost per hour of providing childcare is £4.68, but the average rate that the Government passed on to providers for 2017-18 was £4.34. Some providers are left with insufficient funding to cover their costs and therefore have to cut back on the service provided, including by restricting times, reducing child-to-staff ratios and charging for services such as food and activities. In this situation, providers in higher-income areas can mitigate those funding shortfalls much more easily than can providers in deprived areas, who have much more to gain from these schemes. That undermines the potential for early education to reach disadvantaged children, who are in the greatest danger of falling behind.

The Education Committee's inquiry into tackling disadvantage in the early years made similar observations. It found that rather than closing the gap, the Government's 30-hour childcare policy was entrenching inequality by leading to financial pressures on nurseries, providing more advantaged children with more quality childcare and putting stress on the available places for disadvantaged two-year-olds. The Government must pay providers a rate that reflects the full costs; otherwise, the full benefits for those who are eligible will not be realised, particularly in our most disadvantaged communities, and the overall cost of childcare will be pushed up further.

Of course, investing in childcare costs money. Any policy proposals, however effective they would be, are shaped by the available financial resources. The cost of funded childcare places for three and four-year-olds stood at £3.3 billion in 2018-19, which is equivalent to £3,650 per eligible child. Overall, the Government now spend about £6 billion on all funded childcare, despite the limitations and restrictions in the current model. If free childcare were to be expanded to all children from nine months old, as the petition requests, there would clearly be significant cost implications. Labour's manifesto proposals to reform childcare provision and make high-quality early years education available to all, regardless of income, would amount to a £4.5 billion investment. We know the value of investing in early education to tackle entrenched disadvantage and gender inequality, and there would be longer-term cost savings and a productivity boost from targeting this investment at the early years. Although this would involve a significant cost, politics is the language of priorities, and measures that tackle poverty, support families and boost the economy should be at the top of the list.

There is clear cross-party support for improving childcare, as evidenced by commitments in the manifestos of the three main parties at the last election. Labour pledged the extension of paid maternity leave to 12 months; the introduction of 30 hours of free pre-school childcare for all two, three and four-year-olds; and the extension



[*Catherine McKinnell*]

of provision for one-year-olds. The Conservatives pledged a £1 billion fund to help to create more high-quality affordable childcare, including before and after school and during school holidays; and the Liberal Democrat manifesto included a commitment to offer 35 hours of free high-quality childcare to every child aged two to four, and to children aged between nine and 24 months whose parents are in work.

It remains to be seen whether the current Government have the political will to deliver the support that is needed. Childcare is an issue that affects families right across our country, and there is a widespread belief that the Government could be doing much more to support people to work while also raising a family. I thank everyone who signed the petition that led to today's debate, and I thank all members of the public who have been in touch to share their views. I hope that by the conclusion of the debate, we will have represented their views and experiences effectively, and that the Government will reflect on this discussion and have a serious think about what support they can provide, particularly given this week's Budget, which is very timely.

I will finish by asking two questions that I hope the Minister will pledge to consider. First, will she commit to a review of the economic and social impact of various levels of free childcare, so that its effectiveness can be independently verified? Secondly, will she commit to exploring the expansion of free childcare as requested by the petitioners, including the benefits of such a scheme and how it might practically be delivered with sufficient childcare places and funding to make it viable? Today, the Government have the opportunity to give a clear expression of their commitment to supporting families, supporting social mobility and supporting women and families in the workplace by pledging to investigate this issue. On behalf of the petitioners, I urge the Minister to do so.

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** I now have the pleasure of inviting David Simmonds to make his contribution.

4.54 pm

**David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): Thank you, Mr Davies. I crave your indulgence: this is the first time that I have contributed to one of these debates, so please forgive me if I do not follow the protocol exactly. I am sure you will be quick to draw to my attention any failings on my part, as the Minister was when she kindly pointed out that I had sat on the wrong side of the Chamber when I came in.

This is a timely opportunity to discuss these issues. As one of the many parents directly affected by them—I have two nursery-age children—when I heard the list of issues that the Government need to consider, it resonated with me. Having had those discussions about how best to allocate the cost of childcare, what impact the costs would have on two working people, and whose salary and career prospects would be most impacted, those issues feel very personal, and I know they are on the mind of my constituents in Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner. I will reflect back some of the solutions and points that arose in my time in local government, as I was responsible for this issue both in my local authority

of Hillingdon and, to look at the bigger picture, at the Local Government Association, which represents local authorities.

I will start with the cost and its impacts. When the free childcare policy was first implemented, one of the debates that local authorities had with the Department was about the fact that, as is clear from providers' feedback, the funding that comes through this mechanism is unlikely to be sufficient to ensure that childcare is always free to the user. I have spoken to a number of the Ministers who have been responsible for this area over the years, and they have been very candid about this. The fact that the commitment was in a Bill meant that they needed to speak of that childcare as free, but providers recognised that there was scope to charge for elements of childcare, such as nappies, food and trips—elements quite explicitly laid out in the legislation—which those of us paying the monthly bills would assume were part of the overall cost. That made it a slightly different conversation.

It is fantastic that the Government have invested in providing what is, in practice, a massive subsidy for childcare—about a 90% subsidy in most places. However, there will always be an ongoing debate when, although we talk about something being free, families have to pay an additional contribution to secure the hours—although for most parents, the funding covers the cost of the care that, in the Department's analysis, it is intended to cover. My children's nursery and many others, recognising the fact that the free element is term-time only, have spread that time out, so that in practice it becomes a subsidy over the course of the year. That is extremely welcome, given the overall cost of childcare, but clearly it leads to this dilemma whereby people expect it to be free but it is not, although it is heavily subsidised.

It is important to consider this in context. I was the local authority's lead member on this during the previous Labour Government, when the tax-free voucher schemes were being rolled out and accessed through many employers, particularly large ones such as local authorities. The Government have maintained some of that momentum by seeking to make the benefits of those voucher schemes available to a much larger cohort of people through the tax-free childcare programme, which is at the very minimum a significant subsidy of the cost. The roll-out of those programmes has not been without teething troubles—I am one of many parents who experienced frustrations in accessing the tax-free childcare service and making sure that payments due under that scheme were made on time—but they have been of significant benefit to many mums and dads the length and breadth of the country, and reflect the Government's considered policy position, which is to ensure tax-free childcare arrangements are focused on supporting people who are accessing work. I hope that gives the strategic picture on financing.

I turn to the local authority sufficiency duty, what it means in practice and how it affects the market. For a long time, local authorities have played a significant role in the provision of high-quality childcare at a local level, going back to the neighbourhood nurseries initiative in the late 1970s. Currently, that role is expressed via the sufficiency duty. It is important to be clear that the duty involves the planning rather than the provision, although many local authorities, including mine, both provide childcare under the policy and work with local providers to ensure that sufficient places are available.

A number of challenges arise from that, especially for children who have special educational needs and disabilities. As I know from personal experience, it is often only through the local authority that children with significant medical conditions can access nurseries, because it has sufficient resources in the background to provide the training, and the experienced staff who know how to deal with complex medical conditions in a way that a private profit-making provider may struggle to within the funding envelope.

The Department's finance guidance clearly expresses the expectation that there be a minimum pass-through rate of funding of 95% for local authorities. In many cases, local authorities passport a significantly higher rate of funding; in Kent County Council, the rate is 99%. In a number of local authorities, 100% of the funding from the Department is expressed in the funding rate paid per hour to providers.

There is a challenge around that. It would be helpful for the Minister to consider in the round, although not necessarily straightaway, the role of schools forums in the distribution of funding. The early years block is one of the three main components of the ring-fenced dedicated schools grant. The local authority is not permitted to deduct resources from the grant, although schools forums have some discretion in how the 5% for overheads may be used. In most cases, because of the capacity and planning issue, it is used to ensure that free training in paediatric first aid and resuscitation is available to local nursery providers. It may also be used for up-front grants for nursery providers who are seeking to expand, and who need money ahead of time to recruit staff, so that they have enough people, under the child-staff ratios, to take extra children into that setting.

As any local authority will say, schools forums tend to be dominated by the voices of large secondary schools. For the most part, the early years sector is fragmented and made up of many small private providers, so it is hard for it to bring the leverage to the discussions that secondary headteachers can bring, who are supported by large unions and research organisations. In practice, therefore, many debates at schools forums focus on how to distribute the secondary school money, with only a passing glance at what happens in early years. The view among secondary heads is often that an early years underspend is good, because if that persists, it justifies the redistribution of money into secondary school budgets.

**Katherine Fletcher** (South Ribble) (Con): I spent some time with the Children's Commissioner's early years board in the last couple of weeks. The importance of making a great start and having a cohesive response, from a nursery or somewhere else, was heavily emphasised. I ask the Minister to understand the number of families with children in the gap between nine months and two years, and how many are directly affected before the Government funding kicks in, and to examine the opportunity to provide targeted support in that area to troubled families through family hubs or children's groups.

**David Simmonds**: My hon. Friend makes a good point, which I will touch on in my concluding remarks. Too often, that issue has been absent from schools forums' deliberations about the distribution of funding. We hear repeatedly from primary and secondary heads

that they would like more to be invested in the early years, but when it comes to the practical decision-making that would ensure that money got to the sharp end to deliver the benefits that she touched on, the drive is often absent.

It is important that the Department's guidance and messages to schools forums appropriately consider the value of early years education. Money spent there has the biggest impact on a child's life prospects, and the arguments about disadvantage have been well rehearsed, so I will not cover that. In the language of priorities, childcare can be expressed as an issue about enabling people to access work—as purely economic: “money in, productivity out”—or, which is more complex, as something through which we seek to measure the impacts that specific early interventions have on a child's life.

Anecdotally and from research, we know that access to high-quality early years education is hugely beneficial over a child's life, more so than money spent on young people of sixth-form age. It is harder to identify, however, which specific interventions yield the most value. From my experience as a trustee of the Early Intervention Foundation, which I have been at since its inception, although I have now stepped down, I know that a challenge of the Sure Start programme was that money was spent on many things that were popular and well-received by parents, but there was a real lack of evidence that they effectively tackled the issues in the communities for which the money was provided. As a result, there has been a growing interest in identifying through research, by using the gold standard of a randomised control trial, which interventions should be chosen by an individual centre or by a local authority when it is planning that provision in a local area. As we begin to look at the development of family hubs, to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) referred, we need to identify the things that not simply were popular and well regarded in the past, but will actually change outcomes for children in the medium to long term.

The work of the Early Intervention Foundation and the other What Works centres founded by the Department to look at each of the different life stages gives us the opportunity to make much better decisions than in the past about how the Government deploy those resources. As a Conservative, I am interested in the efficiency of public money, but having been there from the inception of Sure Start, through its implementation and the days when it was extremely well funded, back to now, when we are looking at winding back some of that activity, I would like there to be a focus across the activity of the Department and the Government on demonstrating what leads to an improvement in outcomes.

I hope that gives a flavour of what I learned in the world of local government. The Minister is listening attentively, and I know from discussions with the Department that it is an area of great interest for a variety of reasons, so I look forward to her response.

5.8 pm

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), the Chair of the Petitions Committee, on brilliantly

[Emma Hardy]

articulating the problems that families face in deciding when to start a family; the costs involved, including the 5% increase in childcare costs in one year, which is concerning and incredibly shocking; and the impact on women and the gender pay gap. I look forward to the Committee's future debates and its work under her brilliant chairmanship.

I welcome the comments of the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) and agree that those additional costs are not often initially considered when discussing free childcare. I particularly note his concern about the adequate provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities, which is an issue up and down the country. As someone who has worked in children's nurseries, I congratulate him on his two youngsters being at nursery. I have first-hand experience of how delightful, curious and playful they are at that age, and I am sure that he is kept busy when he is at home in his constituency.

I also thank the nearly 150,000 people who signed the petition and, by doing so, brought this important debate to Parliament. How best to provide for children in the first two years of life and to support their parents to work is an issue that we should debate far more often and take far more seriously, if we are to tackle inequality in our society. It is a shame that today's debate unfortunately clashed with the urgent question on coronavirus; I am sure many more Members would be present if that was not the case.

Sir Michael Marmot described the early years of a child's life as the time when inequalities have the greatest impact on their life chances, and when interventions to disrupt those inequalities make the biggest difference. All the evidence shows that the foundations for a child's future prospects are laid in the critical 1,000 days between conception and the age of two. A report last year by the Health Committee argued that:

"Investing in the early years is the best investment any government can make".

As my hon. Friend said, the poorest children in this country are already 11 months behind when they start school. As a former infant teacher, it was something I saw at first hand.

Over 4 million children live in poverty—an increase on 10 years ago. Sir Michael's report on health inequalities, published this month, showed that we have gone backwards in key measures of early development as a result of policy choices in the past decade. It is not just young children who have been let down by this failure; entire families are struggling to cope with the lack of support available for the early years. According to the OECD, we have the second most expensive childcare system in the world. Exorbitant childcare costs force parents who want to spend more time with their children to work long hours away from home, and they force mothers who want to work to have to stay at home.

In 2018, there were 870,000 mothers who wanted to work but could not for financial reasons. Research conducted last week by Pregnant Then Screwed, which is an inspiring organisation that campaigns for mothers who are unfairly treated, found that just over a third of those who return to work say their earnings are either completely used on childcare, or do not cover the cost

of it. Previous research by Pregnant Then Screwed found that 62% of parents work fewer hours as a result of high childcare costs. Report after report has shown that by increasing female employment and ending the penalties on women for returning to work, we could boost GDP by billions of pounds. However, economic benefit is not the main reason we should do this; the overwhelming evidence should give us pause for thought about why it is not happening already.

On providing support for families in the first two years of a child's life, we are clearly getting things badly wrong. It is our job to debate the solutions and put the situation right, and we already know some of the solutions. Improving education, health and family support services for all young children and their families, and bringing them under one roof, dramatically improves the outcomes for children and takes pressure off struggling parents. That is exactly what the last Labour Government did with Sure Start. By 2009, there were over 3,500 Sure Start children's centres providing support to families, which transformed lives. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, it saved the NHS millions of pounds. Since then, we have lost over 1,000 children's centres, and spending on such services has fallen by over 60%.

There is also the issue of maternity pay. At the moment, mothers are allowed to take only a year off work after having a child, and they only receive statutory pay for the first nine months. I was proud to stand at the last general election on a manifesto that promised to extend maternity pay for a full year and to double paternity leave. From many of the comments shared on social media ahead of the debate, I know that the low level of maternity pay can cause huge problems. Employers should see the statutory maternity pay as a starting point rather than the maximum amount, and we need to consider encouraging employers to view it in that way.

Flexible working is also crucial for supporting families with young children. There are excellent companies and organisations such as Transport for London, which is leading the way on flexible working, but the share of people working flexibly increased by just 4% from 2005 to 2017, and we still have a long way to go. A right to flexible working in large companies would give thousands of mothers who want to work the opportunity to do so, and we should legislate for that as soon as possible.

However, early years funding is the key to the challenges we face, for two reasons. First, the amount of money that childcare providers receive from the Government has a direct impact on how much childcare they can offer, and at what cost. The annual survey by Coram Family and Childcare, published earlier this month, showed that average childcare costs for children under two surged twice as fast as inflation this year. It also found a postcode lottery in the quality and availability of childcare, with just over half of local authorities having enough places.

We know that childcare costs are particularly high in London and the south-east, but they are also very high in the place where I live—up in the north, in Hull. We can see that from the number of people who signed the petition right across the UK. In fact, nearly 500 people in my constituency signed it. The crisis of childcare costs affects the whole country, which is why it is important to give parents access to affordable, subsidised



childcare rates outside their free childcare entitlement, and to end the needless complexities and fragmentation of the current system by funding providers directly.

The second reason why early years funding is so important is its impact on the workforce. The Marmot review argued that a highly educated, well-paid childcare workforce is essential in order to tackle health education inequality. Under this Government, however, early years staff suffered a real-terms pay cut of nearly 5% between 2013 and 2018, and nearly half of childcare workers currently claim universal credit.

We know that low pay is driving childcare workers out of the sector, and research published last week by Ceeda showed that staff shortages in nurseries are forcing them to offer fewer childcare places, depriving children of education and making it harder for parents to work. That particularly affects younger children, who require more restrictive adult-to-child ratios in childcare settings, which is why we are committed to tackling the early years recruitment crisis, with national pay scales, better career progression and a minimum wage of at least £10 an hour. If we accept that caring for young children is important, we should accept that people need to be paid properly to do the job. The UK spends just 0.1% of GDP on early childhood education and care, compared with the OECD average of 0.7%. We have all seen the consequences of that appalling choice in our constituencies, and it is time the Government started to invest in the early years.

I turn now to the specific policy suggested by the petition: giving 15 hours of free childcare to working parents with children aged between nine months and two years. Labour's manifesto pledge was to extend childcare provision for one-year-olds, in addition to offering 30 free hours of childcare for two, three and four-year-olds. We should continue to debate how we can better support parents of one-year-olds. As neither the UK, Scottish nor Welsh Governments are extending free childcare entitlement to under-twos, the debate should be relevant not only to English MPs; it should be about debating as a United Kingdom how we can support such children.

We need to look at childcare provision holistically. The Conservatives have shown that better outcomes for children and parents cannot be achieved just by expanding free childcare entitlements, especially if they are not funded properly. Almost all childcare providers in England are experiencing financial difficulties as a result of the Conservatives providing 30 free hours at a time when early years has been so badly underfunded by the Government. In fact, the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner highlighted some of the additional costs that parents have to meet from their own pockets.

Many childcare providers choose not to offer the full free entitlements because of the financial hit in doing so. We on the Labour Front Bench support the expansion of free childcare entitlements, but it has to go hand in hand with sufficient funding. The all-party parliamentary group for childcare and early education found a £63 million shortfall in the funding given to childcare providers. As a result of the shortfall, many have closed and many more face closure. Research has shown that providers in deprived areas are twice as likely to close as those in affluent areas. Indeed, a report from the Education Committee—I was a member when we wrote it—found that the Government's approach to free childcare was "entrenching inequality rather than closing the gap".

That is from a cross-party Committee with a Conservative Chair. This is not about party politics, but about supporting young children. Whatever approach we take, we must avoid such outcomes at all costs.

We must address important questions about childcare provision for under-twos, and I want to ask the Minister a few questions. First, ahead of the Budget on Wednesday, what representations has she made to the Chancellor about increasing early years funding? Secondly, what steps is she taking to tackle the unaffordability of childcare, particularly for parents with children under two, and to address the variation in availability and quality? Thirdly, how does the Minister plan to tackle the recruitment crisis in the early years workforce and improve staff qualifications so that we can provide more and better quality childcare?

We must all do more to give our children the best start in life and to support mothers who want to go back to work. I hope that we can all work together to find solutions to the important question raised by the petition.

5.20 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Vicky Ford):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for opening this important debate, and I congratulate her on her new role as Chair of the Petitions Committee. I also congratulate Harley Cuthbert on starting the petition, which has sparked so much interest. In my remarks, I will address the issues that hon. Members have raised.

The debate is most timely and allows me the opportunity to set out clearly the Government's position on childcare and our commitment to helping working families with accessible, affordable, high-quality childcare. As the new Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for children and families, I thank all who work in the early years sector and who dedicate their time, effort and skills to providing high-quality early years education and childcare. They all do an excellent job in helping our youngest children to learn and grow. That is essential to those children's development and to ensuring that they are ready for school.

A child's early years are a crucial time for their development. We are already doing more than any previous Government to ensure that as many families as possible can access high-quality and affordable childcare. The good news is that that work has made a difference not only for families but, crucially, for children. The latest early years foundation stage profile results show that the proportion of all children achieving a good level of development is improving year on year, with 72%—nearly three out of every four children—achieving a good level of development in 2019, compared with 52%, or one in two, in 2013. There has been some discussion of the attainment gap. Since 2013, the attainment gap between children who are in receipt of free school meals and their peers has narrowed, in terms of outcomes at the age of five. The difference in their attainment of a good level of development was 17.8 percentage points in 2019, compared with 19 in 2013.

**Emma Hardy:** I am sure that the Minister is as aware as I am of the report published last year that showed that the attainment gap, having started to narrow, has now widened and that, on our current trajectory, we will not reduce the gap until at least 2050.

**Vicky Ford:** I am aware of that report, but it is extremely important that we give credit to the early years workforce for ensuring that the attainment gap at the start of the school years has narrowed, because when there is a gap, there is a risk that it will widen during each individual's school years.

The early years workforce plays a key role in the delivery of high-quality early education and childcare. It is a testament to that workforce that 96% of childcare settings—or 19 out of 20—are now rated “good” or “outstanding” by Ofsted; that represents an increase from 74% in 2012. Our investment in the early years entitlements not only allows us to support high-quality early education, helping children to thrive in the crucial early years, but helps us to make childcare more affordable, supporting more families to work. We are continuing to increase our investment in childcare to support parents to work.

The Government plan to spend more than £3.6 billion on the early years entitlements in the coming year. That includes the universal 15 hours of childcare for all three and four-year-olds, which was introduced in the early 2000s; the entitlement to 15 hours of free childcare a week for disadvantaged two-year-olds, which was rolled out in 2013 under the Conservative-led Government; and the additional 15 hours for working parents of three and four-year-olds, which was introduced in 2017—again, under a Conservative Government. Those entitlements save parents up to £5,000 per year in total if they use the full 30 hours of free childcare available. The Government's manifesto at the last general election committed to investing a further £1 billion to create more high-quality wraparound and holiday childcare places. I have noted the challenges of holiday periods that hon. Members have mentioned.

All three and four-year-olds, and the most disadvantaged two-year-olds, benefit from 15 hours a week of free early education, regardless of whether their parents are in work. The entitlement for two-year-olds is in place to help to give the most disadvantaged children a great start in life by closing the attainment gap between them and their better-off peers.

The Department for Education's study of early education and development, or SEED, and the study of effective primary, pre-school and secondary education, or EPPSE, are clear that good-quality early education at the age of two has a variety of positive benefits for children. I believe in evidence-based decisions, however, and evidence from the EPPSE also indicates that children who start pre-school under the age of two do not show more positive outcomes than those who started between the ages of 24 and 36 months, which is why we targeted the policy at the most disadvantaged two-year-olds. It is extremely encouraging to see that more than 850,000 two-year-olds have benefited from an early education place since the scheme began in 2013.

Achieving a good level of development is important. It is excellent news that three out of four children are reaching that level, because children who do not are more likely to have an education, health and care plan or to become children in need. That is why we have announced a range of initiatives to support disadvantaged children, including a significant investment in professional development for early years practitioners and the development of the evidence base for what works in the early years. I hope that that addresses the point raised

by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), about the importance of supporting professional development in the early years sector. A range of initiatives are under way.

Capital funding is also important. We have allocated £24 million to build more school-based nursery places in deprived areas. That supports our commitment to social mobility, ensuring that we provide more quality places for those who will most benefit.

Early language has a major impact on all aspects of young children's non-physical development, contributing to their ability to manage emotions, communicate feelings, establish and maintain relationships, think symbolically, and learn to read and write. The evidence is clear that children who start school behind stay behind. Children with poor vocabulary skills at the age of five are twice as likely to be unemployed when they reach adulthood, and three times as likely to have mental health problems.

We want to enable more parents to support their child's early communication, language and literacy development at home. The Department for Education has launched the hungry little minds campaign, which I hope all hon. Members present will help me to champion. That three-year campaign aims to encourage parents to chat, play and read with their children to help to set them up for school and beyond.

As part of that campaign, the Department for Education recently awarded a quality mark to eight early years apps with a focus on literacy, language and communication. That comes after new data revealed that three quarters of children aged five and under had used smartphones or tablet apps at least once in the past six months to learn. A panel of experts recommended that the apps should be accredited to help parents to make informed decisions about the use of technology in creating a positive learning environment at home.

As well as improving children's outcomes, the availability of high-quality childcare is a key factor in enabling parents to work, a subject that has been raised a number of times today. The 2018 Office for National Statistics report on families and the labour market in England shows that many parents return to work and need childcare when their child turns three.

The primary focus of the 30-hour childcare entitlement is to support all working families with the cost of childcare, and to support parents to go back into work or to increase their working hours, if they so wish. As I said, 600,000 three and four-year-olds have benefited from a 30-hour place in the first two years of delivery, helping parents to keep more of their salary through the doubling of free childcare. According to the Department's independent year-one evaluation, the 30-hour policy is making a real difference to families' lives, with many parents reporting that they now have more money to spend. In our most recent parent study, which was published last December, the vast majority of parents—80%—said that their family's quality of life was better since using the 30 hours. We are clear that the 30-hour offer aims to support working families with the cost of childcare and to support parents to go back into work or to work more hours, should they so wish.

A point was made about gender pay equality and support, especially for mothers returning to work. The Government's parental leave, flexible working and childcare policies all work together, and they have supported a

closing of the gender pay gap. Back in 1997—that was before I had my first child—the gender pay gap was 27.5%. The last number we have is for 2018, when it was 17.9%. Over the past two decades, there has been a really significant improvement in employment for mothers. The maternal employment rate has gone up from 62% in 1996% to 74% in 2018. There is more to do, of course, but I ask Members to please recognise the huge improvements that have been made with the gender pay gap and maternal employment.

Early years entitlement supports families with two, three and four-year-olds to work more hours and supports their children's development. Other childcare offers across Government support families with younger children. It is important to enable parents to spend more time with their children in the very early months and to allow families more flexibility to find the right balance for them. That is why the Conservative Government introduced shared parental leave in 2015. It has given parents the chance to share up to 50 weeks of leave and up to 37 weeks of parental pay in the first year following the child's birth or adoption.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) raised the issue of family hubs. I am positive about family hubs and, in fact, visited the hub in my constituency last Friday. I was deeply impressed with the support that it gave to families across a wide age range, and for the nought to three-year-olds especially. I would like to see more family hubs opening across the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) made a large number of really important points, as ever. He brings great experience to this House. First, he spoke about special educational needs and disabilities. He knows that we are in the midst of a review of the entire SEND system, but our disability access fund is worth £615 per eligible child per year. All local authorities are required to have special educational needs inclusion funds for all three and four-year-olds with SEND who are taking up the early years entitlement. A two-year-old in receipt of disability living allowance or an EHCP—education, health and care plan—would also be eligible for the universal 15-hour entitlement.

**David Simmonds:** The Minister covered a number of the key issues in her speech. Does she agree not only about the benefit from the early years pupil premium, which helps to boost the funding rate, but that it is important for the Department for Education to put pressure on the Department of Health and Social Care? One of the consistent issues for children with special educational needs and disabilities is that local authorities have for many years been doing statements for children with special educational needs and are used to that process, but local NHS colleagues who are required to contribute towards the clinical and medical aspects of a child's early years experience do not have any history of doing so at the local level. In fact, I am sure that many Members find, when we investigate SEND casework in our constituencies, that the blockage behind getting a child what is needed sits with the local NHS provider, rather than with the local authority.

**Vicky Ford:** My hon. Friend absolutely hits the nail on the head. I have been in my role for two weeks and one day, and the issue of education, health and care

plans has been raised a number of times. SEND review is right at the top of my list of priorities. The plan is meant to cover education, health and care—that was a huge step forward in the 2014 reforms—and it needs to ensure that they are all delivered. I have a meeting scheduled with my counterpart, the Health Minister, but the Health team seems rather busy at the moment. However, it will happen, and we will look at those plans as part of the review.

My hon. Friend also raised the important issues of the school forums, which I will look into, and of tax-free childcare. I was quite disappointed that neither of the two Opposition speakers mentioned tax-free childcare, because it is an important introduction that helps up to 1.3 million families whom we estimate could be benefiting.

**Catherine McKinnell:** Will the Minister give way?

**Vicky Ford:** Let me go through the availability for the record. Tax-free childcare is available for all parents who work more than 16 hours at the national minimum wage or above, and who earn up to £100,000. For every £8 that parents pay into an online account, the Government will pay £2, up to the maximum contribution of £2,000 per year for children aged under 12. Parents with disabled children will receive extra support worth up to £4,000 per child each year until their child is 17. More and more families are benefiting annually from tax-free childcare. I asked to be updated on the latest numbers. The numbers benefiting have more than doubled since this time last year: 205,000 families used tax-free childcare for 243,000 children in December 2019, compared with 91,000 families for 109,000 children in December 2018. I accept the points made about the bureaucracy sometimes, but the scheme is more targeted and fairer.

**Catherine McKinnell:** To correct the record, I did not specifically reference the tax-free childcare scheme; I referenced the Government's interventions, which very much included the tax-free childcare scheme. The Treasury Committee's conclusions were that the scheme is not as targeted a use of Government resources as it could be; it results in those already in work benefiting much more than those looking to re-enter the workplace, and that is the subject of the petition.

**Vicky Ford:** I am sure that the hon. Lady will welcome the news that the number of people using the tax-free childcare scheme has more than doubled. The scheme benefits the parents of very young children, which is the entire point of the debate, and it is more targeted and fairer. Unlike vouchers, which were mentioned, it is available to everyone who meets the eligibility criteria, including those earning the minimum wage and the self-employed. Often, vouchers were available only to those employed by larger organisations. This scheme is available per child, whereas childcare vouchers were available per parent. Therefore, parents with younger children, disabled children or multiple children, whom the hon. Lady mentioned and who are likely to have higher childcare costs, will be better off under TFC.

**Catherine McKinnell:** Clearly, any support for childcare is welcome, but the Government's so-called tax-free childcare scheme benefits most those who are wealthier and earn more. The petition focuses on those on lower incomes who consider themselves to be caught in the



[Catherine McKinnell]

middle: people who do not earn enough to get the maximum benefit from that scheme, but who are not eligible for the free element of childcare. It would be helpful if the Government recognised that squeezed middle.

**Vicky Ford:** Let me get on to those who are sometimes on lower incomes. As I hope the hon. Lady is aware, eligible families can now get help with 85% of their childcare costs through universal credit, compared with 70% under the previous tax credit system. That is the highest ever level of support. Furthermore, we committed in our manifesto to creating a £1 billion fund to help with high-quality, affordable, wraparound childcare for the holiday, before-school and after-school periods. We have already started working on the details of that, which will be rolled out from 2021.

I understand that some working families who contribute hugely to our society face additional pressures. I am thinking in particular of people such as nursing students, who work shifts, and armed services families, many of whom move around regularly. That is why the Department of Health and Social Care has already announced that, from September this year, it will increase the parental support allowance for students of nursing, midwifery and allied health professions from £1,000 to £2,000 per year. That is on top of the additional £5,000 that all students on those courses will get access to, whether or not they have children.

The Ministry of Defence is setting up a childcare support team, the aim of which will be to work at fulfilling the manifesto commitment and ensuring free wraparound childcare for four to 11-year-old eligible children from armed services families. That team will also look at other areas of potential disadvantage that service families face when trying to access appropriate childcare, whatever the age of their children.

I am extremely grateful to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North for raising this important issue. I listened carefully to the debate and noted all the contributions. I am honoured to be responsible for this extremely important part of the Government's agenda to support parents and children. I am proud of the significant range of childcare support that the Government offer families, and of the improvements that have been made over the past decade. As Members will know, a spending review is due this year. I cannot make any commitments ahead of that about the shape or amount of the Government's childcare funding, but I will ensure that the points raised today feed into the Government's evidence base for that spending review.

**Geraint Davies (in the Chair):** I invite Catherine McKinnell to wind up the debate. We have a little longer than normal, but I do not expect you to take the whole hour and 45 minutes.

5.44 pm

**Catherine McKinnell:** Thank you, Mr Davies. This has been a wide-ranging debate. We had the opportunity to put on the record a range of concerns and to consider the range of measures that successive Governments

have put in place to try to tackle this issue. The one point I must make is that, clearly, this is not job done. The petition would not have been signed by 146,000 people if families out there felt that their childcare requirements were already being met and they were able to pay for it.

**Emma Hardy:** I want to correct something I said in my intervention on the Minister. The report I mentioned was by the Education Policy Institute, which found that the attainment gap had widened by 0.6%. I said that that gap would not be closed until 2050, but the report shows that it will take well over 100 years for the disadvantage gap in maths and English to close. I just wanted to clarify that.

**Catherine McKinnell:** I thank my hon. Friend for that clarification, which very much goes to my point that this is nowhere near job done.

I congratulate the Minister on her appointment to what I agree is a vital part of Government. I hope it will be central to the Government's offer, so that, by the end of this Parliament—I hope we can assume that that will be in 2024—families are better placed to pursue their careers and to ensure that their children are well cared for, happy and educated, and arrive at school on a more equal footing.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) on his first speech in Westminster Hall. My first speech in Westminster Hall was back in 2010 in a debate on volcanic ash. I do not wish to diminish the importance of that crisis at the time—Newcastle airport is in my constituency—but I must say that his contribution was vital and will be of long-standing importance to the work of this Parliament.

Clearly, this is a complex issue to which there is no one solution. There are important elements for families, children, social mobility, wider society, our economy, our productivity and our gender equality, and for the progress we must make as a country on all those fronts. I welcome any support for childcare that the Government can offer, but they must recognise that the support available at the moment is not sufficient. In too many cases, it does not keep pace with inflation. People are working harder and feel ever more squeezed and compromised when it comes to meeting the costs of childcare and making choices for their families and their careers.

I thank the petitioners—Harley, who started the petition, and the 146,000 people who signed it—for bringing this issue to Parliament's attention and ensuring that the Government are tasked with considering not only what has been done to date but what more they can do, in particular to support families who feel a bit squeezed between the support available for very low-income families and the support that many more affluent families are able to take advantage of.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered e-petition 255237 relating to the provision of free childcare.

5.48 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statement

*Monday 9 March 2020*

## CABINET OFFICE

### **UK's Future Relationship with the EU: Negotiations**

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove):** Negotiators from the UK and the EU met in Brussels on 2 to 5 March 2020 for the first round of negotiations on the UK-EU future relationship.

The negotiations were formally launched by the UK's chief negotiator, David Frost, and by the European Commission's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, in a plenary session on 2 March.

The substantive discussions then took place within 11 separate negotiating groups, as agreed between the parties and as set out in the terms of reference. The session closed with a further plenary on 5 March.

Both sides presented their positions as set out in the EU mandate and in the document "The Future Relationship with the EU—The UK's Approach to Negotiations" (CP211). The UK's team made clear that on 1 January 2021 the UK would regain its economic and political independence in full, and that the future relationship would need to reflect that reality.

Discussions in some areas identified a degree of common understanding of the ground that future talks could cover. In other areas, notably fisheries, governance and dispute settlement, and the so-called "level playing field", there were, as expected, significant differences.

The next negotiating round will take place on 18 to 20 March in London. The UK expects to table a number of legal texts, including a draft FTA, beforehand.

[HCWS153]





# Petition

Monday 9 March 2020

## OBSERVATIONS

### HOME DEPARTMENT

#### Refugee family reunion

The petition of residents of Glasgow North,

Declares that under current family reunion rules adult refugees can only sponsor their partners and children under 18 years old to join them in the UK; further that child refugees in the UK have no family reunion rights so they can't bring their parents to join them; further that the lack of opportunities for refugees to reunite with family members forces people to turn to smugglers and exacerbates the humanitarian crises in Southern Europe; and further that, for refugees already living safely in the UK, the enforced separation from their families and constant anxiety about their wellbeing can be devastating, preventing them from rebuilding their lives and undermining their successful integration into their new communities.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to expand the criteria of who qualifies as a family member for the purposes of refugee family reunion, including by allowing adult refugees in the UK to sponsor their adult children, their siblings that are under the age of 25, and their parents; further to give unaccompanied refugee children in the UK the right to sponsor their parents and siblings that are under the age of 25 to join them under the refugee family reunion rules; and further to reintroduce legal aid for refugee family reunion cases.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Patrick Grady, *Official Report*, 11 February 2020; Vol. 671, c. 826 .]

[P002555]

*Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp):*

The Government provide a safe and legal route to bring families together through its family reunion policy. Under this policy, we have granted over 27,000 family reunion visas in the last five years.

We are clear that there is discretion to grant visas outside the immigration rules, which caters for extended family members in exceptional circumstances. This discretion may be used where, for example, young adult sons or daughters are dependent on family here and living in dangerous situations.

Refugees can also sponsor adult dependent relatives living overseas to join them where, due to age, illness or disability, that person requires long-term personal care that can only be provided by relatives in the UK.

Amending the policy without careful thought could significantly increase the numbers who could qualify to come to the UK, not just from conflict regions but from any country from which someone is granted protection. In reality, this would result in extended family being able to come here who themselves do not need protection—which risks reducing our capacity to assist the most vulnerable refugees.

The Government have made clear in the past their concern that allowing refugee children to sponsor parents' risks creating incentives for more children to be encouraged, or even forced, to leave their family and attempt hazardous journeys to the UK. This too would play into the hands of criminal gangs, undermining our safeguarding responsibilities. Our policy is not designed to keep child refugees apart from their parents, but in considering any policy we must think carefully about the wider impact to avoid putting more people unnecessarily into harm's way. There is a need to better understand why people choose to undertake secondary journeys to the UK after reaching a safe country, which are unnecessary. It is important that those who need international protection should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach—that is the fastest route to safety.

Legal aid for refugee family reunion may be available under the Exceptional Case Funding (ECF) scheme, where failure to provide legal aid would mean there is a breach or a risk of breach of the individual's ECHR or enforceable EU rights, and subject to means and merits tests.

The Government recently amended the scope of legal aid so that separated migrant children may receive civil legal aid in relation to applications by their family members and extended family members, for entry clearance, leave to enter or leave to remain in the UK granted either under the immigration rules or outside the rules on the basis of exceptional circumstances or compassionate and compelling circumstances.



# Ministerial Correction

*Monday 9 March 2020*

## INTERNATIONAL TRADE

### UK/EU Trade Agreement

*The following is an extract from International Trade questions on 5 March 2020.*

**Andrew Bridgen:** What progress has been made in laying the groundwork for a UK-Australia free trade agreement? Is a timetable in place for the commencement of those negotiations?

**Conor Burns:** This week we have published the proposals for the United States deal, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade is ably leading on Australia, Canada, Japan and, potentially,

the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership. She will come to the House in due course, hopefully soon, to lay out full proposals for the terms of those negotiations.

*[Official Report, 5 March 2020, Vol. 672, c. 964.]*

*Letter of correction from the Minister of State, Department for International Trade, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns):*

An error has been identified in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen).

The correct response should have been:

**Conor Burns:** This week we have published the proposals for the United States deal, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade is ably leading on **Australia, Japan and, potentially**, the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership. She will come to the House in due course, hopefully soon, to lay out full proposals for the terms of those negotiations.





# ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 9 March 2020

|                                                                      | <i>Col. No.</i> |                                                                 | <i>Col. No.</i> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>WORK AND PENSIONS</b> .....                                       | 1               | <b>WORK AND PENSIONS—continued</b>                              |                 |
| Access to Employment for Ex-offenders .....                          | 10              | State Pension Age: Life Expectancy .....                        | 13              |
| Child Poverty .....                                                  | 8               | Support into Self-employment .....                              | 11              |
| Claimants with Disabilities: Number of<br>Assessments .....          | 13              | Topical Questions .....                                         | 17              |
| People with Disabilities: Employment Support .....                   | 6               | Universal Credit .....                                          | 3               |
| People with Disabilities: Financial Assistance .....                 | 15              | Universal Credit and State Pension Payments .....               | 6               |
| Personal Independence Payment Assessments and<br>Outcomes .....      | 12              | Working-age Social Security Benefits: Four-year<br>Freeze ..... | 16              |
| Special Rules for Terminal Illnesses: Review .....                   | 9               | Workplace Pensions .....                                        | 1               |
| State Pension Age Equalisation: Financial<br>Support for Women ..... | 16              |                                                                 |                 |

# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Monday 9 March 2020

|                                                             | <i>Col. No.</i> | <i>Col. No.</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <b>CABINET OFFICE</b> .....                                 | 1WS             |                 |
| UK's Future Relationship with the EU:<br>Negotiations ..... | 1WS             |                 |

# PETITION

Monday 9 March 2020

|                              | <i>Col. No.</i> | <i>Col. No.</i> |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <b>HOME DEPARTMENT</b> ..... | 1P              |                 |
| Refugee family reunion ..... | 1P              |                 |

# MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Monday 9 March 2020

|                                  | <i>Col. No.</i> |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>INTERNATIONAL TRADE</b> ..... | 1MC             |
| UK/EU Trade Agreement .....      | 1MC             |

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## CONTENTS

Monday 9 March 2020

**List of Government and Principal Officers of the House**

**Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1] [see index inside back page]**  
*Secretary of State for Work and Pensions*

**Coronavirus [Col. 23]**  
*Answer to urgent question—(Matt Hancock)*

**Hate Crime (Misogyny) [Col. 40]**  
*Bill presented, and read the First time*

**Hate Crime (Misandry and Misogyny) [Col. 40]**  
*Bill presented, and read the First time*

**Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill [Lords] [Col. 41]**  
*Motion for Second Reading—(Nigel Huddleston)—agreed to*  
*Programme motion—(Rebecca Harris)—agreed to*

**Commonwealth in 2020 [Col. 85]**  
*General debate*

**Flood Prevention: Rainwater Attenuation and Reservoirs [Col. 126]**  
*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Westminster Hall**  
**Free Childcare [Col. 1WH]**  
*E-Petition Debate*

**Written Statement [Col. 1WS]**

**Petition [Col. 1P]**  
*Observations*

**Ministerial Correction [Col. 1MC]**

**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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