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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 28 April 2020

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

The House entered into hybrid scrutiny proceedings (Order, 22 April).

[NB: [V] denotes a Member participating virtually.]

Oral Answers to Questions

ATTORNEY GENERAL

The Attorney General was asked—

Covid-19: Domestic Violence

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions on the capacity of the Crown Prosecution Service to investigate the increase in domestic violence cases during the covid-19 outbreak. [901896]

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions on the capacity of the Crown Prosecution Service to investigate the increase in domestic violence cases during the covid-19 outbreak. [901900]

Mr Speaker: I call the Attorney General to answer the substantive question tabled by Carolyn Harris. May I welcome the Attorney General to her new role? Congratulations.

The Attorney General (Suella Braverman): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I congratulate the shadow Solicitor General, the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves), on her appointment, and the shadow Attorney General, Lord Falconer, on his. I look forward to constructive debate with both of them, hopefully in the same room at some point.

There is no doubt whatsoever that this Government take domestic abuse and the pain that it causes extremely seriously, and that is especially the case at this time. The Crown Prosecution Service is wholly committed to ensuring that the perpetrators of this horrendous crime face justice and that victims are supported through what is often a very traumatic process.

Carolyn Harris [V]: Calls to the national domestic abuse helpline have increased by almost 50%, and 16 deaths of women and children were linked to domestic violence in the first three weeks of lockdown. With the CPS issuing new guidance as a result of the pandemic that advises

prosecutors to prioritise the most serious cases, what assurances can the Attorney General provide that domestic abuse cases will fall into that category?

The Attorney General: I thank the hon. Lady for her considerable work on this subject and her courage in speaking out about this matter. I myself represented victims of domestic abuse during my time as a lawyer. I have seen how devastating it can be, and I share her goal in wanting to eliminate this scourge from our society. I am very concerned about the rise in domestic abuse offending during lockdown. This is a difficult time for those who may be living with their abuser. That is why the Government have invested an extra £2 million at the frontline for online services and phone lines so that there is help 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for those victims who need it.

Nick Smith: It is vital that cases of domestic violence are properly prosecuted during this covid-19 crisis. To avoid delays in prosecution, are the Government taking the necessary steps to enable the most serious cases to be heard through virtual court hearings where necessary?

The Attorney General: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. We need to go as far as we possibly can to support vulnerable victims throughout the court process. The CPS is at the forefront of implementing section 28 pre-recorded cross-examination, which aims to allow vulnerable victims to give evidence in advance of trial so that they can have a better experience of the process. I encourage him to look closely at the Domestic Abuse Bill, which contains considerable provisions to protect vulnerable witnesses throughout the court process.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on her new post; I am sure that she will do an excellent job.

With 100 arrests a day for alleged domestic violence in London alone, clearly the problem is getting worse. What action can my right hon. and learned Friend take to ensure that the victims of domestic abuse feel safe to give evidence against the perpetrators? At the moment, they fear reprisals and are not in a safe position.

The Attorney General: This is an important point. A range of protections is available for victims so that they can give evidence in such situations. Prosecutors can apply for special measures, including a screen, or for evidence to be given via video link, so that victims do not need to have contact with their abuser in the trial process.

Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con) [V]: It cannot be emphasised enough how important it is that victims of domestic abuse get the support that they need during this very difficult time. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that this often-hidden scourge, which affects children as well as adults, must be a priority for the Government at all times, as is demonstrated by the commitments in the Domestic Abuse Bill?

The Attorney General: My hon. Friend speaks with authority about child safeguarding, based on his practice as a barrister and his time in government as a Minister. These crimes are abhorrent, and those who commit them must not be let off the hook. Today, the landmark

Domestic Abuse Bill returns to the Commons for its Second Reading. I am very proud to have personally supported this landmark legislation that provides support—legal and otherwise—for victims of domestic abuse, including children, so that we as a nation take a step further towards eliminating domestic abuse.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab) [V]: I congratulate the Attorney General on her appointment; likewise, I look forward to a constructive working relationship with her.

Charities and police forces across the country anticipated a rise in domestic abuse during the lockdown. Indeed, the Met is currently arresting an average of 100 people a day, with charges and cautions up 24%. Devastatingly, domestic abuse killings doubled in the first three weeks of lockdown. Meanwhile, in January, a report by the Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate stated that the domestic abuse case load for both the CPS and police had increased by 88%, against the backdrop of a 25% reduction in funding, therefore stretching prosecutors' workload and forcing them to make difficult decisions about priorities. I am extremely grateful for what the AG has said, but I urge her to significantly increase funding—

Mr Speaker: Order. We have to bring in the Attorney General.

The Attorney General: I am acutely concerned by the rise in domestic abuse offences in lockdown, and I want to make two points. First, the Domestic Abuse Bill, which returns to the Commons today, will involve the allocation of £3.1 million to services supporting children who witness domestic abuse in the house during lockdown. Secondly, I want to take this opportunity to let victims out there—men and women—know that they do not have to suffer in silence. There is support for them if they seek it. Please pick up the phone and dial 999; press 55 if you cannot speak. Use the national domestic abuse helpline. Crucially, please know that if you want to flee your abuser—if you want to leave the home—you will not be breaking coronavirus regulations. You will not be breaking the law if you seek help outside.

Serious Fraud

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): What recent progress the CPS has made on increasing prosecution rates for serious fraud. [901899]

The Attorney General (Suella Braverman): Last year, the Crown Prosecution Service prosecuted over 10,000 defendants where the principal offence was fraud or forgery. It also has a specialist fraud division, which brings together expertise and skills to prosecute complex and serious fraud.

Kevin Hollinrake: I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend to her role. She will do a tremendous job, and she has an immediate opportunity to right a wrong. It is 10 years since my constituent, Ian Foxley, blew the whistle on corrupt payments at GPT Special Project Management. That has not come to a resolution. Will she now bring it to a resolution and ensure that my constituent and others in the same situation are properly compensated?

The Attorney General: I thank my hon. Friend for his extensive work on that case. He has been indefatigable in seeking a resolution for his constituent—of that there is no doubt. Unfortunately, I cannot comment on the details of the case, because the Serious Fraud Office is undertaking criminal investigations into the affairs of GPT and Saudi Arabia, which have taken some time because of the significant complexity involved. However, I would like to reassure my hon. Friend, because upon my appointment to this job, that case was one of the first matters, if not the first, to cross my desk, so it is a priority for me and I will not rest until we find an appropriate resolution.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Five thousand suspicious emails were reported to the National Cyber Security Centre just one day after the launch of its Cyber Aware campaign earlier this month, with a huge growth in malicious emails offering fake coronavirus-related services. Can the Attorney General tell me how prepared the CPS is to deal with prosecuting online fraud and scams during the coronavirus emergency?

The Attorney General: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this point, and I recognise the increased risk posed by scammers and fraudsters at this time of crisis. Sadly, there are those who will seek to exploit the vulnerable at this time. We are leading several initiatives in this area, such as working with the technology industry, to shut down any vulnerabilities that fraudsters might exploit and to ensure that the public have the knowledge so that they can spot scams and stand up to fraudsters.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con) [V]: I appreciate all the work my right hon. and learned Friend is doing in her new job at this difficult time. Naturally, there is real concern about crime, particularly fraud against the elderly. How is the CPS tackling cases of covid-19-related fraud?

The Attorney General: This is an important issue. Sadly, criminals are looking to take advantage of the vulnerable during this pandemic. It is shameful and disgusting, but sadly it is a fact of life. We recognise the threat posed, and that is why the CPS and the police have published a joint charging protocol that makes it clear that covid-related fraud will be a priority for an immediate charging decision. I am glad that, as a result, we have already seen some successful prosecutions of such offences.

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): We all welcome the enormous packages of support that the Treasury has put together for businesses and individuals, but clearly there is the prospect of fraud by people applying to some of those schemes. Has my right hon. and learned Friend had discussions with the Treasury on those matters?

The Attorney General: As the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear in his announcements, the unprecedented level of support for businesses and those in financial difficulty has sadly raised the risk of fraud on the Exchequer, which is of course fraud on the taxpayer. There will be those who try to play the system, to make

false claims and, frankly, to defraud and deceive. The Cabinet Office counter-fraud function is leading the work to minimise the risk, and the CPS has been fully engaged with this vital work.

Covid-19: CPS

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the CPS during the covid-19 outbreak. [901901]

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): What steps she is taking to ensure the effectiveness of the CPS during the covid-19 outbreak. [901902]

The Attorney General (Suella Braverman): I would like to put on record my thanks to the whole CPS family and, indeed, the wider justice system for their hard work during this uncertain period. CPS staff are working remotely and, where safe to do so, in person. They are playing a full part in supporting the criminal justice system's response to the pandemic with the use of more technology, more collaboration and planning for recovery.

Mr Wragg: I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend to her post. Further to her answer, will she tell me how the Crown Prosecution Service is working with the courts to manage the impact of covid-19 on its services and particularly to support them in planning for recovery, not least for the administration of justice?

The Attorney General: Justice is non-negotiable, and notwithstanding the crisis we are facing, it is important that justice continues to be done and continues to be seen to be done. There has been very effective work between the CPS and other partners—for example, the judiciary and the Courts Service—to ensure that practical arrangements are put in place so that, as far as possible, our justice system continues to function through the use of technology and the efficient management of resources. The CPS is also working with partners to turn its focus towards recovery, including exploring options for a phased recovery.

Tom Hunt [V]: Over recent weeks, we have seen a shameful trend in suspected criminals spitting and coughing at police officers. There have been a number of cases in my constituency of Ipswich, and it is a particularly pernicious form of assault during a covid-19 outbreak. Those responsible must have their day in court, and that day must come quickly so that they can be duly punished and others can be deterred from doing this. What steps is my right hon. and learned Friend taking to ensure that the CPS is right behind our police in prosecuting those responsible for this horrible crime and bringing them to justice quickly?

The Attorney General: My hon. Friend makes a crucial point. Those on the frontline—those in the trenches of this battle—who are risking their own safety in the service of others are the heroes in this crisis and they deserve nothing less than our admiration. That is why assaults on emergency workers will not be tolerated. Those who commit these sickening offences will face the full force of the law. I am glad to have seen—if “glad” is the right word to use—that the CPS has successfully prosecuted several such offences recently.

Robert Lorgan (High Peak) (Con) [V]: What steps are the Government, along with the CPS, taking to ensure that this current crisis does not leave us with an enormous backlog of court cases that could lead to huge costs and delay justice for a long time to come?

The Attorney General: My hon. Friend raises an important point. The CPS and others have been working at pace to ensure that justice continues to be served. The Coronavirus Act 2020 enables the use of video and digital technology to facilitate court hearings during this crisis. The CPS is working with the judiciary to manage the listing of cases, so that cases that can be dealt with by way of a guilty plea or by other disposal are prioritised, which will go some way towards reducing the backlog in the system.

Covid-19: Remand on Bail

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions on CPS management of people remanded on bail during the covid-19 outbreak. [901903]

The Attorney General (Suella Braverman): [*Inaudible*]—capacity across the criminal justice system, and our focus is to ensure that the most dangerous offenders are dealt with as a priority. All cases with an approaching trial date, including bail cases, are under review to ensure that serious and time-sensitive cases are prioritised for trial and that any bail conditions remain suitable.

Kerry McCarthy [V]: Given that there was already a backlog of more than 37,400 Crown court cases before the covid-19 outbreak—I am sure that many of those defendants were remanded in custody—what is the CPS doing to ensure that bail hearings for people who perhaps do not need to be remanded in custody can be expedited and that people can be released into the community when it is safe to do so? In that way, we can ease the pressures on the prison estate in terms of dealing with the coronavirus outbreak.

The Attorney General: Clearly, any bail should be for the shortest possible period, because it restricts the ability of an individual to carry out their normal life while they remain innocent until proven guilty. Each case needs to be assessed on the individual facts, including the potential risks posed by a defendant of, for example, further offending or absconding. There are statutory limits underpinning the conditions that can be imposed, and the defendant has a right to apply to the court to vary or remove any conditions of bail. We need to ensure that these cases continue to be dealt with expeditiously, and the CPS is working with the judiciary to consider options for restarting some trials while maintaining social distancing.

Covid-19: Civil Liberties

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the effect of the covid-19 contact tracing app on civil liberties. [901906]

The Solicitor General (Michael Ellis): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. It is a pleasure to be here and to see you—virtually or otherwise.

Her Majesty's Government are actively considering a range of further options for managing the effect of the outbreak of covid-19. A careful assessment of any implications for civil liberties, including the impact on human rights, equality and privacy, will be an important part of these considerations.

Afzal Khan [V]: I welcome the Government's new focus on testing, tracing and containing the coronavirus, and I believe that the NHS contact tracing app has an important role to play. However, does the Attorney General agree that the legal basis for processing personal data by such an app should be set out in legislation and that this should include a measure that ensures the app stores data in a decentralised manner?

The Solicitor General: I am very pleased that the hon. Gentlemen is supportive of the contact tracing app. It is very important because everyone will benefit from the app. If enough people with smartphones download it, it will help stop the spread, slow the epidemic, and protect the NHS. I can assure him and others that the app will be for voluntary participation only. There will be no private identifiable information on it. The whole process will be compliant with data protection and there will be an ethical advisory board monitoring it.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab) [V]: We support the development of the app, which could be central to the lifting of the lockdown. However, to be effective it would require more than 60% of the population to sign up, and achieving that would require trust from the public. Will the Solicitor General confirm that the legal basis for processing data under the app will be set out in primary legislation? Will he also confirm that any measures will be compliant with the general data protection regulation, both now and after the Brexit transition period?

The Solicitor General: I welcome the hon. Lady to her place. Stakeholder engagement in this matter has been crucial, and continues to be. We have been consulting not only the ethics advisory board for the app, which is chaired by Professor Sir Jonathan Montgomery, but the Information Commissioner, the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, the National Data Guardian and many others. Trust is important—it always is—but this app is from NHSX, the tech arm of the NHS, and in this country we trust our NHS with our data. The app is going to be heavily protected and I am confident that it will be very popular.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP) [V]: The Information Commissioner has said that the

“starting point for contact tracing should be decentralised systems that look to shift processing on to individuals' devices where possible.”

Why have the Government apparently gone against that advice and reportedly opted for a significant centralised data-gathering system, with all the challenges and risks that that brings?

The Solicitor General: The app is being developed with expert assistance from a plethora of different sources. Data on the app will not be held any longer than is absolutely necessary, and civil liberties and the privacy of information are absolutely crucial to the development of the app. We want people to trust it and to use it—it is going to be important to protect the NHS and to save lives—so every single mechanism we have will be utilised to protect the privacy of data.

Pro Bono Work

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): What recent steps she has taken to support pro bono work by lawyers. [901897]

Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con): What recent steps she has taken to support pro bono work by lawyers. [901904]

The Solicitor General (Michael Ellis): As one of the Government's pro bono champions, I am proud to support the valuable work provided by the legal and pro bono sectors. I regularly engage with pro bono stakeholders to engage directly with their work. Covid-19 has affected all frontline services, and the pro bono sector is not unaffected. I applaud the efforts of law clinics and pro bono services to continue to provide advice, where possible, over the phone, by email and digitally.

John Lamont [V]: The pro bono offer in this country is incredible, and I pay tribute to all those in the legal services market who provide free legal services. Does the Solicitor General agree that we need to do more to promote greater awareness among the public about the legal services that are on offer in this country?

The Solicitor General: Yes, absolutely. It is of the utmost importance that members of the public are aware of their rights and responsibilities, as well as the rights of other citizens; this builds confidence and the skills needed to deal with disputes, and ensures that everyone has access to justice. For example, last year 500 schools, 7,500 students and 1,400 legal practitioners supported mock trials in schools. Such work builds on confidence and will support those in the pro bono sphere.

Sarah Atherton [V]: Many smaller legal firms want to offer free legal support to those who cannot afford it. Agencies, such as the citizens advice bureau in Wrexham, facilitate pro bono opportunities, and solicitors are covered by those agencies' professional indemnity insurance. Demand exceeds supply and waiting lists are long. Does my right hon. and learned Friend feel we should incentivise smaller legal firms to undertake pro bono work?

The Solicitor General: Yes, increasing numbers of lawyers at all levels are already undertaking pro bono work, as my hon. Friend knows, because they recognise the truth—that it makes a real difference to people, communities and those who would otherwise be denied access to justice. I do encourage all firms of any size to take part; it is a commendable gesture. After all, we know that the legal community rallies admirably to support victims in their hour of need. The covid-19 pandemic is no exception, and I want to encourage lawyers to do as much as they can in that regard.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab) [V]: The Bar Council survey of 145 chambers revealed that 81% cannot survive the next 12 months without additional support. Similarly, many law firms are also struggling to make ends meet. Even before the pandemic, the publicly funded legal sector was already on its knees due to cuts to legal aid under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, hindering not only pro bono work but access to advice and representation across the piece. Will the Law Officers work together with us, at this time of national crisis, and commit to reversing LASPO?

The Solicitor General: The Government continue to prioritise legal aid for the matters that need it most—where people's life or liberty is at stake, where they are at risk of serious physical harm or where children may be taken into care. Pro bono work is an adjunct to, not a substitute for, legal aid funding. We recognise that as Law Officers. It is correct that coronavirus has had a profound impact on us all and will inevitably have an impact on legal advice, provision and services, as it has on all other services, but guidance has been published by the Legal Aid Agency and the Courts and Tribunals Service, and I recommend people check online for the latest information.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Covid-19: Waste Collection Staff

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): What guidance his Department has provided to local authorities on safe working practices for waste collection staff during the covid-19 outbreak. [901973]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): May I begin by sending my thanks to all those working in local government? Their efforts in every village, town and city across the country is making the difference in this national endeavour. Thank you.

Our binmen and women have done a fantastic job, maintaining the vast majority of collections. The Government published advice to councils on how to ensure the safety of refuse collections on 7 April. Today I am announcing that I am asking councils to plan the organised reopening of household waste collection sites. I expect this to happen over the coming weeks, and I will be publishing amended guidance shortly.

John Spellar: Earlier today we paid tribute to key workers who have lost their lives during the pandemic, and those who take away our rubbish and thereby protect the health of our communities are certainly key workers. The Secretary of State will know that their unions—Unison, the GMB and Unite—have been working with councils and contractors to agree safe working practices and the provision of personal protective equipment. The advice and guidance from his Department is welcome, but what steps is he taking to ensure that

this is actually spread out right the way across the country and that best practice is being followed to protect these key workers?

Robert Jenrick: The right hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. Our binmen and women have done a great job. We owe them a debt of gratitude, and they deserve to have both the advice that they need and the protective equipment where that is required. Public Health England has published guidance for those working in the sector, recommending that where the 2 metre distance rule cannot be adhered to, staff should make sure that the windows of their vehicles are open for ventilation, and they should wash their hands for 20 seconds or longer before getting in and out of the vehicle, or use hand sanitiser where handwashing is not possible. We will ensure that councils follow up and adhere to that advice so that those key workers are properly protected as they go about their work.

Mr Speaker: We now go across to scenic Lancashire with Kate Hollern.

Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab) [V]: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The new online portal for councils to order PPE has still not gone live. Despite being promised that it would be open three weeks ago, we are now told it is likely to be another three weeks. The first duty of any employer is to keep their staff safe while working. Councils are desperately trying to buy, and are asking for donations of, PPE because their stocks are dangerously low. Can the Secretary of State tell me when the portal will be open, and will he give councils a cast-iron guarantee that they will be given all the PPE they need to keep them safe?

Robert Jenrick: It is absolutely right that everybody working on the frontline of this crisis has the protective equipment that they deserve. Of course, those working in local government, and particularly those working in care homes, deserve the best possible care. We have been working to ensure that PPE reaches them through our local resilience forums, which my Department is responsible for. That has delivered over 50 million items of PPE in the past three weeks, the vast majority of which—36 million items—have gone to care homes. Of course there is more that we need to do. The online Clipper service is now being piloted in care homes and in general practice, and it will be rolled out, as the Health Secretary has said, in the coming weeks.

Non-ACM Cladding

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): What recent steps he has taken to help ensure the removal and replacement of unsafe non-ACM cladding from high-rise residential blocks. [901974]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): At Budget we announced that £1 billion will be provided to fund the removal and the replacement of unsafe non-ACM cladding from high-rise blocks to drive action at pace and protect leaseholders from unfair remediation costs. This is in addition to the £600 million already provided to remove Grenfell-style ACM cladding. As a result of covid-19, remediation work has currently paused on as many as

60% of sites, but I have been working to persuade companies to get back to work, and we are seeing some success. I have brought together Mayors and council leaders to issue a strong co-ordinated message that this important work can and should continue.

Matthew Pennycook [V]: I thank the Secretary of State for his response. He will, though, I know, be conscious of the additional strain that—[*Inaudible.*]

Mr Speaker: I think that unfortunately I am not going to ask the Secretary of State to comment on that.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab) [V]: As we get close to the third anniversary of Grenfell, when 72 people tragically lost their lives, hundreds of thousands of tenants and leaseholders are still living in unsafe buildings. This is, as the Secretary of State will know, a double whammy for people in the lockdown, trapped in buildings clad with flammable materials, with some out of work or out of business and having to pay expensive waking watch fees. I understand that the Secretary of State said in a call with the M9 Mayors that he would look into financial support from the Government for the cost of waking watch and other interim fire safety measures. Has that been done, and what was the outcome?

Robert Jenrick: I am pleased to report that as a result of the call that I convened with Mayors from across the country, we were able to issue a co-ordinated message sending a very clear message to the sector that building safety is of critical importance, that works now need to continue, and that the sites that were closed should now reopen. I hope that colleagues from across the House will join me in that message, because it is important that we deliver it in a co-ordinated, cross-party fashion.

With regard to waking watch, I have asked the noble Lord Greenhalgh, the new Minister with responsibility for building safety, to look into this to see what we can do to reduce the cost of waking watch for members of the public in this position, and to ensure that waking watches, where they are required, can continue despite the lockdown.

Covid-19: Local Authority Funding

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): What plans the Government have to provide additional funding to local authorities to replace funds spent on the response to the covid-19 outbreak. [901976]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): At the start of this emergency, I said that we would give councils the resources they need to do the job, and I meant it. We have announced over £3.2 billion of new funding to councils. This is in addition to £20 billion in business rate support and cashflow grant funding; £12 billion in grants for businesses delivered through councils, which have got £6 billion of that out of the door as of last week; £2.6 billion in deferred business rate payments; and £500 million in council tax funds. We will back councils with the financial resources they need as we work together in this national endeavour against coronavirus.

Mr Perkins [V]: The Secretary of State told councils to spend what it takes and expect reimbursement—[*Inaudible.*] From the money that the Secretary of State announced, they received just £59,000 of his initial £1.6 billion—[*Inaudible.*]

Robert Jenrick: Apologies to the hon. Gentleman for the fact that we did not hear all his question, but I think I understand the point that he was making, which was twofold. First, whether the Government will stand behind local councils for all the covid-related expenditure, to which the answer is absolutely yes. Those things that we asked of local councils in our national response, we will ensure that they get the resources that they need to do.

Secondly, will we ensure that smaller councils, such as district councils, get a fair share of that money to reflect the important work that they are also doing, for example, on rough sleeping? Yes, absolutely; and am I aware that those councils are concerned about loss of income and need to be given assurances that they can be on a stable and sustainable financial footing? Yes, of course I understand that, and we will take action accordingly.

Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): May I first echo the Secretary of State's thanks to everybody working in local government? They are all heroes helping to keep our communities safe. As he is aware, councils are not allowed to go into debt, so if the Government do not keep their promise to fund the full cost of the crisis, councils will be forced to make cuts potentially totalling billions of pounds, which will mean job losses.

Councils say that the additional funding announced so far covers barely a quarter of what is needed; it is not enough. Will he reconfirm the Government's original promise to fund whatever is necessary in full? If he does not, the frontline heroes we are cheering today will lose their jobs tomorrow.

Robert Jenrick: I have been working closely with local councils across the country on a cross-party basis and speaking to them almost every day. The message that I have consistently delivered is that we will fund the brilliant work that they are doing to support the country through the crisis. We have seen that already with the £3.2 billion of additional funding that I announced, plus the other support mechanisms. We will keep under review whether further funding is required, and if it is, we will bring it forward, because we want to back this brilliant sector in all that it is doing.

Covid-19: Support for Extremely Vulnerable People

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to enable local authorities to provide (a) food and (b) other support to people who have been identified as clinically extremely vulnerable during the covid-19 outbreak. [901978]

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to enable local authorities to provide (a) food and (b) other support to people who have been identified as clinically extremely vulnerable during the covid-19 outbreak. [901979]

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to enable local authorities to provide (a) food and (b) other support to people who have been identified as clinically extremely vulnerable during the covid-19 outbreak. [901985]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): At the outset of the crisis, we identified more than 1 million people who were classified as extremely vulnerable for specific clinical reasons. As of last week, more than 1.8 million had been contacted by the NHS and the Department for Work and Pensions and asked to shield themselves, with GPs continuing to refer others. For those who do not have family, friends or neighbours to support them, we have delivered more than 600,000 food boxes.

Brendan Clarke-Smith [V]: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his answer. In my constituency, we have been fortunate to benefit from the excellent work of the voluntary sector and groups such as Bassetlaw Community and Voluntary Service and Bassetlaw Action Centre. Will he join me in recognising the valuable contribution of such groups in supporting local authorities in the fight against covid-19?

Robert Jenrick: In addition to my hon. Friend, it is my privilege to represent part of the Bassetlaw district, so I am more than happy to join him in thanking those wonderful organisations, which I also know well and which are doing a great job in supporting local communities. In addition to the individuals who are being shielded and who benefit from the national scheme, millions of other people, such as the elderly and vulnerable in communities across the country, are benefiting from the work of charities, faith groups and local councils. I encourage anyone who wants to work with them to go on to the Government's GoodSAM app and see the opportunities that are available in their local area.

David Johnston [V]: The supermarkets have clearly got a big job on their hands, but my constituents who are shielding in Wantage and Didcot are finding their approach inconsistent. Some are very responsive, with dedicated telephone lines and email addresses that get people's issues resolved quickly. Others have fobbed people off with lines that are never answered, and frequently asked questions instead of a tailored response that helps solve people's problems. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that in his work with DEFRA, he will push the supermarkets to be consistent in their approach and get the shielded the online delivery slots they really need?

Robert Jenrick: Individuals who are being shielded and who have registered with the Government through our website on gov.uk or through the call centre have their details passed on to national supermarkets, so they should in time be on the supermarkets' priority access lists. There is a challenge for the supermarkets in having sufficient capacity on those privileged delivery lists, and they are working very hard to increase that. I understand that at the beginning of the crisis, there were typically 2.1 million delivery slots in the entire supermarket sector. That has already increased to 2.6 million, and within a couple of weeks we are told by the supermarkets that it will be close to 3 million. The more they can

increase capacity, the easier it will be to broaden out those privileged slots to more members of the public who deserve them.

Anthony Browne: Parish councils in South Cambridgeshire have been heavily involved in co-ordinating the volunteer effort and bringing support to vulnerable people, and I commend them for stepping up to the plate and for that vital work, but at the same time many parish councils, including Cottenham and Cambourne, are suffering a loss of income—for example, they can no longer hire out halls—and some are suffering financial distress. My right hon. Friend has talked about the welcome support he is giving to county councils and district councils. Will he tell me what his Department is doing to support parish councils in their time of need?

Robert Jenrick: I am very grateful to parish councils, their members and their clerks for the vital work they are also doing to support communities. They harness the networks of familiarity and loyalty upon which society is built and have the relationships to support the vulnerable. I can announce today that as we bring forward the allocations for the £1.6 billion of funding, there will be a significant increase in the amount of money paid to district councils. More than 70% of district councils will receive an additional £1 million and in many cases significantly more, and I ask those district councils to work with their parish councils where appropriate to ensure that a fair share of that funding flows through to parish councils, if they are in financial distress.¹

Mr Speaker: We now go across to Clive Betts.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab) [V]: To even more scenic Yorkshire.

The Secretary of State is right to commend councils for the excellent work they are doing, particularly to help the most vulnerable in our communities and to commit the resources necessary to ensure councils have the finances to do that. Yesterday at the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, both the Local Government Association and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy said that in the current circumstances it would be wise to postpone the fair funding review and the business rate retention scheme changes, and in 12 months' time have a much more fundamental review to put local government finances on a sustainable footing for the long term. Will the Secretary of State give serious consideration to those proposals?

Robert Jenrick: I am grateful for the comments of the Chair of the Select Committee, and I think it is true that capacity in local councils is extremely stretched at this moment in time, so a fundamental reform such as fair funding, which we need to get right in everybody's interests, would be difficult to take forward in the way that we would all wish it to be at the current time. I will give further thought to that and work with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor before coming back to the House or the sector with a decision.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP) [V]: We know that coronavirus does not restrict borders or immigration status. Many asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers

1. [Official Report, 29 April 2020, Vol. 675, c. 4MC.]

find themselves not only socially isolating, but in financial destitution. Last month, the Prime Minister said that those people would get the support from the Home Office that they need and deserve. Can I ask the Secretary of State why people are still being told that they have no recourse to public funds? They are being left in complete isolation at the height of a global pandemic.

Robert Jenrick: We are really proud of the work that local councils have done in England, and there is a similar workstream in Scotland to bring people off the streets and offer them safer accommodation. Today more than 90% of rough sleepers within England are in safer accommodation, such as hotels. A huge amount of work has now to be done, having brought those people in, to care for them and then to work through what the next steps are, so that they can move on to better accommodation and greater support in the future. With respect to no recourse to public funds, the Government's position and the law have not changed, but councils are able to use their discretion within the law to support those individuals, as they would in the normal way.

Mr Speaker: I must explain that Minister Clarke has not been able to get connected and I must thank Minister Chris Pincher for stepping in—I now call him to answer the substantive question tabled by Yvonne Fovargue.

Covid-19: Local Authority Revenue

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the reduction in local authority revenue as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. [901975]

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): What recent estimate he has made of the reduction in local authority revenue as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. [901987]

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What recent estimate he has made of the reduction in local authority revenue as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. [901992]

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): I apologise for the absence of the Minister of State, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke)—I am a small but no less perfectly formed substitute, I hope.

We are working closely with the sector to develop a good understanding of the pressures that local authorities are currently facing. We have announced £3.2 billion of additional funding and measures to support immediate cash-flow concerns. This is a very significant package of support, which responds to the range of pressures that councils have told us they are facing.

Yvonne Fovargue [V]: Wigan Council estimates that it will lose £40 million in income this year, while spending on frontline services has absolutely rocketed because of the coronavirus crisis. In addition, the loss of the dividend from Manchester airport will exacerbate that pressure—*[Inaudible.]*

Christopher Pincher: I think I got the gist of the hon. Lady's question. Wigan Council has received £10.5 million of the original £1.6 billion that has been allocated to local authorities, and that funding is unringfenced so

they can use it as they see fit. As the House will know, local authorities will be fully compensated for the business rates loss that they have incurred, and we will work with councils over the coming weeks to understand what their particular needs are.

Rachel Hopkins [V]: Yesterday the Local Government Association and CIPFA told the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee that the Government must support councils who have lost commercial revenue streams because of the coronavirus crisis. Luton Council relies on commercial income gained through its ownership of London Luton airport. This income has dried up overnight. The Government promised to do whatever is necessary to financially support councils, so when will they be introducing funding for councils that have lost considerable commercial income to avoid those councils being forced to cut vital frontline services?

Christopher Pincher: I am obliged to the hon. Lady for her question. In addition to the announcements I have just made, I can tell her that Luton Council has received £5.4 million of funding from that very significant package that we have put together. We have also deferred £2.6 billion in payments to central Government and we will work with local authorities to understand their particular needs. I point out that the County Councils Network, the Local Government Association and the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board have all welcomed the Government's interventions.

Jeff Smith [V]: I suspect that the Minister is going to tell me how much Manchester has been given, which is about 12% of what is actually needed. In Manchester, the council is forecasting £125 million in lost income this financial year as a result of coronavirus. That is the money that has kept services going in the face of some of the harshest cuts in the public sector and is allowing the council to lead the response to covid-19. Will the Minister pledge to fully reimburse councils for lost income, so that they can have the certainty they need to carry on their vital work on the frontline?

Christopher Pincher: I congratulate all local authorities on the hard work that they are undertaking at this critical time. The hon. Gentleman is right: I am going to tell him that his authority has received £18.6 million in the first tranche of funds made available to local authorities, and more will come. In addition to what I have already said, let me reiterate that we are going to work with local authorities to ensure that they get the help they need to see them through this crisis. We have made that commitment—the Chancellor has made that commitment and I reiterate it here at the Dispatch Box.

Covid-19: Local Authority Shortfalls

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): What estimate he has made of shortfalls in funding for local authorities as a result of (a) additional expenditure, (b) loss of budgeted income and (c) inability to deliver planned savings during the covid-19 outbreak. [901977]

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): The Department is working closely with the sector to ensure that we have a well-rounded understanding of the impacts of covid-19 on its finances and capacity. We have already

announced a significant package of additional funding worth over £3.2 billion, alongside introducing several other measures to support immediate cash flow concerns.

Greg Smith [V]: I warmly welcome the steps that the Government have taken to support local government at this time and I put on record my thanks to council workers in Buckinghamshire Council for their professional and dynamic response to covid-19. To reflect a local concern, Buckinghamshire Council came together as a new unitary only on 1 April, and it estimates, from lost income streams and an inability to deliver the savings planned as it put those five councils into one, potential pressure of £22.5 million over three months and £67 million if the crisis extends to a year. Will my right hon. Friend give me an assurance that the Department is working with all councils to ensure that costs are fully met?

Christopher Pincher: I echo my hon. Friend's tribute to Buckinghamshire Council. To date, it has received £10.6 million of additional funding to support its response to covid-19 and it will receive further support from a second tranche of funding, as will other local authorities, for which allocations will be announced imminently. This month, Buckinghamshire will also receive an up-front payment of three months of social care grants, totalling £3.4 million. We are also deferring three months of the council's payments to Government under the business rate retention scheme between April and June, which is worth £25 million. I hope that is of some help to the council and to my hon. Friend.

Covid-19: Local Authority Support

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): What steps he is taking to regularly assess the adequacy of support for local authorities during the covid-19 outbreak. [901982]

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): What steps he is taking to regularly assess the adequacy of support for local authorities during the covid-19 outbreak. [901988]

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): I express once again my gratitude and admiration and that of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the vital work that councils are doing. We have been in constant contact with councils up and down the country from Cornwall to Cumbria to listen to their concerns. As I have said, more than £3.2 billion demonstrates our very real support for that sector.

Mark Fletcher: District councils face an acute cash flow problem in the next few months as normal revenue streams have dried up. Although, as the Minister has outlined, there is plenty of financial support available from the Government, has the Department considered, as North East Derbyshire District Council and the District Councils' Network have suggested, providing more flexibility and innovative approaches to short and medium-term borrowing?

Christopher Pincher: As with unitary authorities or county councils, I assure my hon. Friend that we are committed to ensuring that councils, including district councils, are supported. My hon. Friend the Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government holds regular talks with the District Councils' Network. Indeed,

he had a call with them just yesterday. As I have said, councils will be able to defer £2.6 billion of payments they are due to make to central Government over the next three months. With that support, district councils are ensuring that vulnerable people receive the care that they need and deserve. I am impressed by the work of North East Derbyshire District Council, among others, to pay grants to small businesses.

Joy Morrissey: Will my right hon. Friend join me in again praising the excellent work of Buckinghamshire Council during the covid-19 crisis? As my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) said, we now have a unitary authority. What financial assurances can my right hon. Friend give Buckinghamshire Council, given the reduction in our income and the increase in our statutory duties associated with covid-19?

Christopher Pincher: In addition to the points I made to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith), I emphasise that authorities up and down the country, including Buckinghamshire Council, are performing admirably by supporting businesses, charities and the most vulnerable in society. As I set out in my earlier answer, I am happy to say that Buckinghamshire Council received more than £10 million from the first tranche of funding, which was paid on 27 March, and it will receive further support from the second tranche, for which allocations will be announced imminently.

I assure my hon. Friend that we will continue to work with councils such as hers over the coming weeks to ensure that they are managing as the pandemic progresses.

Covid-19: Housing Market

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): What plans the Government have to support the recovery of the housing market after the covid-19 outbreak. [901980]

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): As Mike Yarwood used to say, "This is me".

The Government have engaged closely with the housing industry and stand ready to support its recovery. I have spoken to the Home Builders Federation, large developers, small and medium-sized enterprises, niche developers, metal matrix composite manufacturers, housing associations, the private rented sector and the National Residential Landlords Association to identify their challenges. Building on the immediate support that the Chancellor has already provided, we will bring forward measures to support renters and buyers, as well as continuing to drive forward a package of housing reforms to get Britain building again.

Stephen Crabb [V]: It is vital for delivering our national housebuilding mission and for the wider economy that we get the construction sector back to work as quickly as is safely possible. While it is extremely welcome that some of the UK's largest construction firms have announced that they will resume work, smaller firms are nervous about returning without a full green light from Government, so what measures is the Minister putting in place to ensure that the construction industry gets all the support it needs to make sound decisions about getting sites reopened?

Christopher Pincher: I am obliged to my right hon. Friend for that question. He is absolutely right: getting building going again is vital to our economy. Something like 100,000 extra homes adds 1% to our GDP, so work in construction can and should continue where it is safe to do so. We are working with a range of developers and

organisations to make sure that they feel it is safe to go back to work, including the big developers that he described but also a range of SMEs that are keen to get that green light. I hope that further developers will follow the work that Taylor Wimpey, Vistry and others have done to get back to work, and we will certainly help them to do so.

Public Services

12.32 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on the work the Government have undertaken over recent weeks to support and steer our critical public services through the coronavirus pandemic. First, I thank all those on the frontline of our public services for the spirit of selflessness and commitment to others that they have demonstrated in dealing with this pandemic—nurses, doctors, porters, cleaners, paramedics, pharmacists, care home staff, prison and police officers, teachers, social workers and those preparing and delivering food, collecting our refuse and administering the welfare system. They deserve our gratitude; they need our support. They are in all our minds. They are the very best of us. I am sure that everyone in the House observed that one-minute silence at 11 o'clock today, as we reflected on the sacrifices being made by so many on our behalf.

This pandemic has claimed more than 20,000 lives and has left every community across the country grieving. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those who have suffered loss, in the humble knowledge that every life is precious. As the Prime Minister said on his welcome return to work yesterday, we are dealing with

“the biggest single challenge this country has faced since the war”.

Like him, I thank the British people for their forbearance and solidarity as we have all had to abide by the guidance on social distancing, which restricts cherished liberties but protects precious lives.

The challenges that the pandemic confronts us with require an unprecedented response from Government. For that reason, as the House will know, on 17 March, we established four ministerial implementation groups to lead the Government's response to this pandemic. The Health Secretary chairs one group, co-ordinating work on the NHS and social care; the Chancellor chairs the group considering how to support business and the economy; and the Foreign Secretary chairs the group co-ordinating our international response. I chair the general public sector group, which looks at how we support the delivery of public services beyond the NHS and social care, working with colleagues from across the UK Government and Ministers from the Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive. I am very grateful to colleagues from the devolved Administrations for their participation and their constructive contributions to all our discussions. Those discussions have helped us to understand how the virus has affected every part of our United Kingdom, enabling us to take action that meets the needs of people across all our nations.

The ministerial implementation group has now met 30 times, and we have considered the impact of the pandemic on: schools and children's services; the police; the Prison and Probation Service; the courts; the food supply chain; the welfare system; charities; and support for the most vulnerable. With my colleague the Environment Secretary, we have been working to address the shortfall in the agricultural workforce, in order to protect our domestic food supply, working closely with the industry to launch the “Pick for Britain” campaign. Working

with the Education Secretary, we have established the free school meal voucher scheme, to make sure that children who need it can continue to access food, despite school closures. That scheme has seen 15,500 schools place orders for vouchers, of which £29 million has been redeemed. We were able to ensure that more than 60% of schools were open every day over the Easter holidays to provide places for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children. In addition, we have launched the Oak National Academy, providing 180 video lessons each week. We have committed £100 million to ensure that remote education is accessible for all, including by providing laptops, tablets and routers to disadvantaged children. Since the end of March, 90% of rough sleepers known to councils have been made an offer of accommodation, ensuring that some of the most vulnerable people in our society can stay safe during this pandemic.

Of course, we recognise that this is not just a national crisis; it is also a local one, in communities across the country. We have deployed dedicated military planning support to every local resilience forum. There are 156 military planners embedded across the country, helping the LRFs to co-ordinate and protect local services and supplies, with additional support from senior Whitehall officials and named resilience advisers in regional knowledge hubs. Of course, this crisis has put existing services under huge strain. To bolster them, we have worked with the Ministry of Defence to mobilise a covid support force of 19,060 strong, of whom 2,948 personnel are now committed, supporting a total of 79 military assistants to the civil authority tasks nationwide.

Our police have been working hard to keep people safe, while enforcing the new measures the Prime Minister put in place just over a month ago. They have issued 3,203 fines between 27 March and 13 April to those who have flouted social distancing rules, and this number will have increased considerably since then—this is all dedicated to helping to save lives and protect the NHS. We have tested more than 150,000 key workers and their families for coronavirus, allowing those who do not have it to go back to work and protecting those who do have it. We have also made sure that the civil service and the wider public sector are resourced to operate under the considerable new pressures imposed by this virus. We have worked to fill about 1,300 covid-19 roles through civil service redeployments, with more than 400 civil servants now moving to the Department of Health and Social Care.

We also recognise that there are people who have developed new needs as a result of coronavirus, as well as individuals whose pre-existing needs are now more acute or more complex. The Government are undertaking a programme of work to support those who have not been identified as shielded but who are still vulnerable. We know that many local community organisations have stepped forward to help their friends and neighbours at this time. The Government want to support that activity, and we welcome the important role that volunteers, charities and local authorities are playing throughout this crisis. More than 750,000 people have signed up to the NHS volunteer responders programme, and more than 600,000 have had their ID verified, to start helping with tasks such as collecting shopping, providing telephone support, transporting patients and helping with supplies for the NHS. To support this effort, and to make sure that people know where to turn, we have been working

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to signpost people to existing and available support, whether local, national or voluntary, through the website address www.gov.uk/find-coronavirus-support. This service has supported more than 35,000 people since its launch on 10 April. In addition, we are working with supermarkets to ensure that a greater number of online delivery slots are made available explicitly to those most in need. We have also been working to understand and identify where there are gaps in provision, and what government, working with local and voluntary partners, can do to address that. A notable example of that is the Home Office's announcement of an initial £2 million of funding to immediately bolster domestic abuse helplines and online support for those at risk.

There will, of course, be further challenges ahead, and I do not shirk from acknowledging that we as a Government will not have got every judgment right. Indeed, many people, including the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) have asked fair questions about the Government's response in a constructive spirit. I and my colleagues will do our best at all times to respond to those questions and challenges, because we owe it to our public sector workers to work collaboratively, and to harness all available resources in the fight against this virus. In that light, it is important to recognise just how much we all owe to the stoicism and steadfastness, hard work and heroism, compassion and commitment of those working on the front line of public service. We owe them so much, and we in Government will do everything we can to support them. It is in that spirit that I commend this statement to the House.

12.40 pm

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his good words about the constructive approach taken by the Opposition, which is very much our approach, and for an advance copy of his statement.

This year is the 72nd anniversary of our national health service, and perhaps never in its history have we appreciated it as much as we do today. To all our public sector workers, in all our public services, let me say this: we are all hugely grateful for everything you do. You are the foundation stone of our communities and our society.

Let me start by asking the Minister about social care. Unlike our national health service, social care is hugely fragmented but no less vital. At the weekend, Ministers said that deaths in care homes were declining in the same way as they are in hospitals. However, the most up-to-date statistics tell a different story. Weekly figures published today by the Office for National Statistics show that 4,316 deaths outside hospitals that involved covid-19 were registered in England and Wales up to 19 April. Of those, 3,096 took place in care homes—almost treble the number of deaths recorded the previous week. The number of overall deaths in care homes has trebled in three weeks. Will the Minister now correct the Government's claims that deaths in care homes are falling? Without accurate and up-to-date information, it is difficult to know how this awful virus is progressing. Will the Minister commit to work with the Care Quality Commission and the Office for National Statistics to publish data on a daily basis, just as we do for our hospitals?

It is over a month since the Government introduced the lockdown measures, which the Opposition support. We all recognise that there will be no rapid return to the world we knew before, but what might the journey out of lockdown look like? Lockdown comes with its own risks. Refuge has reported a 25% spike in calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline, and the number of deaths associated with domestic violence have more than doubled. Will the Minister support our calls for £75 million to be made available to domestic violence charities to support those who are struggling? What assessment have the Government made of current PPE provisions, and other protections that the police will need going forward?

One of the most concerning aspects of the lockdown has been the impact on vulnerable children who risk falling behind their peers, despite the best efforts of our teachers and social workers. The Government must give advice to schools that is based on scientific advice, but will the Minister confirm that they are working on plans to reopen schools with school leaders, education unions and parents? One million children lack access to electronic devices on the internet, which are essential for home learning. Will the Government consider expanding their scheme to provide free devices to children who are in need of them? Will the Minister update the House on efforts to ensure that our most vulnerable children are safe during lockdown?

Let me turn to personal protective equipment and face masks, because the Cabinet Office is responsible for Government procurement. An increasing number of countries are advising the wearing of face masks when out in public. Face masks are now mandatory in shops or on public transport in many German states, and the Japanese Government have sent free face masks to 50 million households. To prepare for that possibility and to learn from the mistakes that the Government made in not stockpiling or sourcing sufficient levels of PPE for NHS and care staff, will the Minister say how many face masks the Government have stockpiled? How many would we need on a monthly basis if they became mandatory out in public? Where has the stockpile been sourced from, and where are additional face masks being produced? What preparations have been made to ensure their effective and fair distribution?

Members across the House will be aware of shortages in PPE in hospitals, care homes, and for other frontline workers in their constituencies. A survey by the Royal College of Physicians has shown that 27% of doctors are still being forced to reuse single-use protective equipment, more than 30% do not have access to protective gowns, and just 50% have access to protective goggles. Does the Minister accept that those statistics from the Royal College of Physicians show the reality for too many doctors?

Following last night's "Panorama", how can the Government claim to have delivered 1 billion items of PPE, when that number included counting individual gloves and paper towels? Will the Minister provide the House with a breakdown of those 1 billion PPE items by type, and place a copy in the House of Commons Library today? With huge PPE shortages in care homes, will the Minister say when the so-called "clipper" service will be up and running for local councils to access PPE, with reports that it will not be available for another three weeks?

Is he confident about the standards of PPE in care homes, given that our advice falls below that of the World Health Organisation standard?

We came to the lockdown too late, with inadequate PPE and testing too late, so we want the Government to get the decisions right this time to help people to plan, to ensure that the Government take the right action to prevent infection rates rising again, and to build and maintain the confidence of the public. Will the Government commit to holding talks with teachers, trade unions, businesses and local authorities about how a strategy can be developed in the best interests of public health and the economy? Will the Minister commit to publishing the Government's next steps?

We stand ready to support the Government. It is in our national interest that we defeat this virus, and the questions posed today are to help the Government and all of us get the answers to these difficult questions right. I hope that, as we come through this, we will build a national recovery plan to help our NHS, public services, businesses, workers, families and communities to recover, to be more resilient, to end austerity and to value, cherish and reward what really matters to all of us, now and in the future.

Michael Gove: May I join you, Mr Speaker, in welcoming the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) back to the Front Bench? She demonstrated, in the detailed and thoughtful questions she asked, what an asset she will be to the Opposition in the months to come. I congratulate her on her elevation to the shadow Cabinet—it is richly deserved.

The hon. Lady rightly points out that this is the 72nd year in which the national health service has existed, and she rightly reminds us all that if ever there was an occasion, a moment or a crisis that reminds us how much we need and cherish our national health service, this is it. I underline my thanks to all those who work in the NHS, just as she did.

The hon. Lady asked specifically about social care, and she cited the figures from the Office for National Statistics that have just been produced. Those figures relate to deaths in the week up to 17 April, and they are indeed deeply concerning. The coronavirus pandemic has affected our communities. We have had outbreaks in hospitals and particularly distressing outbreaks in care homes.

The way in which we record deaths in the NHS depends on each NHS trust reporting daily on deaths. Care home deaths are recorded differently through a model that the Office for National Statistics has used that provides us with a weekly update on deaths overall. We will, of course, look at all ways in which we can ensure that we have the most accurate information, but the method that we have used is the one that the national statistician has underpinned as robust and reliable. While we all want information as rapidly as possible, we also need reliable information to ensure that our response is appropriate and adequate. The hon. Lady suggested that we work with the Care Quality Commission and the Office for National Statistics to see if we can improve the collection of data, and we will of course at all times look to ensure that we have data that is both timely and accurate to make sure that we have the right response.

The hon. Lady also mentioned domestic violence, and it is sadly the case that the number of reported incidents, or the number of calls to domestic violence helplines, have shown that there is an increased risk and danger for many under our lockdown stipulations. She rightly drew attention to the fact that as well as the £2 million that we have devoted to charities, the Government have made available an additional £750 million to them. I know that the Minister for safeguarding, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), is talking to the Treasury now about how we can ensure that a proportion of that £750 million can go to those who are at risk of domestic violence.

The hon. Member for Leeds West also asked about vulnerable children. It is absolutely the case that we ensured that schools would remain open so that not just the children of key workers but vulnerable children could attend. However, the proportion of vulnerable children who have been attending school is lower than many of us would want. Detailed work is going on with schools and local authorities to make sure that we can encourage and support more families to ensure that vulnerable children are in school, where they can receive the education and support they need. The Education Secretary will be saying more about that in due course.

It is also the case, as the hon. Lady rightly pointed out, that because of the lockdown measures, there is a risk of increasing educational inequality. Children in homes with access to technology and with parents capable of providing support will find it easier to keep up their learning than those without, which is why we have instituted the virtual academy that I referred to in my statement. It is also why we need to work even harder to ensure that children have the resources they need, and that poorer children and vulnerable children are in school as quickly as possible.

The hon. Lady asked if we would talk to teaching unions and others in education. We will do just that, because part of our effort to ensure that we can have a safe exit from some of the restrictions that we face at the moment will be dialogue with employers, trade unions and others, and her question gives me the opportunity to say how much I appreciated the chance to talk to trade unions in forums organised by Frances O'Grady. In particular, I appreciated the conversation I had with my friend and colleague Len McCluskey, in which he made a number of valuable suggestions about how we as a country could respond more effectively.

The hon. Lady mentioned face masks as part of a broader effort to ensure that we have the right personal protective equipment. As she knows, there is a difference between the high-spec surgical face masks that will be required in NHS and other healthcare settings, and the sorts of face coverings that can ensure that we limit the droplets that each of us might be responsible for producing in particular settings. I can confirm that Lord Agnew, the joint Cabinet Office and Treasury Minister, has launched a domestic effort to ensure that we produce just such masks, and that is part of the broader effort that Lord Deighton is leading on to ensure that we can bolster the production of personal protective equipment.

The hon. Lady asked about the detailed figures on personal protective equipment. The figures that the Government have produced refer to the fact that we have distributed, in the course of this crisis, 143 million masks, 163 million aprons, 1.8 million gowns and 547 million

[*Michael Gove*]

gloves. Depending on the surgical setting, gloves are sometimes delivered in pairs, groups of four, or different consignments. On 26 April, we had delivered over 90 million items of PPE across the health and social care system, and the figure specifically on that day included 1.6 million masks, 5.8 million aprons, 46,000 gowns and 10.5 million gloves.

Of course, it is incumbent on all of us to make sure that we do everything we can to support those on the frontline, and it is in that spirit that I thank the hon. Lady for her questions and look forward to working with her and other colleagues to put our frontline public sector workers first.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con) [V]: Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking the wonderful volunteers and staff at McNair Shirts in Slaithwaite for the PPE gowns that they have produced for local hospitals in Huddersfield and Halifax? Will he also tell me what the Government are doing to improve the local procurement of protective equipment so that local companies and volunteers who are making their own PPE can get it to our frontline staff and carers—the ones who actually need it?

Michael Gove: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and commend the work of those in his constituency. We have seen a great national effort to support those on the frontline. There has been the establishment of scrub hubs, as individuals have deliberately set out to use their own time, energy and resources to provide additional material for those on the frontline of our NHS. The Government have received over 10,000 offers of support and help with respect to the provision, supply and distribution of personal protective equipment, and we are responding to them all.

Mr Speaker: We now go over to Pete Wishart, who has two minutes.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP) [V]: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Speaker.

May I thank the right hon. Gentleman for prior sight of his statement, albeit at the last possible moment, and gently encourage him to do more to engage with all Opposition parties throughout this pandemic? We have had no communication with him for weeks.

May I join the right hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to all those who work in our public services? They go way above and beyond in their duty of care for all nations. I also, of course, welcome the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) to her new place on the Labour Front Bench. I, too, look forward very much to working with her.

Those in our public services should expect our full support and to be given the very best equipment to carry out their heroic and difficult tasks. Last night the nation watched with horror the BBC's "Panorama" report on a timetable of inaction and unpreparedness. It reported that those working in public services were being sent out to the frontline without the necessary protection, and that the Government were told years ago to stockpile certain PPE to cope with a pandemic but failed to do so.

May I therefore ask the right hon. Gentleman some gentle questions? First, why were we so unprepared? Why were gowns, visors, swabs and body bags left out of the stockpile when it was set up in 2009? Surely cleaning products are not counted as PPE, and there should be no question at all that individual gloves are counted as single PPE items. I also want the right hon. Gentleman to convince me that paper towels are not counted as PPE. The Royal College of Physicians has found that 27% of doctors are reusing, or have used, their PPE. Why are they having to reuse PPE?

The Health Secretary said that 11 million PPE items had been sent to Scotland, which is our responsibility, from the UK pandemic stockpile, but that has now been downgraded to only "committed". How many items from that 11 million have actually been delivered?

We all want to get behind this Government and to cheer them on when they are doing their best, but we also want them to admit when mistakes are made and to acknowledge shortcomings. Is the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster now prepared to acknowledge his shortcomings and admit to some of those mistakes?

Michael Gove: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his questions. On the subject of communication between the Government and parties, in nearly all of the 30 meetings that my ministerial implementation group has held, there have been representatives of the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. I have had the opportunity to discuss how we can co-ordinate our response with Scottish Government Ministers including Mike Russell, Aileen Campbell and John Swinney, and it has been a pleasure to do so. They have operated in a collaborative fashion, as have the Labour members of the Welsh Government, and the Democratic Unionist party, Sinn Féin, Ulster Unionist party, Alliance, and Social Democratic and Labour party Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive.

Indeed, I noted that on Radio 4's "Westminster Hour" just the other night, the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), the deputy leader of the SNP group in Westminster, paid tribute to the extent of collaborative work. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) does not agree with the deputy leader of his parliamentary delegation and has such little faith in Scottish Government Ministers making sure that priorities are addressed in the daily meetings we have.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the stockpile of personal protective equipment. The stockpile that we had before this pandemic was explicitly designed in accordance with advice from the Government's scientific advisers on the new and emerging respiratory virus threats advisory group, and of course it was explicitly for a flu pandemic. The nature of coronavirus is different from that of a flu pandemic, as we all know, and we, like every Government across the world, have had to respond to this new virus by ensuring, not just with personal protective equipment but in every respect, that we are in a position to retool, refit and upgrade our response.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the support that the UK Government are giving to Scotland. I am pleased to confirm that the UK pandemic stockpile has been responsible for transferring millions of items to the NHS in Scotland. It is also the case that the new

testing centres in Scotland have been set up with the assistance of the British Army, and that our RAF has been responsible for supporting the Scottish national health service in making sure that individuals in remote island communities can receive the care they need. And, of course, it is the strength of the UK Exchequer that has allowed business support to be provided to Scottish businesses.

One of the truly impressive things about the response across these islands has been the way in which people have put aside their ideological and political differences to work in the interests of one United Kingdom. Even at a time of test and trial for our nations, we should take pride in the efforts of the Northern Ireland, Scottish, Welsh and English people.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con) [V]: May I wholeheartedly join my right hon. Friend in the tribute he paid to NHS staff and all the key workers throughout the four nations of our kingdom? As we draw close to the summer, the agricultural sector's need for labour is increasing. With reduced access to foreign labour, what steps are the Government taking to support the agricultural sector?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the steps that the Environment Secretary has taken, which I referred to briefly in my statement, is to work with the farming industry in order to ensure that more UK workers can support our farmers to produce the food we need. Whether it is picking asparagus or soft fruit or helping in other ways, thousands of people have stepped up to help our farming sector. It is vital work, and I commend all those who are doing it.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab) [V]: We have seen Wales move ahead of the UK Government in many areas throughout this crisis, but in an effort to ensure greater collaboration, with decisions coming out of the lockdown made equally, the First Minister of Wales has called for a new weekly framework of decision making between the four nations. Will the right hon. Gentleman agree to that proposal, under which officials meet during the first part of the week and Ministers then meet before a final meeting at Cobra?

Michael Gove: It is not necessarily appropriate to have a full Cobra meeting every week. When those meetings do occur, we will of course ensure that all representatives—First Ministers or Deputy First Ministers—of the devolved Administrations are invited. I enjoy regular conversations with Mark Drakeford and his colleagues, and I am always happy to discuss with him in any forum the steps that we should take together.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con) [V]: The additional capacity for testing careworkers and their families if they have symptoms of covid-19 is welcome news, but what plans are there to extend that to all careworkers who have been in contact with residents or staff who have covid-19 and to those who work outside the NHS in other care sectors?

Michael Gove: The number of tests capable of being administered and being administered has increased significantly in recent days, as we move towards our 100,000 target. My hon. Friend is right: careworkers

are at the front of the queue. We now have across the United Kingdom 48 testing centres, each of which will have two military units assigned to them, in order to be able to do mobile testing, and care homes are our first priority.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab) [V]: I want to press the Minister further on what he said to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) about deaths in care homes. He said that “every life is precious”. We know from the CQC that 4,343 people died in care homes between 10 April and 24 April, and that is just up to four days ago. We now know that one in three people are dying from covid in care homes. Why are the Government not doing a better job of valuing every tragic loss and informing policy better by making it a real priority to have up-to-date figures on all deaths from covid-19?

Michael Gove: We do value every life. Every life is precious, and the deaths of those in care homes, in our hospitals and in the community are a source of grief, sadness and loss to us all. The figures that we produce are the figures that the Office for National Statistics validates. It is vital that Government figures are supported by the ONS, so that they are robust and detailed, but we will work with everyone constructively to ensure that we have the appropriate data in order to ensure that our response is tailored in accordance with those facts and with the science.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for the “Pick for Britain” initiative, but why are the employers being so picky, with many people being told that their services are not required? What assessment has been made of the potential impact of mandatory quarantine on air travellers, which will certainly devastate business travel?

Michael Gove: I would hope that all employers will make use of the willing hands available. I am not the most dextrous of Members of this House, but even I was able to help with the tattie howking when I was younger, so all willing hands can help in our fields at this time. On the question of quarantine and how we deal with international travel, it is important that we ensure that we depress the infection curve here, but of course we are keeping under review our approach towards international travellers.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab) [V]: Hundreds of thousands of people working legally in the UK have no recourse to public funds, so stopping work means many have been left with no income at all. Will the Government lift the no recourse to public funds restriction for the duration of this crisis, to give those hard-working families a chance?

Michael Gove: This is a matter that has been discussed at the Ministry with the implementation group and it is under review.

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for the excellent work that he and his colleagues are doing, and particularly the team behind the gov.uk website, which is world-leading in how rapidly updated and comprehensive it is. That is

[Andrew Griffith]

a significant achievement. May I press him, though, and ask that when the time is right—I hope that will be soon—the outdoor economy and garden centres, including those in West Sussex, will be in the first wave of modifications? They are important to the emerging mental health crisis, but they are also—if I can put it this way—economically wilting with every day of the peak growing season that they remain closed.

Michael Gove: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words about the Government Digital Service and gov.uk. The civil servant who leads the work on gov.uk, Jen Allum, been doing a wonderful job in making sure that we can provide people with accurate, timely and comprehensive information. My hon. Friend also makes a valid point about garden centres. One of the things we know about this disease is that it spreads more easily inside than outside and, as the Government reflect on how to lift the current restrictions, that will be an important factor.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD) [V]: On 11 March, I asked the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care whether he would be providing protective equipment for care workers. I was told that the Government were taking that into account. Given the right hon. Gentleman's Department's responsibility for procurement, will he please confirm when a full assessment was made of the protective equipment needs of social care providers, when that equipment started to be distributed, and when Clipper, the long-promised central distribution service for local resilience forums, will finally be operational?

Michael Gove: New guidance was issued and approved on the appropriate use of personal protection equipment in health and also in social care settings some fortnight ago, and the Clipper service will be there to ensure that all local resilience forums and local service providers can have access to additional personal protective equipment.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con) [V]: Will my right hon. Friend explain how he is working with the devolved Administrations to ensure that all four nations of the UK have the best possible advice in a timely manner to ensure that they are able to deal with this pandemic?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to stress that working together across the United Kingdom is the right way to deal with this pandemic. The chief medical officers of all four parts of the United Kingdom meet regularly and scientific advice is shared across the United Kingdom. We want to ensure, as we ease any restrictions, that we do so in as united a way as possible, because consistency of messaging is critical to ensuring that all of us see some of our cherished liberties restored while at the same time protecting precious lives.

Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP) [V]: Today, on International Workers' Memorial Day, our key workers and public sector workers are even more at the forefront of our minds. A decade of Tory-led austerity has hugely cut apart our public services, which play a crucial part in protecting us from covid-19. Scottish public services have lost out on over £13.9 billion in

real terms. Does the Secretary of State agree that the current crisis shows that we need more support for public services, not less?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady is right that we are all reminded of how much we rely on public services, but it is the case that the Scottish Government operate a deficit. The UK Government support the Scottish Government in making sure that public services can be protected. Per capita spending on public services—health and education—is higher in Scotland as a result of the resources that the UK Exchequer provides. This crisis reminds us all that when we work together, while recognising the distinctive nature of each of the four parts of the United Kingdom, we are stronger.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con) [V]: The tourism, leisure and hospitality sector is very important in the Waveney area, and business owners and their staff face serious challenges both while the lockdown is ongoing and once it has been lifted. Notwithstanding the Government's welcome support packages, some businesses do not qualify, and seasonal workers, who could not be furloughed, face a worrying immediate future. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that he is working in a co-ordinated way with other Departments, the devolved Administrations, local government and industry on a sustained recovery strategy?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; in Lowestoft, Beccles and so many other coastal and near-coastal communities, hospitality and other seasonal sectors will be particularly badly affected by the pandemic. That is very much in the minds of the Chancellor and the Business Secretary, and we will be saying more in due course.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab) [V]: Does the Minister accept that one of the lessons of this crisis is that the Government should collect much more data on a routine basis so that they have a much more informed picture of the reality of life in our care homes?

Michael Gove: I think we should collect more data of every kind, make that data open and transparent, and allow people to use that data in a smart way, in order to ensure that we tailor the delivery of public services to those who need them most. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con) [V]: I join my right hon. Friend in paying tribute to our amazing frontline public sector workers. Does he agree that anyone who is convicted of spitting or coughing at those key workers, or of threatening them with covid, should receive an immediate custodial sentence?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. My view is that it is up to the police and the criminal justice system to decide the appropriate response in such situations. It is often the case that non-custodial sentences are as effective as custodial sentences for certain offences, and we also need to ensure that our prison estate is kept as free of infection as possible. An appropriate balance needs to be struck, but my hon. Friend presents a fair challenge, and I will share it with the Justice Secretary.

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab) [V]: My question is straightforward. Can the Minister tell me—no generalities, no kicking the can down the road—on what specific date all care workers can expect to receive PPE?

Michael Gove: I hope it will be the case that all care workers are currently receiving PPE. If there are specific examples of specific care homes where PPE has not been provided, I will be grateful to the hon. Lady for letting me know.

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): Across Bolsover we have seen many individuals and groups step up and really go above and beyond their duty at this time of national crisis. Will my right hon. Friend's committee look into the possibility of creating a special honours list for individuals and organisations that have made such a valuable contribution? May I go further and pass on the suggestion of Brian Kirkland, a constituent of mine in Morton, that we should have an annual day to celebrate the work of our NHS staff?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Brian Kirkland's suggestion is a noble one and I will pass it on to the Prime Minister. Of course, honours are a matter for the Crown, but I am sure that the sentiment my hon. Friend expresses will be well understood across the country.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD) [V]: Recent reports have stated that the contract for the NHS tracking app, which will handle huge amounts of personal and confidential data, is going to be given to the brother of a No.10 data scientist and former vote leave employee and a friend of Dominic Cummings. If this app is to be effective, we need the buy-in from the overwhelming majority of the public. What measures are the Government taking to ensure that trust in this app can be established and maintained?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. It seems to me that whether someone voted leave or remain is irrelevant to the question of their participation in helping us to resolve this crisis. It is my understanding that the app is being developed by NHSX, which is the arm of the NHS responsible for technological innovation under the leadership of the inspirational public servant, Matthew Gould.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con) [V]: I join others in thanking all our key workers, especially those across Chatham and Aylesford, including the many teachers and nursery workers who have worked non-stop, including through the Easter holidays, to keep vulnerable children and children of key workers in schools during this crisis. Will my right hon. Friend join me in also thanking our postmen and women up and down the country, many of whom are trying to work safely in unusual conditions while continuing to provide a service that my own postie describes as similar to the levels at Christmas?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a very, very important point. Postal workers and those who work in the Royal Mail are doing so much to ensure that individuals can keep in touch and that we can all get the goods that we need at this critical time. I am happy to join her in

praising postal workers, workers in the Royal Mail, and members of the Communication Workers Union for everything they are doing at this time.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab) [V]: PPE is essential for frontline NHS workers and care staff. May I ask how the Government responded to the offer of the British Chambers of Commerce in March to help co-ordinate spare PPE for businesses and get it to the frontline?

Michael Gove: As I mentioned earlier, we have had 10,256 offers overall for support with supply, manufacture and distribution of PPE. We have had 192 specific offers of support for the manufacture of PPE, 30 of which are now being taken forward in order to ensure that the equipment that people want to manufacture will be suitably safe for distribution.

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con) [V]: I also want to join the chorus of thanks to our public sector workers for their extraordinary response. In conversation with many of them, I have heard concerns about the changes to the lockdown—[*inaudible*]. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that conversations with unions will continue and that those unions will be involved in any changes to the lockdown that take place?

Michael Gove: Absolutely. My hon. Friend makes an absolutely spot-on point. We will engage with the unions that serve so many public sector workers so well and, as well as engaging with Frances O'Grady and Len McCluskey, we are also grateful for the work of so many other trade union leaders. We will make sure that we work with them in order to ensure that there are safe work places for all.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC) [V]: Global experience indicates that widespread community testing is vital in tackling coronavirus. The Welsh Government had secured a deal with Roche to do 5,000 tests a day, which would have put Wales on a similar level of testing per head of some of the best-performing countries in the world only for Wales to be seemingly gazumped by the British Government. The UK Government are building mega labs in England and Scotland. Will they also commit to building a mega lab in Wales?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point. Testing is something that needs to be done in a co-ordinated way across the United Kingdom. It is the case that the incidence of test take-up in some parts of the United Kingdom, particularly in Scotland, has been less than existing capacity. None the less, I am sure that Welsh scientists and Welsh medics will play a role in ensuring that we can test many more in the future.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con) [V]: Will the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster join me in thanking the Devon and Cornwall police for their proactive approach in preventing people travelling to Cornwall for non-essential purposes, including to visit their second homes and for a holiday? One of the biggest concerns for people in Cornwall is that, as we start to ease the lockdown, we will see an influx of people coming to Cornwall and risk another wave. Can my

[*Steve Double*]

right hon. Friend assure me that as the Government consider lifting the restrictions, they will come with clear and enforceable travel restrictions to prevent that from happening?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is right. Cornwall is beautiful and visiting it is a pleasure, but at the moment, and for some time to come, don't.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): I would like to ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster a question about child sexual abuse and exploitation, and online platform management. Over the weekend, the Internet Watch Foundation reported that there had been an 89% reduction in the number of URLs that were taken down in the past month compared to the previous month, the comparison being 496 in the past month and 14,947 the month before. One of the concerns of the IWF and the industry more widely is the pressure on police in being able to take down indecent images and videos. In his deliberations in the Cabinet Office, will he ensure that the police have enough resources to ensure that children are protected from this form of paedophilia?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman raises an incredibly important point. The Home Secretary has updated my ministerial implementation group on some of the increased risks of child abuse during the pandemic. I will report back to our group and to her the very important point he makes.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. As he mentioned, one of the real positives to come out of the past few weeks has been the collaboration and close working between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations, which has avoided confusion and delivered clear, uniform messages and allowed those fighting the virus on the frontline, such as our amazing staff at NHS Grampian, to know that all levels of government are working for them. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that that collaborative approach will continue and that it is imperative that all our Governments continue to work closely together, demonstrating that the Union is still working?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely spot on. Of course, we recognise the competence of the devolved Administrations in their respective areas, but it is also the case, in dealing with the pandemic, that I have been impressed, cheered and reassured by the way in which Ministers in the Scottish and Welsh Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive have recognised that we are all in this together. As we seek to ease the restrictions that are there at the moment, the closer we can work together the better.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) [V]: Local authorities like Salford City Council are on the frontline of fighting covid-19, from supporting our social care services to providing food for vulnerable people and supporting local businesses. The Chancellor of the Exchequer said the Government will do whatever it takes to defeat covid-19, but councils are now facing the prospect of not having all their additional costs covered. It is imperative that the Government fully fund

the cost of this vital local response. Will the Minister assure me that the Government will do that for Salford City Council?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government has been in touch regularly with local authority leaders and chief executives to make sure they have the resources they need and that some of the administrative burdens that are not necessary at this time are lifted. I will pass on to him the particular concerns the hon. Lady expresses on behalf of the citizens of Salford.

Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con) [V]: My right hon. Friend referred to the work of the Army in his statement and the support that has been provided to local resilience forums. It is fantastic to see them playing their part, as they always do when our country finds itself in need. Will he outline what strategic role they will play moving forward, in particular whether, given their expertise at running operations in the field, they will be utilised to support mobile testing and getting tests to the places we need them?

Michael Gove: Absolutely. I join my hon. Friend in thanking our military for all the support they are giving at the moment. It is the case that we have 48 regional test centres up and running. Each has two teams of military capable of dispensing and administering tests at a distance. One thing we are keeping under review is how we can expand that capacity even further in the future. The role of the military has been absolutely vital. I commend, in particular, Alex Cooper, one of the ex-servicemen who has been absolutely critical to making sure that the Department of Health and Social Care can do everything possible to deliver testing.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) [V]: The Health Secretary promised me nearly two weeks ago that the Government would publish the scientific evidence behind the decision not to self-isolate people arriving at ports and airports, but he has not yet done so. If we look on the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies website, there has been no update, it appears, in the publication of the scientific advice and evidence to the Government since 16 March, which is six weeks ago. It is inconceivable that the Government have not received more scientific advice and evidence since then. Given that transparency and trust should be at the heart of what the Government do and that getting these decisions right is crucial, why are the Government still not publishing the scientific evidence and advice?

Michael Gove: The first thing to say about flights into this country is that many of them are carrying people who are being repatriated and many of them are carrying the personal protective equipment and other goods that we need here, but, as I mentioned earlier, the prospect of changing our approach is something that we are reviewing at the moment. She makes a broader point about the publication of scientific advice, and it is not for me to dictate what SAGE, NERVTAG—the new and emerging respiratory virus threats advisory group—or any of our independent scientific committees should or should not do, but I know that our chief scientific adviser has spoken about the importance of building confidence, and more will I am sure be said in due course.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con) [V]: The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will know how important it will be, as we move into the next phase of dealing with coronavirus, to maintain the high levels of public trust that the Government currently have. To avoid any unnecessary confusion, can he set out for the House, for the purposes of the 100,000 testing target, how the Government define a completed test?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend makes an important point, and there has been some confusion over capacity and tests administered. The target is tests administered, and the figure for the number of tests administered on Thursday, which is the day we have set for the target, will be published on Saturday.

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab) [V]: Our public health departments were once the envy of the world, so will the Minister give the country hope that the Government will reinstate them to their former glory by resourcing them properly and giving them and local authorities immediate access to the SAGE and Cobra planning assumptions, as well as to the NHSX covid-19 data warehouse? No one answer fits all: all local areas are reacting and are at different stages. Can the Minister give assurances?

Michael Gove: Those are very good points, which I will consider and discuss with the Health Secretary.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Can my hon. Friend confirm that, as well as treating patients for covid-19, our NHS is very much there for people needing urgent access to healthcare, and will my right hon. Friend confirm that the NHS is open for business for everybody who needs it? Anybody who is suffering a stroke, a heart attack or other life-threatening conditions should not be deterred from seeking that important medical help.

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend makes a very important point. We must do everything we can to encourage people, particularly those with serious conditions such as cancer, to seek support from the NHS. The effective response that the NHS has mounted to the pandemic so far enables us to treat them as well.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP) [V]: Before Parliament rose before the lockdown, I told the Government that the Soapworks company in my constituency was quite happy to provide soap, which we know is hugely important in this pandemic, but Soapworks has not been contacted by the Government. Can the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster please ensure that urgent contact is established with this company in my constituency that wants to play a part in this national effort?

Michael Gove: Yes.

Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): What contingency plans does my right hon. Friend have in place to ensure that our prisons, such as the Mount in my own patch, remain functional, given the increase in staff absences?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. The Lord Chancellor has ensured that we have a system in prisons where we effectively segment and

isolate those who may have the virus. It is also the case that we have ensured that additional capacity has been sourced. There has also been a very targeted early release programme in order to ensure that we manage the estate appropriately.

James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Community testing and contact tracing will be crucial to keep infection as low as possible in the months ahead. We need an effective system with local understanding of capacity. I am therefore very concerned that the Government's plans for contact tracing seem to rely on a phone-based system with 18,000 staff who will all be recruited nationally. I learned last week that local authority staff in Ealing and elsewhere have not yet been asked to play a part. So will the Minister confirm today whether they will be asked to play a part in contact tracing, and if so, what role and by when?

Michael Gove: Contact tracing is vitally important. It should be done both through the new NHS app that is being developed and through those who are working at Public Health England, and others. But I will consider with the Health Secretary what additional steps may be required.

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con) [V]: Across our country we are seeing some incredible displays of community spirit and selflessness. So will my right hon. Friend join me in praising the incredible work of Bishop Auckland's first unsung hero, Kim Clark, in cooking and delivering over 6,000 meals to the elderly and vulnerable from her very own kitchen?

Michael Gove: That is a fantastic example of community spirit, and just what I would expect from the people of County Durham and Bishop Auckland in particular.

Mr Speaker: Imran Hussain has withdrawn, so I go to James Cartlidge.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con) [V]: My constituents have of late been spending more of their time than usual on gardening, with nowhere to dispose of significant waste because of the closure of household waste recycling centres. Will my right hon. Friend consider reopening such centres fairly soon, because they would appear to offer a low risk of infection but considerable amenity to our constituents?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a very important point that I will take into account as we consider how we relax restrictions.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD) [V]: It has been reported that the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies—SAGE—includes not one molecular virologist, not one intensive care expert, not one nursing lead or immunologist, and only one member from an ethnic minority. So will the Government publish the criteria and selection process used to identify and appoint members of the SAGE group dealing with covid-19?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for mentioning that. I read precisely that statement in *The Guardian* earlier today, and it is useful for the House to be reminded of it. The Scientific Advisory Group for

[Michael Gove]

Emergencies is composed of some of the finest minds in our scientific community, and the criterion for membership is a commitment to doing everything possible to save others' lives. It seems to me that it does not matter what colour someone's skin is if they are committed to saving the lives of others.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con) [V]: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is absolutely imperative to maintain the support of the public and that the best way to do that is, when deciding the next steps, to implement them on a UK-wide basis?

Michael Gove: Absolutely. The more that the four parts of the United Kingdom can co-ordinate the response, the easier it will be for all our citizens to follow the guidance, which is in all our interests.

1.33 pm

More than two hours having elapsed since the commencement of hybrid scrutiny proceedings, the Speaker brought them to a conclusion (Order, 21 April).

Point of Order

1.33 pm

Mr Speaker: Order. I have received notice from Mr Steve Baker that he wished to raise a point of order. His point of order is as follows:

"I omitted to declare my registered interest in Glint Pay Ltd before speaking on monetary policy in the second reading debate on the Finance Bill 2020 on 27 April 2020. I wish to declare the interest and to apologise to the House for late declaration."

I thank the hon. Member for using this means to draw the House's attention to the matter. Nothing more needs to be said.

I will now suspend the House for 30 minutes to allow Members to safely leave the Chamber and for broadcasting colleagues to make the necessary technical changes prior to the start of the substantive proceedings.

1.34 pm

Sitting suspended.

2 pm

On resuming, the House entered into hybrid substantive proceedings (Order, 22 April).

[NB: [V] denotes a Member contributing virtually.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (28 APRIL)

Motion made,

That—

The following arrangements shall apply to today's business:

Business	Timings	Remote Division designation
Domestic Abuse Bill: Second Reading	Up to two hours; suspension; up to two hours	None
Domestic Abuse Bill: Programme	No debate (Standing Order No. 83A(7))	None
Domestic Abuse Bill: Money	No debate (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a))	None

(2) At the conclusion of the debate on the Domestic Abuse Bill the Speaker shall put the Question, That the Bill be now read a second time.—(*Maggie Throup.*)

The Deputy Speaker declared the Question to be agreed to (Order B(4), 22 April).

Domestic Abuse Bill

[Relevant documents: Second Report of the Home Affairs Committee, Home Office preparedness for Covid-19: domestic abuse and risks of harm within the home, HC321; First Report of the Joint Committee on the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill of Session 2017-19, Draft Domestic Abuse Bill, HC 2075, and the Government responses, CP137 and CP214; Written evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, on the Draft Domestic Abuse Bill, reported to the House on 3 April, 10 April and 21 May 2019, HC 570; Letter from Victoria Atkins MP and Edward Argar MP to Harriet Harman MP, dated 20 May 2019; Letter from Harriet Harman MP to Victoria Atkins MP and Edward Argar MP, dated 10 April 2019; Letter from Victoria Atkins MP and Edward Argar MP to Harriet Harman MP, dated 21 January 2019.]

Second Reading

2 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call Secretary Robert Buckland to move Second Reading. He is asked to speak for no more than 20 minutes.

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

It is a great pleasure to open this Second Reading debate, albeit with a sense of déjà vu. Those of us who had the privilege of being in the House on 2 October last year will not have failed to be moved by the many powerful contributions we heard, including from the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), who recounted her own very personal and heart-wrenching experience of domestic abuse. She was not alone in showing great courage by bringing home to this House the devastating impact of domestic abuse on the lives of survivors, as this Bill has also brought forth very personal accounts from, among others, the hon. Members for Bradford West (Naz Shah) and for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). On that occasion, I was able to share my own personal experiences, as a young barrister, of domestic abuse. I will not repeat them today, because I have no doubt that we will hear some memorable speeches in this debate—more testimony, adding power to what has already been said.

After the last debate, some Members approached me privately to share with me their own domestic abuse experiences—stories that are still raw and still cannot be told. For many of us, the sounds and sights witnessed in our homes, often as children, still haunt us many years on. The experiences we have heard recounted by Members are, sadly, all too frequently repeated across the country. I have heard no more harrowing account recently than that of Claire Throssell, whom I had the privilege to meet last October. Claire's young sons, Jack and Paul, were killed at the hands of her abusive partner. No one can imagine the pain and suffering that she has had to endure, but we owe her a debt of gratitude for giving such a powerful voice to the survivors of domestic abuse.

Gratitude is also due to Tracy Graham, a victim of controlling and violent domestic abuse who this year chose to speak out, go public and share her experiences with my local community in Swindon via the new Swindon domestic abuse support service, which I helped

to launch just before lockdown, seven weeks ago. Tracy is not only a domestic abuse ambassador for the service, but is volunteering with the local police as well, to help to support domestic abuse victims who are going through what she went through. She truly is an inspirational young woman—one of many who are standing up, stepping forward and sharing their harrowing experiences, to the benefit of current and future survivors and victims.

It is right, in this time of covid-19, to dwell a little on the impact that this pandemic is having on victims of domestic abuse and their families. We are seeing evidence of it in the increased calls to domestic abuse helplines. My local refuge had an increase in referrals of 80% in one week, and the helpline in my local area had an increase in the number of calls of nearly 30%. People are speaking up and speaking out about domestic abuse, but it is happening even at this time of great crisis.

The phrase “Stay at home”, which we so associate with the directions to deal with covid-19, should be words of reassurance and comfort. The home should be a place of safety, both physical and mental. The concept of the home as a refuge is such a strong one, yet for too many people it is not a refuge. At this time of lockdown, that fear, distress and suffering is multiplied. I assure all victims that help is available. The police continue to respond to incidents of domestic abuse, and anyone in immediate danger should not hesitate to call 999 and the emergency services. Where necessary, the existing civil order framework can be used to remove a perpetrator from the family home in order to protect victims of abuse.

We are working with and listening carefully to domestic abuse and victims organisations to make sure that we understand what their most pressing needs and priorities are, and we are committed to ensuring that victims have a comprehensive package of support available. We have launched a new campaign to signpost victims to the support services available and provided an additional £2.6 million to ensure that the national helplines have the capacity to respond to increased demand.

In addition, we are working with the domestic abuse commissioner to ensure that refuges and other organisations that provide frontline support to victims will be able to access the £750 million fund set aside by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to bolster charities that are responding directly to the pandemic. I am happy to say to the House that allocations under the charities package will be made very shortly indeed. The Home Secretary and I have together been very much engaged in tailoring the requests to ensure that help is targeted where it will make the most difference. Having spoken to police and crime commissioners, I know that many are making available extra resources for safe accommodation.

I am grateful to the Home Affairs Committee for the report that it published yesterday on the pandemic's impact on victims of domestic abuse. I welcome the Committee's support for our public information campaign and the additional funding. We will of course respond promptly to the Committee's recommendations.

In short, this is a concerted period of direct action being taken by the Government. Measures are being taken to address directly the concerns that I know the shadow Home Secretary, the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), whom I welcome to his post, will raise in due course.

[Robert Buckland]

Let me turn to the Bill, which is necessarily about strengthening protection and support for victims in the longer term. I share the frustration of Members from all parties that we are having to repeat a number of stages of this Bill, which was initially championed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). All parties want to see this Bill on the statute book, but we have to put to good use the time available to us since the election to make it an even stronger Bill than the one that came before the House last October.

The aims of the Bill are fourfold: first, to raise awareness of this insidious crime; secondly, to better protect and support victims and their children; thirdly, to transform the response to the criminal, civil and family justice systems; and, fourthly, to improve performance across all national and local agencies. I shall take those objectives in turn.

If we are to tackle domestic abuse effectively, it is vital that the nature of that abuse is properly understood and recognised. Part 1 of the Bill sets out a statutory definition of domestic abuse. It will apply for the purposes of the whole Bill, but we also expect it to be adopted across all agencies that have a shared responsibility for combating this crime and for helping survivors to rebuild their lives. The definition makes it clear that domestic abuse is not confined to violent or sexual abuse, but includes controlling or coercive behaviour, psychological abuse and economic abuse, too. Identifying and calling out domestic abuse in all its manifestations is just a first step. We then need to protect and support victims. In terms of protection, a number of civil orders are already available to help to safeguard survivors, but the existing landscape of occupation orders, non-molestation orders and domestic violence protection orders is complex, and none are, arguably, wholly adequate to the task.

The new domestic abuse protection order—DAPO—will bring together the best elements of the existing civil order regimes. It will be available in the civil, criminal and family courts. It will be flexible, in that the court will determine the length of an order and decide what prohibitions, and positive requirements too, are appropriate to attach to it, including conditions that may compel the respondent to attend perpetrator programmes or require them to wear an electronic tag. The new DAPO will also have teeth, with a breach of conditions being a criminal offence punishable by up to five years' imprisonment or a fine, or both.

We want to get these new orders right so that they work for victims and their children, the police, the courts and others who will have to operate them. We will therefore be piloting these new orders in a small number of areas before rolling them out nationally.

But protecting victims from abuse is never enough on its own. We also need to ensure that they are effectively supported as they reset their lives. The Bill, as reintroduced, includes a significant new measure to that end. When a victim of abuse has to flee their home and seek sanctuary in a refuge or other safe accommodation, it is not enough simply to provide that person with a safe place to sleep. In such circumstances, victims and their children need access to counselling and mental health support, advice about follow-on housing, help in enrolling children in a new school, or specialist support, such as translation services or access to immigration advice. We know that

refuges and other providers of safe accommodation struggle to provide such support so, to plug that gap, the Bill will place new duties on tier 1 local authorities in England. Under part 4 of the Bill, such local authorities will be required to assess the need for accommodation-based support for all victims of domestic abuse and their children in the area. Having identified that need, the relevant local authorities will then be required to develop, publish and give effect to a strategy for the provision of such support in their locality.

Of course, these new duties will come at a cost—some £90 million a year, we estimate. I assure the House that my right hon. Friend the Housing Secretary is committed to ensuring that local authorities are appropriately resourced as part of the spending review.

I know from my own experience of the legal system that appearing as a witness in criminal, civil or family proceedings can be—shall we say—a daunting experience, so we need to make sure that the victims of domestic abuse can give their best evidence in court. In the criminal courts, that often means being able to give evidence hidden from view of the alleged perpetrator or via a video link. The Bill provides that these and other so-called special measures will be automatically available to victims. In the family courts, for a long time, there have been calls for a bar on the practice of perpetrators being able to cross-examine in person the victims of domestic abuse. Such an experience is bound to be traumatising for victims—it must stop. We have listened to the views of the Joint Committee that examined the draft Bill. Indeed, the Bill as reintroduced now extends the circumstances in which the automatic prohibition on cross-examination in person applies, which is a welcome further step to safeguard and prevent the perpetuation of abuse through the courts.

I know that there are wider concerns about the experiences of victims of domestic abuse in the family courts, which was why we established last year a specialist panel to examine how effectively the family courts respond to allegations of domestic abuse and other harms in private law proceedings, including around the provision of special measures. I aim to publish very shortly the panel's recommendations, together with the Government's response. One way we can improve the experiences of victims is by better integrating domestic abuse-related proceedings right across the various jurisdictions in our courts.

With that in mind, we committed in our manifesto to pilot integrated family and crime domestic abuse courts. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor set aside £5 million in his March Budget to allow that important pilot to progress. Again, I expect to be able to inform the House soon as to how the trial of these new integrated domestic abuse courts will be taken forward. I will take a close personal interest, to make sure that there is a genuine bringing together of the jurisdictions around the victim, around the family—around those people who need the support and benefit of any orders and sanctions that the court might impose.

It is not only the courts where there is room for improvement. The new independent domestic abuse commissioner will help drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse right across the relevant local and national agencies. The relevant agencies will be under a statutory duty to co-operate with the commissioner, and will be required to respond within 56 days to any recommendations that the

commissioner makes. We are lucky to have Nicole Jacobs, who brings a wealth of experience to the role, and I fully expect her to perform her functions without fear or favour.

I know that, on the previous Second Reading, a number of hon. Members argued for the post to be full time. We reviewed—with Nicole Jacobs—the appropriate time commitment for this role and have now extended it from three to four days per week. The Minister for safeguarding, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), will keep this matter under review as we transition to the statutory arrangements provided for in part 2 of the Bill.

We did not want to wait until the Bill became law to make that appointment, and I am very glad we did not, because Nicole Jacobs is already making a huge difference. One area where we want to draw on her experience is in the provision of community-based support. As I described, the provisions in part 4 of the Bill will make sure that victims of domestic abuse in safe accommodation receive the support they need, but of course most victims of abuse remain in their own home, and they need to be able to access appropriate support while doing so.

Victim support services are provided in the community by police and crime commissioners, local authorities and other agencies, but the landscape is, frankly, complex, and there are undoubtedly gaps in the current provision. In order to determine what action needs to be taken, we must better understand the existing routes by which these services are commissioned and funded. To that end, the domestic abuse commissioner has agreed to undertake an in-depth exploration of the current community-based landscape of support. Once we have her findings and recommendations, we will work with her to understand the needs identified and to develop the right options for how best to address them.

Finally, I will say a few words about the amendments put forward in the last Session by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) and the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman). It is absolutely right that we reinforce current case law that a person cannot consent to violence that leads to serious injury or death. To be clear, there is no such thing as the rough sex defence. I had a productive meeting with both Members to discuss the issue, and, as I made clear to them, we are looking at how best to address it. It is a complex area of criminal law, and we need to ensure that any statutory provisions have the desired effect and do not have any unintended consequences; we do not want to inadvertently create loopholes or uncertainties in the law that can then be exploited by those who perpetrate crimes. I am confident that we will be able to set out our approach in time for Report, and I am grateful for the continuing constructive engagement on this important and sensitive issue.

Domestic abuse is one of the most prevalent crimes in our society—let us be honest and frank about that. It is staggering that some 2.4 million people experience domestic abuse each year, and unforgivable that, on average, more than two individuals, the majority of whom are women, are killed each and every week in a domestic homicide.

Tackling domestic abuse needs to be everyone's business, from prevention to protection to prosecution to support. Legislation alone can never have all the answers, but I believe that this landmark Bill will make a significant contribution and I commend it to the House.

2.20 pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I would like to put on record my thanks to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, the Speaker, the House authorities and all staff for facilitating the sitting of the House in these most unusual circumstances.

I am grateful to the Lord Chancellor for his welcome. He and I have debated many times at the Dispatch Box in various roles, and I look forward to continuing to do so in future. I also look forward to debating with the Home Secretary when she is next in Parliament.

The Lord Chancellor was absolutely right to pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and for Bradford West (Naz Shah) for their very moving speeches in October, when the Bill was last before the House.

I welcome the Bill's return to us today, in these extraordinary circumstances. The Opposition support it, and it is entirely right that, even in the midst of this crisis, we send the strongest possible message that tackling the appalling crime of domestic abuse remains a priority and that some of the urgently needed provisions in the Bill can progress.

However, it is not without bitter irony that we face the prospect of pushing forward with the Bill in such a constrained timeframe. After all, it was as far back as March 2018 when the Lord Chancellor's predecessor but one, who no longer sits in this House, announced the initial consultation for the Bill, and it was promised long before that. The wait has been too long for those desperately needed provisions, and many others besides, that should be included in the Bill. I will come back to that.

The lockdown has changed patterns of crime. Over the weekend, the National Crime Agency announced that it had alerted the police to 1,300 potential child sexual abuse cases and that it had also recently arrested a British man possessing indecent images of children who was attempting to re-enter the UK from the Philippines. That paints a worrying picture and we must do all in our power to stop such abuses and prevent them from ever taking place. I pay tribute to the NCA, particularly its director general, Lynne Owens, who is leading the fight to tackle those heinous crimes.

Isolating victims from the support of others is what the perpetrators of domestic abuse often seek to do, so it is sadly no surprise that the coronavirus crisis and the lockdown required to deal with it have produced the conditions in which domestic abuse has sharply increased. At the end of last week, the Metropolitan police reported that in the six weeks up to 19 April, officers across London had made 14,093 arrests for domestic abuse offences—nearly 100 a day on average—and domestic abuse calls had risen by around a third. At the same time, the national domestic abuse helpline has experienced a 25% increase in calls and online requests for help.

Clearly, the warning signals of abuse are flashing red. We have been seeing and hearing those warnings from the domestic abuse sector since the start of the crisis. Asking people to stay at home when home might not be a safe place is clearly a huge challenge. Add to that the massive operational challenge that the need for social distancing creates for refuges and related services and the drop-off in charity funding, and it is clear that services for some of the most at-risk people face

[Nick Thomas-Symonds]

extraordinary difficulty. That is why I have been clear since becoming the shadow Home Secretary that the Government must take action on tackling domestic abuse and supporting the wider sector that deals with violence against women and girls.

Government action, such as the £2 million of funding for a helpline, is welcome, as is the You Are Not Alone public campaign, but it is not enough to provide the emergency support necessary. For a start, that £2 million needs to reach the frontline. We will work constructively and responsibly, and we have repeated the offer to discuss what can be done to fast-track that support.

One of my first priorities was to meet representatives from the sector with the shadow Domestic Violence and Safeguarding Minister. Many of those women have put themselves in harm's way throughout their working lives to stand up for people who are facing abuse, and that is even more true in the middle of the current crisis. The message they gave me was absolutely clear: not only does the coronavirus crisis seem to be pushing up the rate of domestic abuse, but it is putting extraordinary pressure on the services that people turn to for help. Refuges face a massive challenge in keeping their doors open while sticking to the social distancing rules. We are asking people to do the right thing and stay at home, so it is only right that the country is there to support the people put at direct risk by those measures.

The Government have yet to engage fully, and the action does remain too slow. It is our intention to try to set out in Committee amendments that would guarantee rapid support for the domestic abuse charities from the £750 million fund that the Chancellor announced to support charity work. I would like to say from the outset that that in itself is an inadequate amount, and I urge the Chancellor to think again. The Lord Chancellor mentioned making allocations, but let me make this suggestion to him. First, a dedicated proportion of the £750 million should be ring-fenced for domestic abuse and the wider violence against women and girls sector. We say 10%, which is not unreasonable and would keep services going. Secondly, a system should be in place to fast-track that investment to the frontline before charities have to close their doors for being oversubscribed or unable to pay their staff. Thirdly, an element of support should be earmarked for specialist services such as BAME services run with and for migrant women, men who are at risk of or suffering domestic abuse, and specialist LGBTQ services.

I do not want to stand here and criticise the Government. I want the Minister to show the grip and urgency that the challenge requires and needs urgently. It cannot be right that vital services for the most at-risk people are in the position of turning people away because of a lack of funding. As I set out in my recent letter to the Home Secretary, there are a range of ways that the Government can help the sector, such as co-ordinating access to under-used existing accommodation; ensuring that support workers have access to PPE; providing technological support; and ensuring that women are not trapped in abusive situations because they have no recourse to public funds. That requires grip and a more joined-up cross-Government approach. We have seen that happening in the devolved Administrations, such as the £1.2 million fund created by the Welsh Government to purchase community accommodation for victims, to enable move-on

accommodation and prevent lack of bed spaces in refuges or, indeed, to provide other accommodation when a refuge is not the right answer. In London, the Mayor has dedicated £4 million to the London community response fund, taking the total to £16 million to help the capital's community and voluntary organisations. The lesson is that, with political will, these changes can be made. The need is now and the Government must respond to that challenge.

I turn to the Bill itself. It clearly is, as the Lord Chancellor set out, a step forward to have a statutory definition in the first clause of the Bill that also includes, in addition to violent and sexually threatening behaviour, controlling and coercive behaviour and other forms of abuse, including economic, psychological and emotional. I welcome the appointment of a domestic abuse commissioner and pay tribute to the work that Nicole Jacobs is doing as designate commissioner, alongside the work of the Victims' Commissioner, Dame Vera Baird, and indeed the children's commissioners across the UK. I welcome the domestic abuse protection orders and the notices, although I hope that they will be accompanied by support, training and resources our officers need. On the family courts, I agree with the Lord Chancellor that the prohibition of cross-examination of victims by perpetrators in person is welcome and long overdue, and I remember speaking on it myself in the Prisons and Courts Bill, which fell before the 2017 general election. I am glad the wait will not be even more protracted.

We will look to improve the Bill in Committee, and the sector must have its full say in giving evidence to the Committee. That process of scrutiny would be far more effective if we had more information before us. The Home Office has undertaken a review of how migrant women, especially those with no recourse to public funds, interact with domestic abuse provision. Having that review available to members of the Committee is very important.

The second issue on which there is a currently unpublished review is the family courts. Prior to the coronavirus crisis, it was thought that the family justice review panel would report this spring on how the family courts protect children and parents in cases of domestic abuse and other serious offences. Again, having that available would greatly enhance the Committee stage.

2.30 pm

A victim is a victim. We will press the Government on protections for disabled victims. We cannot tolerate a situation where victims with insecure migrant status are not only prevented by that from coming forward, but actually have it used against them by someone abusing them. That is why, as I have argued, the Government should suspend the system of no recourse to public funds during the coronavirus crisis, so that victims can get the support they need, not only in their interests but in all our interests in this public health emergency.

In Committee, we will also press the Government on a clear statutory duty on public authorities in England and Wales to commission specialist domestic abuse support and services for all people affected by domestic abuse, regardless of status. That should include a duty on the Secretary of State to provide sufficient funding. The duty should be to all who are affected by domestic abuse, including those with insecure immigration status,

children and young people. Let us make sure, too, that there are perpetrator programmes with proper quality assurance as to their standard.

We will also push the Government on measures on post-separation abuse. In fact, it is often the case that when perpetrators lose control of the situation, their behaviour becomes even more extreme and the victims require greater protection. I say to the Lord Chancellor that although there are existing laws, such as the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, more is required to be done to tackle the threat to people even after the particular relationship has ended. We will press that in Committee.

The Bill contains a series of measures that will clearly have wide support across the House. I pay tribute to all those people who worked on it, particularly in the last Parliament, including, on these Benches, my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who pushed it forward with her characteristic passion and determination. She is not sat in the House today, but I am sure she will be watching at home. She should have our thanks for the way that she conducted herself.

I implore the Government to keep an open mind in Committee as to how the Bill can be improved. If they decide that they want to ignore all the suggestions for improvement, that will be an extraordinarily grave mistake. The Bill is a real opportunity to consensually make vital changes in the interests of victims and potential victims up and down the country.

We should remember, too, that many services that we rely on to respond to the crisis, and to support women and girls at risk of violence, have faced a toxic cocktail of cuts to policing and preventive services for a decade. We did not go into the crisis with the resilience that we would all have hoped for.

I conclude by giving my deepest thanks to the frontline workers who are doing so much to keep our communities safe and who are working especially hard to protect those most at risk. They deserve all our gratitude and respect for all that they do, putting themselves at risk to keep us all safe.

Desperate as these circumstances are, I say to anyone who is at home and afraid that they are not alone. Since taking up this role, I have made it my priority to speak to senior and frontline officers, who all assured me that tackling domestic abuse remains exactly where it should be—right at the top of their priority list—and that anyone who feels that they need their support should reach out. The message that should go out from this House today is that they are not alone.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): As you can imagine, a lot of people have put in to speak in this debate, so we are introducing a five-minute limit, apart from for the SNP Front-Bench spokesperson. Those contributing from outside the Chamber will not be able to see the clock, so I hope they have their own timers visible to them, because we have to be strict in order to get as many people in as we possibly can. I call Theresa May.

2.35 pm

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con) [V]: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

May I add my thanks to all those who have made this hybrid debate possible, because this Bill is hugely important? Domestic abuse damages lives. It can cost lives and it

can scar adults and children for the rest of their lives. Of course, it also costs our society and economy dear. We all owe a debt of gratitude to those who have had courage to speak out about their experiences. I would also like particularly to commend the hon. Members for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) and for Bradford West (Naz Shah) for their contributions to the debate on 2 October.

This Bill is an incredibly important opportunity for us to ensure that we improve the legislative environment for dealing with domestic abuse and that, by doing so, we improve the response of Government and other agencies. If we get it right, it will not only improve people's lives; it will save lives.

It is important, as those on the Front Benches have said, that we are debating this Bill during the covid-19 crisis, because as covid-19 has required people to stay at home, to be locked down in their homes, it has set an environment where perpetrators have greater freedom to act, where victims find it harder to leave an abusive situation. The figures are clear: domestic abuse increases during lockdown.

We know, as the Justice Secretary told us, that the services are still there. The police are still there to respond to reports of domestic violence. We must reiterate today that the lockdown legislation specifically allows people to leave home to escape the risk of harm, so those who are in a domestic abuse situation can leave and seek the support they need. What we must also recognise, however, is that it is much harder for them to leave and to report domestic abuse, because perpetrators have been given greater control of them in the lockdown situation. They can take their mobiles away and stop them walking out of that front door.

I urge police officers and local authorities to look at the past experience of the New York Police Department, and to consider, as I know some already are, the random contact with or visiting of homes where there are known perpetrators or where there have been reports of domestic violence. It must be done carefully to ensure that it does not exacerbate a situation, but it can help those victims.

I also urge Government, as they consider the exit strategy from lockdown, to think of the impact that lockdown has had on domestic abuse. I want Government to look not just at the impact of relaxing restrictions on capacity in the national health service, although we must all have a concern for our wonderful NHS staff and care workers and for those who contract the disease, but at the impact of lockdown on our overall health and wellbeing as a nation. That of course includes the economy, but it must also include the impact on domestic abuse and mental health. We cannot have a situation where the cure for the disease does more damage than the disease itself. When it is in place, this Bill will help victims and improve the criminal justice response, but as lockdown is eased the Government also need to ensure that the criminal justice system and services for victims can cope with what could be a significant increase in reports of domestic abuse.

On the detail of the Bill, I welcome the important step of setting a clear definition of domestic abuse. I just want to touch on three quick points. We need to ensure that the Bill properly recognises the impact of domestic abuse on children. Just because they are in a different room from the abuse does not mean that they will not be affected by it.

[Mrs Theresa May]

The role of employers is important. A good employer can set the scenario where their employees are able to report and speak about the domestic abuse that they are the victims of and to know that they will be supported. I commend the work of Elizabeth Filkin and the Employers' Initiative on Domestic Abuse. I have tried to find a way of recognising employers' work in the Bill. I am not sure it is possible, but I hope the Minister will be able to recognise it in winding up.

Thirdly, as well as supporting victims, we need to stop perpetrators. We need to ensure that perpetrator programmes can be properly accredited. It is a difficult area, but we need to give it far more attention than we have in the past. So this is a hugely important piece of legislation. Too many lives are damaged and too many lives are lost because of domestic abuse. If we get this Bill right, it can help to achieve our ultimate goal, which is eradicating domestic abuse.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Thank you very much. I call Joanna Cherry, Front-Bench spokesperson, with a 10-minute limit.

2.40 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP) [V]: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). Whatever our political differences, I know that this is an area where she cares passionately and has made a difference. Before I address the Bill, I would like to welcome to his place the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds). I congratulate him on his appointment as shadow Home Secretary, and I pay tribute to his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott).

With some important caveats, the Scottish National party welcomes this Bill. Most of its provisions will apply only to England and Wales; domestic abuse is a devolved matter, and Scotland passed its own consolidating legislation two years ago. The UK Government should look to the Scottish Government's groundbreaking Equally Safe strategy, which has been hailed as one of the best strategies in Europe for tackling violence against women.

In the current covid crisis, there is ample evidence that social isolation is adding pressure to those who live in abusive domestic situations. There may be women and children watching this debate at home today who are in that position, and the Scottish Government have moved to reassure anyone experiencing domestic abuse that support is available to them during these difficult times. Scotland's 24-hour domestic abuse and forced marriage helpline is available on 0800 027 1234, and I know that similar help is available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Of course, if anyone feels threatened or in fear of harm, they should call the police.

There is much to welcome in this Bill. The inclusion of non-physical abuse in the statutory definition of "domestic abuse", the inclusion of children aged 16 and 17, and the appointment of the domestic abuse commissioner are all to be applauded. Like others, I pay tribute to the work she has done already. However, I regret that this Bill is a lost opportunity to tackle a number of important matters—these are reserved matters and therefore can be addressed only by the UK

Government. For example, I would like the Minister, in her summing up, to explain why the Government have failed to take the opportunity to ensure that this Bill helps all women in the UK, regardless of their immigration status. I would also like her to address why, despite years of lobbying from the SNP, the Government have not used this Bill to address two important matters relating to the payment of universal credit. This Bill is a missed opportunity to introduce a system whereby UC is paid separately by default. The current system of single-household payments makes it even easier for abusers to perpetrate economic abuse. The Scottish Government have legislated to introduce separate payments, but are dependent on the Department for Work and Pensions' information technology infrastructure to make this happen. I know that the Minister is likely to respond by saying that victims of domestic abuse can apply for separate payments, but she will be well aware that a survey carried out by Women's Aid some time ago said that 85% of domestic abuse survivors would not dare to apply as an exceptional measure, because it would attract further abuse. That is why this needs to happen automatically. This Bill was the perfect opportunity to change the system, so why not just do it?

Likewise, when domestic abuse survivors leave their partner and apply for UC, the five-week wait leaves many in abject poverty, at a time when they are attempting to rebuild their lives and replace essential belongings. SNP MPs have repeatedly explained to the UK Government why it is vital that UC advances are paid as grants to survivors, yet, once more, the opportunity to achieve that, which this Bill afforded, has not been taken. I do not understand why, and I await the Minister's explanation with interest.

I will devote the rest of my remarks to the provisions omitted from this Bill, which mean that it will continue to be impossible for the United Kingdom to ratify the Istanbul convention. In 2017, Dr Eilidh Whiteford, then the SNP Member of Parliament for Banff and Buchan, led a successful campaign to pass a law that required the UK Government to ratify the Istanbul convention. That was the first time an SNP MP had managed to get a private Member's Bill into law, so it is particularly frustrating that three years later the United Kingdom has yet to ratify the Istanbul convention. It is also rather shameful that the UK is one of only six states in Europe to have failed to ratify it.

The Istanbul convention is based on the understanding that violence against women is committed against women because they are women. It makes clear that it is the state's obligation to address fully violence against women in all its forms, and that the state must introduce measures to protect all women from violence, to protect all victims, and to prosecute perpetrators. Parties to the convention are encouraged to apply the protective framework that it creates to men who may also be exposed to violence in the domestic unit. However, it should not be overlooked that the majority of victims of domestic violence and abuse are women, and that domestic abuse is perpetrated against women as part of a wider pattern of discrimination and inequality based on their sex.

The Scottish Parliament has passed all the measures that are necessary and within its competence to enable ratification of the convention to proceed, but the UK Government are holding things up. The Bill before us

introduces certain provisions regarding extraterritorial effect, which are necessary for ratification, but it falls short in the key area of provision of services to migrant women.

As others have said, some migrant women find it impossible to access emergency protection because of the no recourse to public funds condition. Two weeks ago, the Home Affairs Committee took evidence about that condition from the Victims Commissioner, the domestic abuse commissioner designate, and the Children's Commissioner, all of whom were clear that the no recourse to public funds provision should be scrapped, not just during this crisis, but for good. The cross-party joint parliamentary scrutiny committee that proceeded the first iteration of this Bill also recommended that the Bill should include proper protections for migrant women, yet all those recommendations have been ignored. I would like an explanation from the Minister of why they have been ignored.

I have no doubt that amendments will be tabled in Committee to rectify those omissions and enable all migrant women to access vital protections from abuse. Will the Minister accept those amendments? Will she look favourably on amendments that address the payment of universal credit, which I mentioned earlier? I look forward to hearing about that point later this afternoon, because if the UK Government do not address the matters I have raised, protection for victims of domestic abuse will not be universal. Gaps in provision will remain, particularly for migrant women, and the UK Government will continue to be unable to ratify the Istanbul convention.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We are now back to five-minute contributions for the rest of the debate.

2.48 pm

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con) [V]: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), and to see the Lord Chancellor be supported, albeit at some distance on the Front Bench, by the Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk), who is the Minister responsible for the Ministry of Justice victims strategy. He is a former member of the Justice Committee, and we are delighted to see him on the Treasury Bench.

This is an important Bill that deals with a real and pressing social evil. The Lord Chancellor was right to bring it forward as swiftly as he has, and I welcome the tone of his remarks. May I concentrate in particular on the provisions that relate to legal proceedings and court procedures, starting with part 5? The prohibition on cross-examination by litigants in person in family cases is to be welcomed as a very important advance. It is something for which lawyers and the judiciary involved in family cases have been calling for a considerable time, and it is good to see it in the Bill. What I hope that Ministers will take away is the detail of how we actually make that work in practice.

The first point that I hope the Government will take on board is that those advocates who are appointed to carry out that often sensitive and difficult cross-examination in often very sensitive and fraught cases must be properly remunerated in order to be prepared for that work. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor

will know, one of the first things that we were taught at Bar school was that the key to good cross-examination is preparation. To do that, the lawyers have to be appointed in a timely fashion. They must be paid properly to ensure that they are of adequate experience and seniority to deal with these matters, and they must have time to access the material and be rewarded for doing so.

One issue in the family jurisdiction is that there is not the extent of disclosure that we see in criminal cases and therefore preparatory work may be harder in those cases. Perhaps we need to look therefore at what stage those advocates are appointed to carry out that work. It seems to me that, in order to have the ability to cross-examine properly, it may well be necessary for them to be able to read all of the papers in the case. They probably also need the ability to seek a conference in order to get from the person on whose behalf they are appointed the necessary detail to do justice in the case. That cannot be done on the cheap. I am sure the Government will not want to do that, but it is important that that is not missed out, as both the Bar Council and the Law Society have pointed out. It may also be important, as the professional bodies have pointed out, to consider extending that to instructions to carry out examination-in-chief as well. The example that is given is where an alleged perpetrator of abuse seeks to call a child in the family as a relevant witness to some of the proceedings before the court. It seems to me that the same risks of intimidation would be transferred under those circumstances.

It is also important to consider the nature of the proceedings. It may well be that the allegation of abuse relates to one part of the family proceedings, but the coercive behaviour would have an impact on that perpetrator cross-examining the victim under any part of the proceedings. If someone has a history of coercive control over another, it would be just as difficult for the victim to be cross-examined by them about financial provisions as it would in relation to the actual incidents of assault and abuse, or in relation to custody. I hope that we will be generous in carrying out the legal support that is made available. I hope, too, that we will recognise the need to use the review of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 to look at the re-introduction, as soon as possible, of early legal advice in these matters, so that the necessary issues are flagged up at the earliest opportunity.

I am glad to see that the Lord Chancellor is proposing to bring forward the report of the specialist panel. I hope that he will do that as soon as possible, not least because there has been concern that provision around special measures has never been as consistent or as advanced in the family jurisdiction as it has been in criminal courts. That is not because I think family practitioners and judges do not want it, but because the infrastructure has not been there. I hope that that will give us an opportunity to address that.

I am pleased that the Lord Chancellor is proposing to pilot the domestic abuse protection orders and prevention notices rather than going in immediately. We do need to see how those will integrate—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I am sorry, Sir Bob, your five minutes are up. Thank you for your contribution. I call Yvette Cooper.

2.53 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to follow my fellow Select Committee Chair, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill). When the Domestic Abuse Bill was first proposed, none of us could have imagined debating it in circumstances such as this: when there is evidence that the number of women and children killed as a result of domestic abuse in a few short weeks has increased sharply and at its highest level for over a decade; when the calls to helplines are up by 50% and visits to some support websites are up sevenfold; and when some victims are feeling more trapped than ever because perpetrators of abuse are exploiting the coronavirus crisis to increase control and to commit crimes. Those perpetrators are taking advantage of the fact that it is harder for their victims to seek help: the social worker is not dropping by, the bruises will not be visible at the school gate the next morning; and the GP will not be asking questions at the next appointment. This is not just about lockdowns; the period afterwards may be much higher risk for victims, too. In the face of this deadly virus, we know that staying home to save lives is important, but that it is also why we have a responsibility to help those for whom home is not a safe place to be.

All those reasons show why this Bill is so important, but also why it is not enough. I welcome the Bill, the new powers and the new statutory duty of support for victims, which the Home Affairs Committee called for, although I would want it to go wider. I welcome the creation of the domestic abuse commissioner, which I first raised with the then Home Secretary seven years ago, but I press the Government to go further, including on a stalking and serial abuse register and on making stronger reference to children.

There are things in the Bill that we should be doing better and faster now, as we set out in our Home Affairs Committee report yesterday. First, if we believe in a statutory duty of support, let us start delivering it now. In many areas, refuges are full yet at the same time their funding has dropped, so the Government should ring-fence the new charity funds now and get them urgently to refuges and domestic abuse support groups. They should talk to the national hotel and hostel chains to provide supplementary housing and get a national guarantee of safe housing in straightaway.

Secondly, the Bill is about using the criminal justice system to protect victims and prosecute criminals, but the system faces new challenges. We recommended extending the time limit for domestic abuse-related summary offences, and we should do that now in this Bill.

Thirdly, if we believe in having a domestic abuse commissioner, let us listen to what she says now, because Nicole Jacobs has been appointed already, even if her powers are not fully in place. She told our Committee that a lot of things are in the way of getting people support in a crisis. She raised issues around housing, support services and perpetrator programmes and called for a cross-governmental working group and an action plan to sort things out. The Victims' Commissioner told us that we should adopt a French programme that would provide emergency contacts in pharmacies and supermarkets. I heard from a police officer in the north-west trying to do that, but they need national intervention with the supermarkets to make it work. The Children's Commissioner warned us about vulnerable children

whom no one is visiting and no one has seen since the crisis began and the need for face-to-face contact. We need national action to make that possible.

Some of those important things are not happening because, bluntly, we need more leadership and drive from the centre, and that is why the Committee has called for an urgent action plan to be drawn up by the Home Secretary with the domestic abuse commissioner and others as part of the Cobra planning process.

This Bill is important, but if we are serious about the sentiments behind it that we are all expressing, we should see it as a chance to do more. If we do not, we will be dealing with the consequences of the surge in domestic abuse that we are seeing now for very many years to come.

2.58 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): To start this second Second Reading debate, I thank again the Members of both Houses who were members of the draft Bill scrutiny Committee, which I chaired a year ago. It was a Joint Committee, and I particularly thank Baroness Bertin, who was battling the symptoms of morning sickness in our early sessions. To mark the significant amount of time that has passed since our Bill Committee reported, I am pleased to tell the House that the very young Edward Louis Grist was born on 5 December and is almost five months old. General elections, Brexit and pandemics may have got in the way of the legislation, but we have a chance to put that right today.

In our extensive scrutiny of the Bill, we held seven evidence sessions. The Government have responded positively to many of the recommendations that we made because of that evidence. I welcome the Government's decision to include in the Bill the duty on local authorities in England to provide support for victims and their children in refuges and other safe accommodation, and to provide funding to do that. I am sure Ministers will be pressed firmly in Committee on that funding promise.

At this point, I might want to welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) to her place on the Front Bench. I am very glad to see that she is still there, because I seem to recall a while ago her indicating that if funding for refuges were ever made statutory, her job would be done. I am sure she would agree with me that there is much more work for both she and I to do in this area and to make sure that the Government deliver on all their important promises.

Other recommendations from the Committee that have been taken forward by the Government include the issue of the interpretation of the definition of domestic abuse. We had a long and hard debate on this, and we are particularly pleased to see that the statutory definition will be coupled with guidance, particularly on how to deal with the effects that domestic abuse has on children. There is also the fact that, overwhelmingly, this is a crime where the victims are women, and that is an important thing the Government have acknowledged. The Government have also agreed, as a result of the evidence they heard from the Committee, that there will be a mandatory ban on cross-examination of domestic abuse victims by their perpetrators in the family courts, as well as in the criminal courts. The Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill), referred to that.

However, there are two outstanding issues on which I would like to press my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor. The first is making sure that we have the report from the panel considering the extension of special measures to family courts as soon as possible, and that there is no further delay on that being put in place, particularly given the current circumstances.

Secondly, and equally importantly, we must make sure that there are provisions for migrant women, and that they are made clearer by the Government not at any point in the future, but now and today, because there are currently no provisions in the Bill for migrant women facing domestic abuse, and that is not acceptable. As the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) said, a victim is a victim regardless of their immigration status, which is an important point that we should all take away from today's debate.

The Committee recommended that a firewall be established separating the reporting of crime and access to support services from immigration control. I was alarmed to see that a recently published FOI request showed that 27 out of 45 police forces routinely share details with the Home Office if victims have insecure immigration status, so this is a live issue, which I know my right hon. and learned Friend will be very well aware of.

We meet to debate the Bill in unprecedented times, and I know from speaking to my own local domestic abuse charity in Hampshire, Stop Domestic Abuse, that there are real concerns about the potential for funding issues in relation to a spike in cases when the lockdown is lifted. I would like to take this opportunity to applaud all the work that it is doing to support my constituents. Many domestic abuse organisations are concerned about this issue, and I would like to add my voice to the support for at least part of the very generous £750 million announced by the Chancellor to be earmarked for specialist services.

The impact of this pandemic on our lives is profound, but for those living with domestic abuse it is not only the virus that is life threatening, and we need to take this opportunity today to act.

3.3 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab) [V]: This is a very important Bill, and much needed for tackling the horrific and often hidden crime of domestic violence. I completely agree with all the points that have been made by previous speakers on the Bill. The truth is that a lot of us have pushed for this Bill, but I do not think we would even be debating this today were it not for the former Prime Minister the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), who has just spoken, and I want to acknowledge that.

I strongly support the Bill, but there is one glaring omission, and that is what I want to speak about this afternoon. We need the Bill to tackle the problem of the defence being used by men who kill women and then say, "It's a sex game gone wrong". This is where a man kills a woman by strangling her or by forcing an object up inside her that causes her to bleed to death, and he acknowledges that these injuries killed her and that he caused them, but says it is not his fault—it is her fault; he was only doing what she wanted; it was a sex game gone wrong—and he literally gets away with murder. That is a double injustice. Not only does he kill, but he

drags her name through the mud. It causes indescribable trauma for the bereaved family, who sit silently in court with the loss of a beloved daughter, sister and mother, to see the man who killed her describe luridly what he alleges are her sexual proclivities. She, of course, is not there to speak for herself. He kills her and then he defines her.

That is what happened to Natalie Connolly. I see that the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) is in his place and will be speaking shortly. He was Natalie's family's MP. I urge everybody to listen very carefully to what he says about what happened in that case. Her brutal killer, John Broadhurst, escaped a murder charge by saying that it was what she wanted. We can stop that injustice. We can prohibit the rough sex gone wrong defence. We must do that by saying that if it is his hands on her neck strangling her, if it is his hands that are pushing the object up inside her, then he must take responsibility. That is not a sex game gone wrong; that is murder and he cannot blame her for her own death.

There are two lessons that I think we have learned from previous struggles to improve the law on domestic violence and sexual offences. The first is that it always takes too long. This is the Bill in which this must happen. Secondly, it is never sorted until the law is changed. It will not be sorted by judicial training, by Crown Prosecution Service guidance or by a taskforce, welcome though they are. It will not be sorted by good intentions either; they are never enough. It needs a law change. I fully accept the Government's good intentions. The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, the right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon (Robert Buckland) and his team, particularly the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) and the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), have been very concerned and in listening mode on this issue. However, I say very directly to the Lord Chancellor that he is the man with the power here. He is the Government Minister and this is his Bill. I say to him, "Be the man who listens to what women are saying about this, not the man who knows better than us. Listen to what we are saying and make the change that we are asking for."

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Having our proceedings done in this way is history in the making. We add to that history now with a maiden speech; the first time ever a maiden speech has been given by somebody not physically in the Chamber of the House of Commons. I call Sara Britcliffe.

3.7 pm

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con)[V]: Today, I make my maiden speech in circumstances I could never have imagined. I always said that I got into politics to serve the community I love and have lived in all my life. I always said that I would somehow redefine what it meant to be a constituency MP. Along with making history as the first female MP for the area and the youngest Conservative MP in the country, I am the first Member of Parliament ever to make their maiden speech remotely, from their own home. I do that because I wanted to stay here, rooted in my community, to rise to the challenges we face. As I have always said, we are stronger together. It would be remiss of me not to mention my predecessor, Graham Jones, for his nine

[Sara Britcliffe]

years of service, and to remind the House that, for the first time in 27 years, Hyndburn returned a Conservative MP. Ken Hargreaves, before that, was a truly honourable gentleman, who sadly lost his life in 2012.

I want to tell the House about my home—what I consider to be the capital of Lancashire. Hyndburn and Haslingden have been at the heart of this country's responses to our changing world time and again. They were at the forefront of the industrial revolution, and our local regiment, the Accrington Pals, led the charge to defend our peace and freedom. Today, as we face covid-19, businesses and community organisations in Hyndburn and Haslingden are being as innovative and resourceful as James Hargreaves, the Oswaldtwistle famed inventor of the spinning jenny. Our NHS, key workers and frontline services have proven to be as tough as the famous Accrington Nori brick: unbreakable no matter how much stress it is put under. While I hope we will soon be able to get back to supporting the local team of Accrington Stanley and enjoying the world-famous locally made Holland's pies, it is that sense of community, in which we have been steeped for generations, that will get us through to that happy day—our children have also been steeped in it, as can be seen from my office wall.

I have always believed in supporting those who need it the most, and that resonates now more than ever. While lockdown will help us defeat covid-19, it has resulted in an increase in domestic violence. Organisations like Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Domestic Violence Team in my constituency are working tirelessly to respond to this. We—now, more than ever—have to do right by those in such distressing and potentially life-threatening situations, which is why I wholeheartedly support this Bill.

But this leads me on to what I want to personally champion during my time in office. Through the devastating effects of alcohol misuse and mental health issues, I lost my mum when I was nine years old. I witnessed a woman that I and many others adored, crumble before my eyes and a father who had to pick up the pieces. Sadly, my family's experience is not an isolated case, and that is why it is so important that the right support is available—something I will be campaigning hard for as an MP.

Over the coming months, I am sure we will beat this pandemic, and I will be ready to return to my main mission in this Parliament—fighting for levelled-up funding and investment in the north. The term “forgotten towns” only really became a common phrase since the seismic shift in votes in the general election, but it cannot just be a phrase—a one-off response to an election result. We northerners pride ourselves on our no-nonsense, straight-talking approach, so I apologise in advance to Ministers: I will be pestering for investment in infrastructure—support for businesses to thrive and grow the northern economy and to give our children the same opportunities in life whether they are from Hyndburn, Haslingden or Hertfordshire. To do this, I will have to follow the long and proud Conservative tradition of being, in Ken Clarke's words, a “bloody difficult woman”.

But first we have to beat the virus. This lockdown is hard but necessary, and I see the sacrifices that people are making even within my own family, as my dad, Peter Britcliffe, stays at home in isolation this week to celebrate his 70th birthday.

My virtual speech today is a first, but it will not be the last norm that is challenged. We can learn from how we have all utilised technology in this period to run even better and more efficient public services in the future, as well as remembering that the challenges people face cannot only be dealt with online. People need the sense of familiarity and humanity that shared space and face-to-face contact afford. This creates communities of geography—of belonging—that cyberspace cannot offer.

Finally, I would like to reassure my constituents in Hyndburn and Haslingden that when we get through this—and we will get through this—I will continue to stand up and do what is right for our home, because these forgotten towns, under my watch, will be forgotten no more.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Many congratulations, Sara.

3.13 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope that you can hear me.

I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe) on her extraordinary maiden speech. It is difficult to make a maiden speech at the best of times. I think that her mum would have been extremely proud of her, and I join her in wishing her dad a happy birthday. Many Labour Members are extremely grateful for what she said about her predecessor.

This is a Bill that many of us have fought for, waited for and wanted for a long time. Before the covid-19 crisis, we had already seen the highest levels of domestic abuse in our society for the past five years, so we know that the pressure is as urgent as it is. I join my Front-Bench colleagues in calling for an emergency fund to tackle the issues created by covid-19 by providing a safe environment for everybody to stay at home in. I support the work of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson) in relation to the Bill to ensure that we give women the rights they deserve.

In the short time available to me, I want to take up the Secretary of State's challenge on how we can strengthen the Bill by setting out a number of areas in which I hope we, as a House, can make progress together. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) reminds us in a powerful speech every single year, when we get this wrong, we see the human cost.

First, we must see every victim in their own right—they are not a generic group of people. That is why we need to go further in protecting women who otherwise would find their immigration status a barrier to seeking help. It is also why we must recognise disabled women and ensure that our law works for them. We must look at the concept of what a personal relationship is. I look at the work that Stay Safe East has done on that; it makes a powerful case.

If we are to protect every woman and see her in her own right as a victim, we must also ensure that we protect every woman where she is a victim. I am very moved by the words of Claire Throssell, who talked about the tremendous strength of her sons, Jack and Paul, and the horrific experience they had in the family courts. As Claire has said:

“No parent should have to hold their children in their arms as they die knowing it's at the hands of the other parent, someone who should love and cherish them.”

We need to go further in protecting people from unsafe contact, because we see in Claire's case the damage that is done when that does not happen.

We need to push for the stalkers register that we were promised many years ago. There are too many women—Alice Ruggles, Jane Clough and many more—whom we have to honour, and Paladin is doing work in that area. We must also ensure that housing does not become a barrier to a victim of domestic abuse getting help. I stand with SafeLives and Barnardo's in calling for an amendment to the Bill to ensure that there is a statutory duty on local authorities.

In my final minute, I want to flag the importance of us being a leader, not a follower, when it comes to tackling domestic abuse internationally. It is extremely concerning that although the UK, as a member of the Council of Europe, signed the Istanbul convention in 2014, we are one of the few countries that has not yet ratified it. As the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) pointed out, that means that there are challenges in how we treat women from minority communities, particularly migrants.

Ratification of the convention is also about our recognition that this is a gendered crime. Through the Bill, I hope that we can make progress on something that the Law Commission is looking at: recognising the misogyny behind crimes against women, and looking at misogyny as a hate crime. In particular, I look at the evidence from Nottinghamshire, where treating violence as a misogynistic act has transformed the way in which the police and other services are able to deal with it.

I hope that Ministers look forward to debating not only how we protect migrant women and disabled women, but the need to call this out for what it is: a hatred of women. It is about not creating a new crime, but recognising the importance and value of identifying it as such within our criminal justice system. When we hear the words of victims such as Claire or the families of Jane Clough and Alice Ruggles, we know that we cannot afford to lose this precious legislative moment. We have fought for it for so long. All of us across the House want the Bill to be the best it can be, so I look forward to working with Ministers to make sure that it is.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Thank you, Stella. I can reassure you that your speech was heard clearly and in its entirety in the Chamber.

3.18 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I share the Lord Chancellor's sense of déjà vu after the previous Second Reading of this Bill on 2 October. Like every good environmentalist, I have recycled my speech from that day. It was an important subject then, and it is an even more important subject now. I am delighted to be one of no fewer than 84 Members who applied to speak today, which shows just how widespread the support and interest in this subject is.

I am delighted to make my debut in this virtual Parliament but, most of all, I am delighted to be called after the fantastic maiden speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe). It was the first virtual maiden speech, but there was nothing virtual about its content. We all welcome the latest bloody difficult woman to this Chamber. She achieved her third first today; it was also the third for the

Britcliffe family. Following her father's two unsuccessful attempts to win that seat, she did so on the third try, and this place is greatly enriched by her success.

I said in our October debate that domestic abuse was an important subject, but the coronavirus crisis has emphasised what a big problem it is and how urgently we must find practical solutions. I welcome many of the measures in the Bill, which I am sure will be further improved during its passage. However, in 2019, according to the organisation Attenti, nearly 2.4 million people—overwhelmingly women—reported being subject to domestic abuse. Some 173 women and 13 men were killed by a partner or former partner in 2019, an increase of 32 from 2018. Two thirds of them were killed in their own home. But we forget the hidden toll of the estimated 400 people, again mostly women, who commit suicide each year having attended hospital for domestic abuse injuries in the previous six months.

We know, as many have said, that domestic abuse has flourished during the coronavirus lockdown. As the Home Affairs Committee report shows, calls to helplines have increased by some 50%, and there were some 16 killings in the first three weeks of the lockdown, double the average of previous years. We need smarter ways for women to be able to present and to escape domestic abuse, and smarter ways of safeguarding children who, in many cases at the moment, do not have the early warning system of schools and calls from social workers.

I welcome the measures on the domestic abuse commissioner, domestic abuse protection orders and so on, but they will not have the desired effect unless there are sufficient and appropriate support services available, with long-term, sustainable funding, particularly for refuge place planning and so on. We need suitably trained front-line service personnel receiving cross-agency, complementary and ongoing training to identify and intervene on all forms of abusive behaviour—the sort of cross-agency approach we are beginning to see in response to child sexual exploitation. We must also encourage victims to come forward, and give them the confidence that they will be supported and the perpetrators dealt with, to keep them and their children safe. We need effective intervention, enforcement, support and safekeeping.

I want to focus for a few minutes on children, although I should point out that, contrary to perception, domestic abuse affects older people, too. One in five victims of domestic homicides is aged over 60, and there has been a 40% increase in the last two years in the number affected by domestic abuse. There is also a disproportionate impact on those from BAME communities.

When I was children's Minister, I never ceased to be shocked that over 75% of child safeguarding cases were linked to households with domestic abuse. Some 770,000 children live with an adult who has experienced domestic abuse. It is the most prevalent risk factor affecting children in need, and we must not forget that around half the residents of refuges are children.

Millions of children are affected by domestic abuse, many traumatised by its impact on their health, their life chances and their life, yet they are seen merely as witnesses to domestic abuse, not victims themselves. That is where I have a criticism of the Bill. As a supporter of Hestia and the "UK Says No More" campaign, I hope that the Government will ensure that children feature more prominently in the Bill, starting

[Tim Loughton]

with a reform to the Children Act 1989 so that it reflects more clearly children's experiences of domestic abuse and how that constitutes harm to children.

Support services that understandably were commissioned for adult victims of abuse must also cater for the physiological, psychological and geographical impact on children. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children helpline carried out 663 counselling sessions in the middle week of April alone, showing that child abuse goes hand in hand with domestic abuse. I welcome the Bill and the measures in it, but we need more focus on children, too.

3.23 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab) [V]: We live in extraordinary times. Unfortunately, there is nothing extraordinary about domestic violence. It affects women of all classes and in all walks of life, and the figures show that it has got considerably worse in the course of the coronavirus lockdown.

I welcome this important Bill. There are ways in which it could be improved, but in principle it represents a real step forward. First, however, I want to honour the campaigners. It was they who moved domestic abuse from something that the police and politicians did not necessarily take seriously to the very seriously regarded crime it is today. Without those campaigners, this Bill, although it is by no means perfect, would not have been brought forward.

Domestic abuse and domestic violence are often hidden. The victims are frightened and even too ashamed to speak out. There are no more frightened and desperate victims than women of colour, whether they are refugees, asylum seekers, migrants or—[Inaudible.] Women of colour are fearful of approaching the authorities, because of their immigration status or general fear of the police. I have had to support—[Inaudible]—who were too frightened to report abuse, because they were worried that their partner might report them to immigration.

I think it is important for the House to say that all women have the right to be protected from domestic abuse, regardless of their immigration status. To achieve that, this Government need to move away from the hostile war between immigration control and public services, including services for women who are victims of domestic violence. The women of colour who are reluctant to approach—[Inaudible]—so Government and local authorities need to recognise the importance of providing support for refugees and of services that provide specialist services to black women and migrants. I pay tribute to Ngozi Fulani and her project Sistah Space in Hackney, which has helped so many black women who are victims of domestic violence.

We know that “no recourse to public funds” regulations stop many women of colour who are the victims of domestic violence from accessing support at all. For this and many other reasons, “no recourse to public funds” should be scrapped, but I have a practical proposal in relation to all victims. Labour's new Front-Bench team is dealing very ably with the Bill and they will make the case for their amendments—[Inaudible]—for extra funds. I fully support that case, but the service providers who operate—[Inaudible]—conjure up additional living accommodation overnight every day, so I propose that the Government should acquire vacant hotel

accommodation to house these victims until alternative, decent accommodation can be found. We know that some hotel chains have offered to help by providing accommodation, and they should be taken up on that offer. The policy has already been announced in France, and Britain should do the same. If, at a later date, more appropriate accommodation can be found, that is excellent, but the victims need accommodation now. Mine is a practical proposal that could be announced immediately. I hope that it will command widespread support across the House.

To any women and men at home today who are watching this debate, I think the message of this House to you is that you are not alone.

3.28 pm

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con) [V]: Following on from the Second Reading of the Bill's previous incarnation, I have now been able to draft some of the amendments I mentioned, which I believe will help to improve this Bill. I do not have much time today, but I just want to highlight a few of those.

As I have said on numerous occasions, one of my biggest priorities regarding domestic abuse is that we must treat male and female victims equally. Some of my amendments would ensure that this Bill is completely non-sex specific and that it supports male and female victims. While there are more recorded female victims of domestic abuse, there are still many male victims, and a further body of evidence shows how their numbers are also likely to be underestimated. They should not be ignored. I really want to reiterate for the record that we need to be very clear that women are not the only victims of domestic violence and that violence against women is not always perpetrated by men either.

I have grave concerns about the definition of domestic abuse, including economic abuse. The Government's own guidance on this states:

“Examples of economic abuse include...having sole control of the family income”.

I am not sure why that should in itself constitute domestic abuse, and I hope that the amendment I will table can at least alleviate the potential damage that this current wording could do, as it is not caveated by saying that this does not apply where, for example, there is good reason. There could be a very good reason for something that could be classed as economic abuse under this definition—for example, where the person the money has been withheld from has a drug problem or a gambling addiction or because they are too sick. I have spoken to the Secretary of State about this, and I got the impression that he felt there was something he could do to improve the wording here. I sincerely hope that the Government will look favourably on the amendments I am tabling on this point.

Another amendment I will be tabling would extend the definition of domestic abuse to include parental alienation. This is where one parent deliberately alienates the other parent from a child. I have heard horrific stories affecting parents and children, which I would love to expand on today but cannot because of the time available. However, if we are to save future generations of children from having non-existent relationships with one of their parents, something needs to be done, and my amendment would be a start.

I also want to amend the Bill so that false allegations of domestic abuse would be classed as domestic abuse in their own right. Some parents have their reputations and lives trashed by malicious, vexatious accusations, particularly in relation to domestic abuse. By including false allegations of domestic abuse in the definition of domestic abuse, we can hopefully reduce the instances of this occurring. The definition of domestic abuse should also include cases where one parent deliberately denies the other parent contact with their children for no good reason. As far as I am concerned, this is just as abusive as other forms of abuse that are regularly mentioned; it causes significant distress, upset and harm. In some cases the harm is so bad that it can tragically lead to suicide.

This leads me on to the current situation. According to the charity ManKind, a number of fathers are now contacting the charity stating that their exes are using the covid-19 lockdown as a reason to breach agreed child arrangement orders awarded as part of shared parenting. There have been media reports of lawyers being inundated by divorced parents arguing over lockdown custody. It is always wrong to use a child as a weapon, but it seems that coronavirus has made things worse on this front, too.

In terms of domestic abuse generally during this pandemic, I have heard a lot about female victims on the news—quite rightly so—and about women’s organisations, but not so much about male victims, so I thought I would mention them today, given the limited time available. According to the charity ManKind, calls to its helplines since lockdown are 30% higher than normal, and visitors to the ManKind Initiative website are 50% higher. I hope that any victims of domestic abuse, male or female, will call the police and get in touch with individuals or organisations that can help them in these difficult times. Meanwhile, I urge the Minister to consider my amendments properly, because I genuinely believe that they will improve the Bill, not least by making it fairer for male victims as well as female victims, but also by providing a chance to improve the lives of children.

3.33 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab) [V]: Nearly one in three women will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime, and that number is sadly on the rise, because during this public health crisis we are not all safe at home. As has been mentioned in the debate today, calls to domestic abuse helplines have surged during lockdown. Frontline domestic abuse services such as IDAS in Barnsley are doing their best to support victims and to provide refuge accommodation and community-based support, but they need even more funding to maintain the crucial support services they are providing during this crisis.

The Domestic Abuse Bill is welcome, but it can and must do more. It has the potential to stop abusers exerting control over their victims long after they are supposedly free. I would like to praise the former Member for Ashfield, who stood up for the rights of domestic abuse survivors in this country. Her campaign to ban attempted murderers from recovering joint assets in probate and family court hearings is something that I believe should be reflected in the Bill. Right now, our legal system enables abusers to continue to inflict damage

even when they are in prison for the attempted murder of their partner. This is an issue that I would like to focus some of my remarks on today.

I spoke to a domestic abuse survivor who faced the possibility of having to sell her home to pay her attempted murderer’s £100,000 divorce settlement. She survived 30 stab wounds to then be served with a huge bill by her abuser’s lawyers—effectively paying her abuser to finally be free of him. We have an opportunity with this Bill to remove the automatic entitlement to joint assets in domestic abuse cases, to stop the re-victimisation of survivors in our legal system and to get them the justice that they deserve.

At every level, our justice system lets down domestic abuse survivors while handing abusers the tools and means of exerting control over partners long after they have left, from divorce proceedings that force survivors to disclose their bank details, where they shop and what they spend money on, to compelling victims to live in the homes that their abuse happened in until their abuser gives them permission to let or sell the property. Family court proceedings allow perpetrators to cross-examine their victims, making them relive their original trauma again and again. I welcome the provision to prohibit that kind of direct cross-examination in cases where there is evidence of domestic abuse, but the issues surrounding domestic abuse in family courts go much wider and deeper than that alone.

Family courts have come under repeated scrutiny because of their failure to protect victims of domestic abuse and the children of abusive relationships. One of the gravest abuses in the family courts is the presumption that contact with both parents is preferable, which is frequently put ahead of children’s welfare. There is little understanding of domestic abuse, and particularly coercive control, among judges, who frequently award contact to abusive fathers. Research by the “Victoria Derbyshire” show shows that four children in the last five years have been murdered by fathers following forced contact in the family courts.

This campaign, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), led to the Ministry of Justice setting up a review of the family courts and domestic abuse. Its report was meant to be published in the spring, and its findings will clearly be extremely relevant to the Bill, so it makes no sense that it is not being published alongside the Bill and its recommendations incorporated. The Secretary of State referred to its publication in his opening statement. I hope he will now ensure that it happens imminently, so that the Bill can be amended at a later stage to reflect the report’s findings.

Our justice system needs to be reoriented to protect domestic abuse survivors, instead of being a means through which abusers can continue their abuse.

3.37 pm

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con) [V]: I welcome the Bill. I will cover two topics that I hope Ministers will take on board. First, we have taken a leading role internationally as a force for ending child marriage. However, our domestic law is undermining these efforts, as demonstrated by comments from Bangladesh that we are hypocritical because we allow children aged between 16 and 18 to marry, when they should be in school, completing their education.

[Mrs Pauline Latham]

When the sustainable development goals were being drawn up, with the UK led by Prime Minister David Cameron, he wanted to ensure the inclusion of child marriage within goal 5 of the SDGs. The Bill gives a timely opportunity to bring domestic legislation in line with global commitments to end child marriage, which is child abuse, which happens behind closed doors and which is also domestic violence. However, it is aided by parents and the state. The Bill should close this loophole.

Children who are likely to live at home under the influence of their family and community, who tell them that this is their culture, are unlikely to report a forced marriage in order to be protected from it. Current civil law permits child marriage to be registered under the age of 18 in England and Wales through the legal exception of parental consent, which too often amounts to parental and community coercion. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will look at this, to see how he can help these particular victims of domestic abuse.

Secondly, I raise the issue of women and girls in ethnic communities. Apparently, the Home Office literature related to the campaign to help victims of domestic abuse does not speak to these victims, who are in real danger in their communities, because it suggests that they speak about and report abuse to their families and/or their communities—the very people who are often the perpetrators, which would explain why there is so much under-reporting in this area.

There may have been increases of more than 100% in the number of calls to the national helpline that the Government have funded, but some victims have more challenges than others. For instance, translations are available on the national helpline but the victim has to wait and hang on for the translator to come on to the call. Organisations such as Karma Nirvana, which was founded in Derby some years ago, have bilingual counsellors who can relate much more to victims for whom English is not their first language. Unfortunately, the Government helpline does not always signpost this successful organisation, or many others that may be able to help the vulnerable victims of domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based violence or female genital mutilation, especially in respect of where they have advocated the broader domestic abuse agenda and access for victims. These vulnerable women and girls will not wait for long, because it has taken an enormous amount of courage for them to pick up the phone in the first place.

Apparently, the head of the Government's forced marriage unit has said that calls to its helpline have dramatically fallen: between 1 and 17 April last year, it received 72 referrals or calls; this month, it was down to only 15 calls. I believe that is because people are behind closed doors and have less access to the phone and are less able to call for help. The forced marriage unit also believes that there are girls with forced marriage protection orders who are abroad, waiting to come back to the UK. Apparently, there is only one person in a safe house. There are real concerns that there will be a surge in cases once we are no longer in lockdown. Surely this raises the question of the need for greater awareness now. We should be thinking about how we will monitor cases after lockdown—perhaps we should monitor families when the airports open more freely.

The Home Office has sent a letter suggesting that we disseminate information about domestic abuse among our communities—often the very communities where the problem lies. How do we, as MPs, reach these victims? It is really important that we do so. I recommend that the Minister look into these issues.

3.42 pm

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): First, may I put on record how much I welcome the Bill? I dedicate my words today to Denise Keane-Barnett-Simmons, 36 years old, who was murdered by her former partner in Brent just two weeks ago. She did everything that she could to live her life without fear. May she rest in peace.

Some of the most disturbing cases that I heard as a magistrate were those involving domestic violence. I was continually told that I needed to be less of a social worker while making decisions. I kept saying that for there to be real impact, we need more cross-departmental working. The Government need to do that with this Bill.

I do not have enough time to talk about many cases, but I heard one case in which the violent man argued that it was not his handprint on his ex-girlfriend's face because it did not show his thumb. Just imagine how hard he hit her for that to be the case and his argument.

The Government have said that having this Bill in statute is a once-in-a-lifetime, generational opportunity, but I am afraid that the Bill falls short of that vision. However, if we all work together across party lines, we can make it better.

Government and Opposition Members have mentioned the domestic abuse commissioner, Nicole Jacobs, who has said that there is a “postcode lottery”, and that is still the case. She says that domestic abuse charities turn away one in three people; the Bill could change that.

She also highlighted that the Government must provide support to charities that provide life services, particularly smaller charities, such as those who provide support for BAME women, disabled women and men. We must remember that, because of the cuts, 50% of specialist refuges have closed in London. Women with insecure immigration status should have all barriers removed and not face deportation, and the Government should offer hotels free of charge to women fleeing domestic abuse who have been unable to access a refuge. The domestic abuse commissioner also says that, as has been mentioned, the banning of the rough sex offence must become part of the Bill. I am sure that the Minister, when he replies, will confirm that he supports everything that the commissioner has said and highlighted, but if he does not, he should make it clear to the House which proposals he does not support and the reasons why.

In addition, I have a few questions that I would quickly like to put on record to the Minister. Will he confirm today that the Government will ratify the Istanbul convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence? Will he confirm that at least £50 million of the Chancellor's £750 million must be made immediately available to domestic abuse charities? The £15 million tampon tax fund must be immediately repurposed as grant funding for specialist businesses.

Independent domestic violence advisers have not yet been mentioned today in this debate. Brent Council has an innovative way of using IDVAs that has shown a 9% drop in domestic abuse injuries. Will the Government

commit to rolling out a more comprehensive IDVA policy, and will the Minister adopt Labour's policies for 10 days of domestic violence leave? As we know, the first 10 days when leaving an abusive relationship are the most dangerous.

Universal credit has been mentioned today and, while it has been reviewed during lockdown, will the Government commit to split payments, as they have in Scotland? Honour-based violence is domestic abuse and should be included in the Bill. If there is something that we can take from the lockdown, it is to ensure that all of those suffering domestic violence and abuse know that they are not alone.

I do not have time to thank all the people who have written to me, but I thank End Violence Against Women, Hestia, EDA, Age UK, the Mayor of London and everybody who has written to me about the Bill. Together, we can help those people who are suffering domestic abuse and violence to be safe, if not at home, then somewhere provided by the Government.

3.47 pm

Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con) [V]: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) and, of course, my new colleague and hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe)—I congratulate her on her fantastic maiden speech. Such passion was shown. I look forward to hearing more from her.

I declare an interest in this debate in that I have practised as a barrister in the field of family law for more than 25 years. It is the great strength of this House that it brings together 650 people from a great number of backgrounds. There are right hon. and hon. Members who have first-hand experience of working in the field of law that we are debating today. They will, I am sure, agree that it is particularly distressing and very traumatic for those caught up in domestic abuse to go to court. At the same time, it has been hidden from view for far too long. Many victims have for too long been reluctant to come forward and that must stop. This legislation will encourage them to do so.

There are many examples of the sorts of pressures on the victims of domestic abuse. Many of them are confronted by abusive and controlling partners, who threaten to kill themselves, sometimes by threatening to set fire to themselves, if their partners have the courage to leave them or report the abuse to the police. I have represented the subjects of such threats. I recall the abject fear of one such client, many years ago, when they faced the prospect of being cross-examined by in person by their former partner who had done just that with a can of petrol in front of small children, and I shall never forget that experience. Over many months, I watched that client forge a new life, with support, and become truly independent.

Domestic abusers come from all sexes, and I do not differentiate by saying that it can only be one sex as opposed to another. This House should not differentiate between the sexes and the law certainly should not. The level of fear and intimidation such witnesses face is hard to describe and very harrowing to listen to. In many instances, legal cases have fallen by the wayside as the prospect of being cross-examined in person in court by an aggressive ex-partner has resulted in the reluctance or inability of that witness to give evidence. If they give evidence, their life may be changed for ever. Their evidence

might not be believed because of the very nature and way in which it was drawn, but that does not make it untrue.

The impact on a witness of the fear of being questioned by an abuser cannot be understated. It is definitely a continuation of a pattern of abuse, and it must stop. As a cab-rank barrister, I have also on occasion represented those accused of being domestic abusers, some rightly and some not, so I have seen it from both sides.

I therefore strongly support clause 59, which is an innovation that prevents cross-examination in person where one party has been convicted of, given a caution for or charged with certain offences against the other party. The ban will also extend to circumstances where one party has an on-notice protective injunction in place against the other. That should be wholeheartedly supported by everyone in the House.

I have represented parties in cases in the family courts on many occasions where evidence has been heard precisely in the way envisaged in the new legislation. As a former practitioner, I reassure all hon. Members that it can be done in a way so as to provide a fair hearing for all. Again, it does not differentiate in relation to the sex of the abuser or the alleged abuser.

It is wrong to suggest that the change could result in an unfair or limited trial for an alleged abuser. Further protection can be given by the court and afforded to such alleged abusers. There will be the possibility, and in fact the power, for the court to appoint an advocate to undertake difficult cross-examination in the event that the alleged abuser is not legally represented. Such advocates need to be experienced and sufficiently paid.

The clause seems particularly prescient as we go through the covid-19 pandemic. There has been a dramatic increase in domestic abuse due to the confines of the present lockdown. I have spoken to the chief constable of Derbyshire, Peter Goodman, who has keenly followed these issues. He and his officers are aware of the need to be proactive and extra-vigilant in these areas. He also pressed me last week on the need to protect vulnerable witnesses. I have also spoken to many constituents about the issue.

I have been involved in the wider debates around these issues for a long time. I have no hesitation in supporting the Government on the Bill. As well as drawing on my own experiences—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I hope the hon. Lady is drawing her remarks to a very swift close.

Miss Dines: I have listened to friends such as Sir Geoffrey Nice, QC, and Stephen Harvey. This is a game changer. I am pleased that this Conservative Government have brought such a pressing issue to the House. I support the Bill wholeheartedly.

3.52 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: I am grateful for the chance to contribute to this important and over-subscribed debate. As a nation, we are experiencing an extended period of living at home. It is a shared experience, but not an equal one. It has highlighted how different isolation is in a shared house, or with limited access to technology, or without access to green space. That is brought into sharp relief when we consider the

[Alex Norris]

lives of those living with supposed loved ones, but living in danger of abuse or of losing their lives. In general, the Bill might not be considered core covid business, but for a great deal of people hidden and scared, it could not be more important.

To an extent, I feel as though I am completing a set today. I was a member of the Home Affairs Committee that considered the draft Bill, the pre-legislative Committee for the Bill, the original Second Reading debate, and even the nascent stages of the original Bill Committee. I have been part of the process throughout, as has the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), whose leadership has been welcome.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for her outstanding leadership during the process, which has been so good that she has now been sent to sort out the parliamentary Labour party. We are well served on the Opposition Front Bench by my hon. Friends the Members for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) and for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips). In the case of the latter, we have all been following her anyway—the act has simply been formalised.

What I remember most is not the important parliamentary elements or conversations with parliamentary colleagues, but the afternoon I spent with an experts by experience group convened by Women's Aid. Over a series of sessions, they developed a Bill for survivors—essentially what they think should be in the Bill—so I will use my privileged platform in this place today to give them a voice. I would love to cover the whole of their Bill, and I recommend that colleagues read it, as I know the Minister has, but I will pick on a few elements in the short time I have available.

First, we should establish a long-term sustainable model of funding for specialist services. It seems a long time since we fought off the Government's plans for changes to supported housing, which would have led to generic and dangerous commissioning, but we have not finished the job. Refuges are a precious national asset. A survivor in Nottingham is just as likely to need a refuge in Birmingham. They should not be at the mercy of a patchwork quilt of commissioning decisions and funding availability. We know that there is currently a 30% shortfall in places. Last year, nearly two thirds of referrals were turned away. It is time to move to a national, nationally funded universal offer.

Secondly, we should remove local connection rules for survivors who move across local authority boundaries to access housing. That speaks for itself. It is easy to do and we should do it now. We should ensure that those people are given priority needs status when they access housing. That is critical at the moment given the experiences we know survivors are having in the covid context.

Thirdly, it is time to guarantee support for women who have no recourse to public funds due to their migration status by ensuring access to specialist support services, enabling access to the domestic violence concession and stopping public services sharing details of survivors with immigration control. Essentially that asks the Government to enshrine a simple principle: protection from harm is more important than a person's immigration status. Otherwise, that individual will not leave when

they are at risk of being hurt. In this place, we have 650 people with, I suspect, 650 different views on migration, but surely that is one element we can agree on.

Fourthly, there should be a duty on the Government to engage meaningfully with survivors about the Bill, any future review and the non-legislative guidance. Ministers know how frustrated I and other hon. Members have been about how much the Government have been unwilling to put on the face of the Bill, instead asking us to rely on the guidance. That is a big risk for us to take. One way to make us feel better about it is providing that when that guidance is being developed, survivors will be listened to and help shape it.

Finally, we should gender the Bill. It is a failing to have a Domestic Abuse Bill that does not once mention women or girls. Men are victims too, and should be supported, but the overwhelming proportion of victims are women and the overwhelming proportion of perpetrators are men. Sanitising the Bill of gender stops us as a society confronting the ugly truth that culturally, we condition young men, whether through music, sport, media or popular culture, to see women as lesser. That is where abusive behaviour stems from. A gendered Bill in Wales has been effective for men and women and we are missing a generational opportunity to do something important. It is striking that both the Home Affairs Committee and the prelegislative Committee, which are cross-party bodies, reached that conclusion, having examined the evidence properly. It is time the Government caught up.

I may have spoken the words, but they are those of survivors. It is time to meet their expectations.

3.58 pm

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): Like my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), I shall recycle a speech I made on the first Second Reading of this important Bill. I feel incredibly strongly about the subject, so much so that I thought it was worth driving to make a 300-mile round trip to speak here in person about the appalling events that resulted in the loss of the life of my constituent, Natalie Connolly.

The Natalie Connolly case is well known and the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) has already spoken about it, but it is worth rehashing what happened to Natalie. Natalie was a run-of-the-mill girl who came from Kidderminster in my constituency. In early 2016, she took up with John Broadhurst, a successful property man—a millionaire—who was presumably potentially quite a big catch for someone like Natalie. During their seven-month relationship, Natalie displayed many of the signs of domestic abuse. Her effervescent character became less and less bubbly and she started wearing more concealing clothes as the bruising across her body became more profound. She revealed to her sister that John Broadhurst was into dominating types of sexual activities. It became apparent that Natalie was suffering a lot of abuse, including profound sexual abuse.

In late 2016, Natalie, after going out to a party with John Broadhurst, tragically died at the bottom of the stairs in their house. She was covered in what turned out to be 40 injuries, some of which were profoundly brutal, profoundly intimate and very extensive. They had had a horrible afternoon. The following morning John Broadhurst went downstairs at 6 o'clock and stepped across Natalie's

lifeless body on a number of occasions. He had breakfast, washed his car and then called the emergency services to see what they could do for her.

It was horrific for the family, as Members can imagine, but to make it even more horrific Broadhurst called Natalie's father the following day to attempt some sort of horrific, possibly misogynistic pact to say that the boys could sort it out. What sort of man was this? Natalie's sister Gemma was asked to identify the body in a formal identification. Her nose had to be put back together with straws because it had been crushed, and the side of her face had collapsed because of her shattered eye socket.

John Broadhurst was charged with murder, as Members will understand, but the problem was that the trial did not work to Natalie's advantage. There were three problems. First, the prosecution case was protracted, responding to the defence case rather than prosecuting a sound case. In the end the prosecuting barrister reduced the prosecution case from murder to manslaughter by negligence, as he felt that that made it more certain that he would get a conviction.

Secondly, the defence centred on the "rough sex gone wrong" defence. How can it possibly be the case that somebody dies through sex? It just does not make any sense. It is completely wrong. That is why the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham and I have been working so hard to try to right this wrong that happened to Natalie.

The third problem was that John Broadhurst traduced Natalie's reputation after she died. He conducted post-mortem abuse, having abused her for the previous seven months. It is appalling that this happened. A rape victim is offered anonymity during the course of a trial. The fact that Natalie was dead should not have meant that she received that post-mortem abuse.

The right hon. and learned Lady and I propose to table three amendments. The first would ensure that there are no errors of judgment by the prosecuting barrister. Any potential dropping of the charge by the prosecuting barrister needs to be checked by the Director of Public Prosecutions or a peer review. The second amendment would stop once and for all the defence of "rough sex gone wrong", and the third would stop post-mortem abuse similar to that suffered by Natalie. That could include the judge issuing reporting restrictions.

The right hon. and learned Lady and I recognise, having spoken at length to Ministers, that those proposed amendments are not necessarily good pieces of law. It is very difficult, and we understand that there are issues, which is why I stress to those on the Government Front Bench that they will be probing amendments.

In my remaining moments, I just want to say that I have been here for 10 years and as a Back Bencher I have never found a more engaging Front-Bench team when it comes to talking about this type of thing. The Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), who is in his place, has been phenomenally helpful in talking about anonymity. I will also mention the Justice Secretary. Finally, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), has visited the family. She has been an astonishing individual.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your indulgence in allowing me to go a few seconds over.

4.3 pm

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab) [V]: It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier), who put so passionately why we need this Bill.

I could say a huge amount about this subject, but in the brief time available to me I want to link the Bill to two key areas of interest. The first is the importance of early intervention and a cross-departmental approach. The Bill very much focuses on crisis intervention and criminal justice. Of course it is right that immediate help for victims is a top priority. However, my work as chair of the Youth Violence Commission has highlighted time and again that we need to intervene as early as possible if we are to break the cycle of violence.

The domestic abuse charity SafeLives has found anecdotal evidence of a strong crossover between domestic abuse and violence-affected young people. Practitioners state that when we speak to teenagers about healthy relationships, although important, it is already too late. We need to go back to not just primary schools but nurseries, childhood centres and support for pregnant women.

Colleagues may be familiar with the adverse childhood experiences framework, which treats traumatic childhood events as indicators of an increased likelihood of risky behaviour and certain illnesses in adulthood; experiencing domestic violence is right on top of the list. As we have heard, it is therefore vital that children are properly recognised as experiencing abuse, not just witnessing it, and are given priority access to support. Related to that is a need for a trauma-informed public health approach to tackling domestic violence. Domestic abuse cuts across multiple policy areas, and our response must incorporate not only health, housing and education, but youth services, communities and local government. A full understanding of trauma and the impact it has on every part of a young person's life is vital if we are to provide early intervention.

My second point relates to my brief as shadow Minister for disabled people. Office for National Statistics data demonstrate that disabled, deaf and blind women are at greater risk of gender-based violence. Domestic abuse among those groups is often perpetrated by those they rely on for care, and the barriers to escaping are often even greater. As the Women's Aid briefing for this debate highlighted, it can often take numerous attempts to leave, because of the lack of understanding of disability within statutory and non-statutory organisations, a lack of information available in suitable formats and poor provision of accessible refuge space. I do not mind admitting that I was shocked when I read that during 2018-19 only 0.9% of refuge vacancies were in wheelchair accessible rooms and a further 1% were suitable for someone with limited mobility.

Many organisations will be promoting amendments to this Bill, but I wish briefly to touch on two promoted by Stay Safe East. The first seeks to repeal the existing provisions of the Serious Crime Act 2015 that provide for a so-called "carer's defence" if the perpetrator can demonstrate that in controlling their victim they were acting in his or her best interest. The defence is open to misinterpretation and particularly has an impact on those who have, or are perceived to have, capacity issues. The second amendment proposes that the Bill

[Vicky Foxcroft]

should provide further protection for disabled people by broadening its definition of the relationships covered by domestic abuse to include both paid carers and non-family members working as unpaid carers. I am sure that so many other important amendments will be discussed in Committee, and I very much hope that this Bill is strengthened as it passes through its remaining stages.

4.8 pm

More than two hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on Second Reading, the Deputy Speaker suspended the sitting (Order, this day). On resuming—

4.35 pm

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): The measures outlined in this Bill send a clear message both to survivors and perpetrators: domestic abuse should not and will not be tolerated. Domestic abuse is a heinous, horrific crime, not just because of the lasting damage it will do to its survivors but because it strikes at the heart of what most of us hold so dear: our family; our home. The place where we are meant to feel safest, most loved and cherished becomes a prison—a dark and frightening place, and, in the very worst cases, a mental and physical torture chamber. Domestic abuse does not discriminate. It can occur in any relationship, gay or straight, in any family behind any closed door. There is not a single community or socioeconomic group that is unaffected by this crime. Its victims, its survivors and its perpetrators are our friends, family members, neighbours and colleagues.

In the past month, all our lives have been turned upside down by the coronavirus crisis, and covid-19 has shone a dark light on domestic abuse. For some families, things are incredibly hard, trapped at home for most if not all of the day, creating the perfect storm that makes domestic abuse much more likely. I welcome the Government's recently launched domestic abuse campaign, *You Are Not Alone*, as part of their corona emergency response.

When we talk about domestic abuse, we generally think about adults. However, children and young people are often the hidden victims of domestic abuse, simply considered to be witnesses and not directly affected. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Barnardo's for the help it has provided me with preparing for this speech. It is an outstanding charity, one among many, whose phone line and policy work help thousands of children and young people experiencing domestic abuse directly or indirectly. It is estimated that one in five children aged under 18 experience domestic abuse at some point in their childhood. Three quarters of Barnardo's frontline staff are working with children impacted by domestic abuse.

The damage and devastating impact that witnessing domestic abuse can do to a child's development, their educational attainment and their long-term mental health can have a lasting effect on their life. It affects their ability to form happy, healthy relationships, and often leaves them trapped in a lifelong cycle of violence, either as a victim or even as an abuser themselves. Can you imagine the effect on a child who has had to endure

watching and listening to a parent, often a mother, being screamed at, beaten, their every moment controlled by their abuser, day in and night out, for many, many years? Imagine growing up in a home that is meant to be your sanctuary—your safety net—where every morning you wake up and dread going downstairs, not knowing whether a wrong word or look will start the abuse off again.

I would like to pay tribute to a constituent of mine, the broadcaster and journalist Charlie Webster, who is a domestic abuse survivor herself. She has told me her story of the systematic physical, emotional and coercive abuse that she suffered from the age of seven at the hands of her stepfather. It is hard to believe that she is still alive when you hear her story. She told me last week that she is convinced that if her abuse occurred today, during lockdown, she and her mum would not have survived. It is Charlie's experience of Barnardo's policy work that has led me to conclude that a desperately needed amendment to this Bill is required if we are going to help children through the trauma of growing up in a domestic abuse home.

The Government have added a welcome clause, clause 53, putting a duty on public authorities to ensure support for victims who live in safe accommodation, usually a refuge. My fear is that, as currently drafted, the Bill risks creating a two-tier system, helping those in supported accommodation, but not those still at home, and we already know that the majority of adults and child victims remain in their family home or elsewhere in the community. It is therefore vital that we fix this anomaly in the Bill so that all victims of domestic abuse can expect and receive the support they need to recover from harm and move on with their lives. I hope that Ministers will accept that clause 53 should be amended. Domestic abuse does not discriminate and neither should the law.

I commend the Second Reading of the Domestic Abuse Bill, and I pray that when it finally does become law, it will lead to a better understanding of domestic abuse among the public and public agencies, and that it will ensure that no vulnerable child or adult will be left to suffer.

4.41 pm

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): I would like to thank all those who have made this possible—in particular the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), whom I also thank for her kind words earlier.

A few months ago, when I rose to speak on the Domestic Violence Bill, I had no idea just how much of an impact those eight minutes would have on my life. Within a couple of hours my speech had gone viral on social media, it was all over the globe, in the press and on television and radio. I chose to speak about something extremely personal because I felt it was important to remind others, the vast majority of whom are of course women, that they are not alone, and to make the point that they have not been singled out because of who they are, their social or financial status, their profession, their lifestyle or their physical appearance.

Anyone can find themselves in a situation like I did, and nobody attracts another person with the truth about their brutal temper or their ulterior motives. A witty description of their controlling behaviour will not feature on their dating site profiles, and their work

colleagues will have absolutely no clue that, when they return home from work, they do so to an extremely anxious partner, who will have spent their day trying to anticipate any bear traps or tripwires that could trigger the familiar pattern of a night that then spirals downwards through an exhausting routine of aggression, accusation, rage, threats and pain.

I wanted to speak directly to those women, like me, struggling to make sense of the conflicting message of words of endless love dished out with actions of brutal hate. That simply is not love. Love should never hurt like that. We can spend years trying to make excuses for our abusers, justifying their terrible behaviour and blaming ourselves, just as they do, but it is not your fault: it is never your fault. The only person to blame is the person who uses their fists or their physical power as a weapon.

After my speech, I received hundreds of emails. They still arrive every day as reminders of the grim reality in many households across the UK. The stories are often shocking and provoke reactions of horror and sorrow, but also relief because, mostly, these are survivors' stories, told to me from their past. The ones I do not hear from as much, however, are those who are right in the middle of this reality right now. They are living locked down, locked in, locked away: threatened and terrorised by someone who thinks it is okay to use his wife, partner or family as an emotional or physical punch bag. What almighty cowards they are—bullies who seize the opportunity of a global crisis to show those smaller and weaker than them that they are in control. Whether you are a manual worker or a magnate with millions, if you use your fists or your fury to frighten those closest to you, you are certainly not in control, and you need to stop.

During these extraordinary last couple of months, we have rightly come to recognise those in our communities who carry out the vital services that we mostly take for granted. From refuse collectors to surgeons, and from teachers to council officers, all have played an incredibly important role in ensuring that things still work while all that we know is upside down. Those people have shown such dedication and love for our country when we need them the most. They have worked under enormous pressure, and above or beyond their pay grade or basic training.

Our police forces are not only upholding brand new emergency legislation, but keeping an eye on the most vulnerable in our communities, which includes those at risk of or suffering from domestic violence. They are dealing with a huge increase in incidents and doing their utmost to protect those who need to be protected. Likewise, there are wonderful people who work as counsellors, run helplines, or organise emergency refuge and shelter for those who need to flee from a situation in their home that poses more of a threat than a potentially deadly and incurable virus.

I thank the incredible women who have come into my life over the past few months and worked tirelessly to campaign for recognition of, and desperately needed funding for, the services that put women's lives back together. They include women such as Elaine from my local domestic violence refuge, Rising Sun. She is listed on my phone if I need to talk to her for a bit or to have a boost, just as she is for many other women in my part of Kent. However, services such as Rising Sun, and national services such as Refuge, Women's Aid and SafeLives,

have had their funding cut. At a time when calls on such services have doubled, it is essential that the Government listen to Labour Front Benchers today as they explain what funds are urgently needed. I join them in urging the Government to ringfence 10% of the £750 million fund for domestic abuse charities.

The coronavirus is devastating lives, families and professionals, and we know that it will damage our economy for many years to come. It is, however, a false economy not to invest in the women and families whose lives are stunted and stifled by domestic abuse. Given the right support, those people can and will grow and soar. They will help to stop the cycles of violence surrounding them, and they will probably give back to society far more than they have taken out at their time of greatest need.

4.47 pm

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): Let me take this opportunity to praise the excellent maiden speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe). She was not only eloquent, but also very IT savvy, and we can all learn from her example in this age of a digital Parliament.

I thank the Government for their hard work in bringing the Bill to the House, and also my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) for her tireless work on the issue. The Bill is truly a landmark piece of legislation that builds on the work done by the Government to protect victims of domestic abuse, and there is much to welcome in it. By enshrining the definition of domestic abuse on the statute book once and for all, we can eliminate the confusion and hesitation around pursuing domestic abuse-related charges. By strengthening the powers of the police and courts to protect victims and their families from perpetrators, we can help victims to find the courage to speak out and seek help.

Another aspect of domestic abuse has been thrown into even sharper relief by the current coronavirus pandemic. With the lockdown requiring us all to do our part by staying indoors, many victims will currently be experiencing a living hell, trapped inside with their persecutors, unable to escape or take a break, or even to go outside for some fresh air. Potentially, they will be unable to call for help.

Finally, a critical problem for many families—men, women and children who are fleeing domestic abuse—is housing. The all-party group on ending homelessness is calling for everyone who is homeless as a result of fleeing domestic abuse to have a legal right to a safe, permanent home by extending the automatic priority need category of housing to domestic abuse survivors who are seeking emergency accommodation. That measure is supported by Crisis, the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance, St Mungo's, Shelter, Centrepoin, and the Chartered Institute of Housing. Under the current situation, survivors of domestic abuse have no guarantee of access to settled housing from their local authority. Survivors have to prove their vulnerability and the extent of the abuse they have experienced to be eligible, which can be traumatic and distressing for them.

Research by the all-party group on ending homelessness found that nearly 2,000 households fleeing domestic abuse in England each year are not being provided with such assistance because they are not considered in priority need for housing. Crisis UK argues that many

[Joy Morrissey]

survivors of domestic abuse are, by definition, vulnerable and should therefore be placed in a priority-need category for housing allocation. Given the lockdown measures currently in place, it would be near impossible for a survivor to gather the necessary evidence to qualify for priority-need housing accommodation. I invite the Minister to consider the case for adding to the Bill the requirement for local authorities to put homeless victims of domestic abuse into the category of priority need for settled housing.

4.50 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD) [V]: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey). It is three years since the Bill was first promised to Parliament by the Government of the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). I welcome her earlier remarks, but it is no exaggeration to say that the progress of this Bill, in which she invested so much, has been dogged by delay. I do not think that any of us who were Members in the previous Parliament will ever forget the highly emotional accounts that we heard in the previous debate, particularly from the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), whose contribution today will, again, be one that many people will take notice of and that we should all take with us when the debate is over.

The fact that we are discussing the Bill today is important in many other ways, coming as it does at a time when, all around us, we are being encouraged to stay home and stay safe, although for the many people for whom this Bill is critical, that message brings an additional threat. During this crisis, we have seen an escalation in domestic abuse, which makes getting behind the Bill even more pressing. Reports this week indicate that calls to Refuge's national domestic abuse helpline increased by almost 50%. Tragically, in the first three weeks of lockdown, 16 women and children died—the highest figure for this period in more than a decade. The need to act could not be more pressing.

Earlier this month, I was joined by MPs across the political spectrum in writing to the Home Secretary to demand immediate action to improve support for survivors of domestic abuse through this crisis. We called on the Government to pay for empty hotels to be open to those at risk. We sought guarantees that local authorities have access to ring-fenced funding to ensure that existing refuges and support services stay open. We asked the Government to make it clear that the stay-at-home rule should be disapplied to those most at risk of abuse. Those asks have not changed. Some progress has been made. For example, many hotels have opened their doors to survivors, but support measures remain piecemeal and something of a postcode lottery. That is why I and the Liberal Democrats are determined to play our part in bringing this badly needed legislation into law as soon as possible. We will also continue to work to ensure that the final legislation is as robust as possible. In doing that, we want to thank those organisations with which we have worked: the End Violence Against Women Coalition on the need for more rape crisis centres; Action for Children on including children in the definition of domestic abuse; and the Step Up Migrant Women campaign and Amnesty, which is a part of it, on the issues facing migrant women.

I am not satisfied that, eight years on from the UK signing the Istanbul convention on preventing and combating domestic abuse, it is still not enshrined in our laws. Yes, the Bill is a step forward, but it will not deliver on that promise and we must keep up the pressure until the Government do. That will also mean targeted measures to guarantee support for all victims, not least the children and young people for whom the trauma of having witnessed domestic abuse can cause lifelong damage. I want the Government to amend this Bill to recognise that.

By the same token, we will continue to press for the £195 million needed to expand the number of rape crisis centres in the UK. Support must be provided to all those who need it most. For migrant women, that must mean eliminating the fear that reporting violence or seeking sanction will throw a judgmental spotlight on their immigration status and could compromise their personal safety.

At the moment, we talk a lot about the urgency of the covid-19 crisis, but for those who suffer it, domestic violence is always in need of an urgent response. The Bill gives us the opportunity to make a dramatic difference to the lives of those people, to ensure that they have somewhere they can feel safe, and to protect children from the scars that the trauma of witnessing domestic violence can leave. I believe that every one of us elected to this Parliament has at our core the desire to make a difference—to improve lives. This Bill will give us the opportunity to do that. We must not let the progress that we have made slip through our grasp.

4.55 pm

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con) [V]: I start by paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe) for her truly moving maiden speech. She will go down in history as having given the first maiden speech to be performed virtually, and having been—[Inaudible.]—father for the past 17 years, I know that he would be immensely proud of her, if not a tad jealous.

I welcome the Bill as a step in the right direction, and I hope that the Bill—[Inaudible.]—fully tackling domestic abuse—[Inaudible.]—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but the sound quality is very bad. Those in the Chamber are not really able to hear the hon Gentleman—and now he has disappeared completely. I am afraid that we have lost the hon. Member for Bury South for the time being, but we will try to retrieve him for later in the debate. For now, I call the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen).

4.56 pm

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab) [V]: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I want to start by paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield). Her bravery on this issue has been nothing short of inspirational, as she has put words to feelings that many are unable to. Hers and others' experiences demonstrate why the Bill is so desperately needed.

As we have heard, the recent findings of the Home Affairs Committee make for devastating reading, with domestic abuse killings doubled and national abuse

helplines seeing a 49% increase in calls. It was a horrific consequence of lockdown, which would come as no surprise to anyone who experiences domestic abuse. It is becoming apparent during this pandemic that people from black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds are disproportionately affected.

Domestic abuse affects all genders, races and sexualities, but BAME communities are likely to face additional barriers in accessing the services and help that they need, even outside a lockdown, so my concern is heightened at this difficult time. Although the statutory duty to support all those in refuges and supported accommodation is welcome, I echo Barnardo's/Ipsos MORI in saying that victims, especially those who are BAME or have disabilities, are unlikely to be in that type of accommodation. For wonderfully diverse areas such as my constituency of Luton North, it would be helpful to have a comprehensive strategy that addresses domestic violence in BAME communities, especially regarding violence against migrant women.

The Bill needs to look beyond lockdown, which is why I want to speak about provision for protections in the world of work. This is where I declare an interest as a proud member and former employee of the GMB trade union.

Domestic abuse does not start and end once someone closes the door to their home. It haunts every part of your life, including work—the incessant phone calls; the texts; the emails; being stalked; the questioning why you are late, leaving work early or having to take days off sick. The anticipation of what awaits you after work fills you with an increasing sense of dread as the clock ticks closer to the end of the working day. Justifying every minute away from an abuser while trying to maintain a presence at work makes it a far cry from the sanctuary it could actually provide.

The reason for my earlier declaration was that, as a former trade union officer, I worked with union members from across the country who had experienced domestic abuse, including the inspirational Claire Throssell. We produced a workplace charter on domestic abuse to ensure that employers provide proper protection to their staff. Indeed, many Members of the House have signed it. That charter called for measures that are vital to any worker experiencing domestic abuse, such as paid leave, access to information and support, flexible working, and ensuring that managers are properly trained. It is not an understatement to say that those provisions can be life-saving.

One brave woman told me:

“After a few months in my role, my partner at the time started constantly calling to see what I was doing, turning up at my workplace at lunchtimes unexpectedly, or demanding that I be home for a certain time...I was walking around on eggshells at home, and now at work. The calls and visits became more frequent...I found myself making excuses for not being able to attend social events with colleagues, wearing clothes to hide bruises or taking sick leave when I couldn't cover them up.”

Rather than this woman's employer understanding the situation, the response was to suspend her.

We are not asking the world from employers, just that their workers are kept safe. Reasonable adjustments, such as changing a work number, and staggering start and finishing times, as well as having the option of stepping back from public-facing roles to avoid interacting with perpetrators, could make all the difference, especially

when fleeing an abuser. Although nearly 50,000 workers are now covered by GMB's workplace charter, it is not nearly enough. It will never be enough until every worker is protected. It should never be an optional extra for employers to keep their staff safe or ensure that they are not financially penalised. Without these measures, I am afraid that the Bill will be a missed opportunity to protect victims of domestic abuse in every part of their life.

5 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con)[V]: It is a pleasure to be able to speak in this debate—arguably for the second time, having contributed back in October. What has been really interesting today is the quality of contributions from both returning and new Members. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe), who made a very powerful maiden speech, albeit in interesting circumstances. I reassure other Members that, although she sits on the Women and Equalities Committee that I now Chair, I have at no time found her to be remotely difficult.

I thank the Lord Chancellor for his opening comments. I would like to pay tribute in particular to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), the Minister with responsibility for safeguarding, who will close the debate this evening. She has proven to be a doughty champion of the Bill on the various occasions it has come back before us. She has also taken time, during the intervening months, to speak to various Members, including me, about the difficulties and challenges in bringing into legislation amendments or parts of the Bill that would tackle the cases that my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) highlighted so eloquently. I remember sitting behind him in October when he spoke of Natalie Connolly. What is tragic and sad about that case, although horrific and dreadful, is that it is not unique. We will see more individuals who are perpetrators of domestic violence trying to run that sort of defence. We have to find a way to stop that. I am certainly committed to working with my hon. Friend and the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) in that regard.

We know that domestic abuse can affect anyone: both genders, people who are able-bodied and disabled, and all ethnicities. It is no respecter of socioeconomic background. What we do know is that it impacts some more than others. LGBTQ people are twice as likely as the rest of the population to suffer from domestic abuse. We heard earlier about the impact of domestic abuse on people with disabilities, perhaps particularly those with sight impairments. Those are all issues that have been raised with Members by various charities over the course of the past few days. We all know that it is no respecter of age. I urge Ministers to look again at how they can include in their statistics victims of domestic abuse who are over 74. We know that the National Crime Survey does not pick up on that. Tragically, over the course of the past few weeks we have seen more pensioners who have been impacted. That is absolutely horrific and we have to find ways to include that in the Bill. There is a great deal to be done in Committee. I urge all Members who have the opportunity to serve on the Bill Committee to ensure that the changes that some of us wish to see can be reflected in it.

[*Caroline Nokes*]

We debate the Bill at the time of pandemic, when there is even more pressure on individuals, relationships and families. I wonder whether the Minister, in her closing comments, might reflect on the increase we have already seen in referrals to domestic abuse helplines, both online and telephone. When locked down with the perpetrator of domestic abuse, it is much harder for women to report those crimes. I ask her to reflect on what we might see when the pressure cooker valve is released and whether we will see yet more people reporting.

I want to conclude by speaking about the issue I raised on Second Reading part one, which is that of migrant women. I vividly remember sitting with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), in his time as a Justice Minister, alongside Southall Black Sisters and other groups representing migrant women. We know that people will use finances and physical strength—they will use any means they can to control people. Sadly, they will also use immigration status and passports. They will seize their victim's documentation and keep it from them so that they cannot assert their right to be in the UK legally. It is crucial, as all the Ministers in that meeting said, that we see people first as victims and not through the prism of their immigration status.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has a track record of standing up to those who seek to use power, influence and status to belittle and bully others. I reassure victims that they have a doughty champion in this Minister.

5.5 pm

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Madam Deputy Speaker, may I add my gratitude to you, the Speaker's team and everyone in this place who is ensuring that we can continue to scrutinise the Government in these unique and challenging times?

I thank the Government for bringing this legislation back at this difficult time. It is good to see such broad cross-party agreement on this issue. I congratulate the new shadow Home Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), and his Front-Bench team for their leadership, their constructive engagement and their early involvement on this issue.

On a personal note, may I say how wonderful it is to see my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) on the Front Bench? Her formal role on the Bill and her participation from the Labour Front Bench are long overdue. Her all-party parliamentary group on domestic violence and abuse worked with the APPG on ending homelessness, which I co-chair, on the "A Safe Home" campaign, which is backed by Crisis, Women's Aid, SafeLives and many more organisations and individuals. As the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey) indicated, the campaign also has cross-party support.

Sadly, there is a huge overlap between domestic abuse and homelessness. Last year, almost 24,000 families who were homeless or on the brink of homelessness had experienced or were at risk of domestic abuse. "A Safe Home" seeks to ensure that the Bill enables everyone who is homeless because they are fleeing domestic abuse to have access to a safe permanent home.

That was necessary before the virus struck; the most recent Office for National Statistics figures show that the number of women murdered in the UK increased to 214 in the 12 months to March 2019, including a rising number killed at the hands of their partner or former partner. It is even more crucial now we know that the lockdown has brought with it a rise in attacks. Refuge's national domestic abuse helpline has seen a 49% increase in daily calls and a quadrupling of web traffic.

Sadly, for some, the threat is fatal. The Counting Dead Women project estimates that 14 women were killed during the first three weeks of the lockdown. "Stay home, stay safe" is not true for everyone. I hope Ministers will ensure that safe long-term accommodation is guaranteed, to give women a better chance of escape without fear of ending up homeless.

Currently, anyone fleeing domestic abuse must prove that they are significantly more vulnerable than anyone else to be guaranteed help from councils for a permanent home. Some local authorities use that as a gatekeeping tool. Awful examples include women being told to go and get a letter from their abuser to prove they have been abused. Research last year for the APPG on ending homelessness revealed that almost 2,000 people were unable to meet the vulnerability threshold in England alone. Those are women who were not provided with a safe home after initial help in refuges—women left facing homelessness or a return to an abusive relationship. The Bill must end that fatalistic situation.

Helping those 2,000 people would not be a huge commitment for the Government. My council, the London Borough of Southwark, is already adopting that measure. Although I hope the Government follow where Southwark leads, this issue should not be dependent on leadership in any one postcode, borough, town or city. Ministers have the chance to address this issue nationally through the Bill, and they must rise to the challenge.

When Ministers announced the statutory duty on local authorities to provide temporary accommodation-based support last year, it was welcomed across the House and the country. An extension to an automatic guarantee of safe long-term housing would be similarly welcomed and is just as essential. I also hope Ministers recognise that the Bill needs to extend the statutory duty on local authorities so that it covers not just accommodation but all the specialist support necessary to rebuild lives.

Nearly 70% of survivors access other services that are provided in the community, including independent domestic violence and abuse advisers, counselling, and young people's and children's workers. Children who have experienced domestic abuse should be able to access counselling and support, but that is not currently covered by the Government duty and is poorly delivered at local level. A full statutory duty and resources are required to commission the full range of specialist domestic abuse services that are needed, and the Bill is the right vehicle to provide that.

The current crisis has made the issue far more acute, but there was already insufficient funding in the system. Two thirds of the people referred to refuges in 2018-19 were turned away. With more people at risk during this lockdown and after it ends, the Government must act now to provide sufficient sustained funding in the longer term. I hope to join the Bill Committee to raise those and other issues in more detail for all the organisations working on the frontline. Those issues include splitting

universal credit payments to prevent economic abuse; ending no recourse to public funds restrictions on essential support for women and children currently denied help—shamefully—in this country; introducing a gendered definition, given the higher prevalence of women experiencing abuse; fully ending cross-examination in courts; criminalising the use of threats to share naked or sexual images in order to abuse or control someone; and the proper enforcement and monitoring of non-molestation protection orders, which is far too patchy currently, and which I hope Ministers will act on, given the heightened risk now, more than ever, in lockdown Britain. I hope to see progress on all those issues as the Bill makes progress and look forward to the Minister's reply.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We can now return to Christian Wakeford, but via audio only.

5.10 pm

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con) [V]: I start by paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe) on a truly moving maiden speech. It will go down in history as the first maiden speech to be delivered virtually. Having been a councillor with her father for the last seven years, I know that he will be immensely proud of her, if not a tad jealous.

I welcome the Bill as a step in the right direction, and I hope that it is just that—a step towards fully tackling domestic abuse in our society. Some 2.4 million adults were victims of domestic abuse in 2019. That is unacceptable, and it is important that we shine a light on that heinous crime. Domestic abuse is not just a heinous crime. If not stopped, it can, and often does, lead to further crime, such as sexual abuse or even murder. Far too many women have been lost as they were unable to access the support they needed or their cries for help were not heeded.

Since the lockdown began, domestic abuse agencies and refuges have reported a huge increase in demand, and are increasingly under pressure, with one charity reporting a 700% increase in calls to its helpline. Children are witnessing more abuse than previously, with no escape available because schools are also closed. It is, however, anticipated that there will be a further increase in demand once lockdown measures are relaxed and victims can more freely access the support they need. With that in mind, and while previously announced funding is appreciated by victims and agencies, can the Minister advise what plans are in place to help victims after the lockdown restrictions are relaxed and to ensure that the perpetrators of domestic abuse will face justice in a speedy manner?

As many hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, many aspects of the Bill are to be commended, including the introduction of the domestic abuse commissioner, along with civil protection for victims in the form of the domestic abuse protection notice and domestic abuse protection orders, but that needs to be coupled with adequate funding to ensure that no victims slip through the net. While the Bill is a step in the right direction, I trust the Minister will continue to review the issue and take further action where needed to support victims of this awful crime.

5.13 pm

Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con): This legislation has been a long time coming, and for those on the Front Bench on this side and across the Floor of the House it

has been a labour of love. I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and the Lord Chancellor and his ministerial team for all their work.

There is so much that the Bill will achieve. I start by praising the creation of the post of domestic abuse commissioner. The Home Affairs Committee had the benefit of hearing from her a fortnight ago when she gave evidence on the impact of the lockdown on women with abusive partners. The cogency of her evidence, and her understanding of the pressure points and the unique challenges for women seeking escape, left no doubt in my mind about how vital her role will be.

Then there is the simple act of creating a statutory definition that expresses domestic abuse in all its myriad forms, which is what I think makes the Bill so much more than the sum of its parts. When the Sex Discrimination Act was passed in 1975, it was on the face of it a law that gave women the right to bring cases to employment tribunals, but in fact it was a piece of great social reform that said to women, for the first time really, “We understand the wrong that you experience. We give it definition as a statutory tort and we give you a right of enforcement.” The Bill has many of those features. It shines a spotlight in the darkest corners, and it puts women centre stage.

It is with the darkest corners in mind that I speak in support of the amendments jointly proposed by the Mother of the House, the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), and my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) on the rough sex defence. Through that defence, acts of extreme violence are given a different complexion because they occurred during sex, and it is said that the victim wanted it—something that the Prime Minister himself has said is unacceptable. I know that there are big brains on the Front Bench giving this serious thought. Their task is technical, and it must avoid unintended consequences.

The Lord Chancellor was correct when he said that rough sex is not a defence. That is true, but it does not prevent a defendant from establishing that there was consent when the victim is not alive to tell the tale. The Natalie Connolly story is a case in point. I cannot imagine how hard it was for her family to hear how John Broadhurst inflicted more than 75 catastrophic injuries on their daughter, sprayed bleach in her face and left her in a pool of blood. And yet he established in court that one of the most extreme and violent of those acts—the intimate insertion of a bottle of carpet cleaner—when he had beaten her black and blue, and she was very close to death, was done with her consent. In fact, at paragraph 31 of the sentencing remarks, the court found that it was done at her instigation. It is easy to see why her father, Alan, told *The Sun* in an interview last month that at times, it felt like Natalie was on trial. That is why I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest for affording Natalie the dignity in this Chamber that she was deprived of in her death.

Natalie's case is by no means an isolated example. Take Laura Huteson, who in 2019 had her throat slit by her partner, or Anna Banks, who was throttled to death by her partner a few years earlier. In all these cases, what is really just extreme violence against women is given a veneer of complicity through the sexual element. The victim has no voice. The lurid details of a private encounter are made public in circumstances where, had she lived and the case proceeded as one of rape or

[*Laura Farris*]

sexual assault, she would have been anonymised, and the man receives a derisory sentence on a manslaughter conviction.

We must recognise that violence of this nature is becoming normalised. ComRes undertook a survey last November of a large group of women aged between 18 and 39. Of them, 70% said that they had experienced strangulation during sex, and of that cohort, more than half said that the man had not sought their consent before doing so. They had not wanted it, and some of them gave moving interviews to the BBC in which they said they thought the man was going to kill them.

This landmark legislation offers an opportunity for the Government to show cultural leadership. I hope that it will look to the horizon and build in statutory protections that will keep women in relationships safe for the future.

5.18 pm

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab) [V]: I welcome the introduction of this legislation and the work being done by MPs from across the House and voluntary organisations to ensure that the needs of victims are recognised and prioritised in the Bill. I would also like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for her bravery on this.

In 2018-19, the number of domestic violence-related crimes increased by a quarter. Since lockdown measures were introduced in the UK, calls to the national domestic abuse helpline have soared by 49%. Victims of domestic abuse have been waiting for the introduction of more thought-out protections for decades, and this Bill truly has a chance to be transformative. However, we must get this right to ensure that the huge increase we have seen in domestic violence is not an annual expectation.

I want to start by making representations to the House on behalf of victims of domestic violence, who are often denied even the most basic provisions. This ongoing public health crisis has highlighted the plight of people with no recourse to public funds on a regular basis. I have been contacted by several constituents since the emergency covid measures were introduced who have no recourse to public funds and have found themselves completely abandoned by this Government and, in some cases, destitute. The inability to work, seek help from friends and family and move around freely means that people with no recourse to public funds are having to rely solely on the income earner in their household. Without access to welfare or housing support, victims of domestic violence are forced to remain in their abusive household for fear of homelessness and absolute poverty.

Alarmingly, over 50% of migrant women surveyed said that they believed that the Home Office and police would believe a perpetrator over them and therefore were fearful of seeking help. Unfortunately, that fear is supported by the fact that more than half of police forces in England and Wales confirmed that they share victims' details with the Home Office for immigration control purposes. When a call to 999 may be a person's only option for survival, it is disgraceful that those deterrents exist. That is especially important during covid-19, when the usual survival mechanisms for victims have been cut off. The lockdown measures introduced

against coronavirus have made accessing the usual support systems difficult for all victims of domestic violence, and it is clear that that is not being addressed with the seriousness necessary.

The Bill does not go far enough to provide LGBT and disability specialist provision. The Government must act urgently so that the needs of domestic abuse victims are represented during emergency covid-19 discussions. They should therefore ensure that the domestic abuse commissioners include the senior covid-19 planning forums, including Cobra. The Government must also start making preparations to support victims of domestic violence after lockdown measures are eased.

Voluntary organisations providing support for domestic violence have warned that costs are likely to surge post-covid. If the Government are serious about tackling domestic violence, there must be adequate long-term funding that reaches diverse specialist services. It is essential that funding for charity organisations is made available and that local authorities are given clear guidance on supporting victims of domestic violence going forward.

Local authorities have been working at the forefront alongside voluntary organisations to provide support and assistance to victims of domestic violence during this crisis. However, there is a clear lack of specialist support available in many areas of local government. When the crisis is over and the Government declares business as usual, what will happen to those victims who are currently being housed in hotels and empty homes? Local authorities do not have the funding or expertise to tackle this looming crisis going forward. Without clear guidance, that will cost lives. I ask the Government to take clear and decisive action, alongside the introduction of the Bill, to urgently support the most vulnerable in our society and ensure that a social crisis does not follow this covid-19 crisis.

5.22 pm

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): I start by paying tribute to the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe). She is a friend, a formidable colleague and today she is a history-maker. I thought she gave a wonderful speech.

I strongly welcome this Bill and I add my words of tribute to those from Members from all parts of the House for those who have helped get us to this stage. It is, regrettably, a timely Bill. Many Members have touched on the current situation, and I echo the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Miss Dines) about the importance of Members of Parliament speaking to their local police force and ensuring that we are dealing with the issue on the ground, as it happens. Her comments were well placed, and I join our weekly calls with Derbyshire police to make sure that they are taking the issue as seriously as we are.

The symbolism of the Bill and the importance of that symbolism was beautifully summarised by my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Laura Farris) in a fantastic speech. It is incredibly important that we hear male voices adding their support for the Bill, because this is not a women's issue, but a societal issue, and it is vital that male voices make themselves heard, saying, "This must not go on." The Bill is a wonderful starting point. There have been many suggestions for what should be added to make it stronger, but the symbolism of it is this House at its finest.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) made a wonderful speech earlier and stole almost all the suggestions that I was going to make. As he got there first, all I will say is that I strongly support what he said about the impact on children.

Very sadly, I grew up in a household where we encountered incidents of domestic violence. Let me say that it casts a lifelong shadow on those children who are affected. Behind closed doors, many things go on. There are many secrets. Those doors do not have to be those of people who are lower class, middle class or upper class; they do not have to be of members of one socioeconomic group or one minority characteristic or another. Those doors do not discriminate. There are secrets behind them.

I echo the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), who touched on the impact of domestic abuse in the LGBT community. That is an incredibly important consideration.

Unfortunately, I had a step-dad who reigned with physical terror. I regret that I remember the difficulties we had when he became violent, when he decided, one day, to come home and beat my mum to a point where she needed strong support, and when he came upstairs and blamed me—an 11-year-old kid—and used words that I would not repeat in Parliament ever. Those are things that shape you. Those are things that, unfortunately, you can never forget.

I do not remember particularly well the period afterwards of economic manipulation in which he took, or tried to take, control of the family's money, but I do remember the visit of the psychiatric nurse to help my mum. I remember her shame—her shame—for nothing that she had done, her shame at not being able to tell the authorities, when she denied it to the police and when I was lying to my school. I remember that shame. That is something that nobody should have to go through. If there is anything that we should take away from this Bill, and this fantastic session of Parliament today in which we have heard so many brilliant contributions, it is a very simple message: this must end.

5.27 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP) [V]: It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate on behalf of my constituents and to follow such a powerful speaker. I declare an interest in that I was an expert witness in domestic abuse cases in the Scottish courts. I welcome the Bill and thank the campaigners who have been wholeheartedly at the forefront of the legislation.

Domestic abuse is much more than physical violence. It has coercion, psychological abuse and financial abuse at its core. During the lockdown, cases of domestic abuse are reportedly rising, because proximity is heightened and escape for survivors is limited. Although home is safe for us, it is dangerous for survivors. As a psychologist, I want to take some time to highlight the particular impact of domestic abuse on the needs and experiences of children and young people, and to ask that the Bill is strengthened in that regard. The current proposals are narrow and require to be absolutely transformative for children.

Domestic abuse is not just witnessed by children; it has an impact on them emotionally, developmentally, socially and behaviourally, and on their health and

wellbeing. It is one of the significant adverse childhood experiences that leads to long-term comorbidity and decreases life chances.

Domestic abuse also leads to childhood abuse in many cases. We know that children may become anxious and depressed, have sleep difficulties, nightmares or flashbacks, have a heightened startle response to danger, wet their beds due to trauma, become aggressive, identify with the aggressor themselves, fall behind at school, and experience low self-esteem for years to come. They will often suffer feelings of fear and helplessness, anxieties about their safety and the safety of their family at risk, and fear of parental loss and abandonment.

It is vital that the needs and experiences of children are reflected in the Bill. We need a child-focused approach. We know that women who are pregnant are often at increased risk of domestic abuse, and we must do all we can to protect them and their unborn child from that abuse. Child protection responses must therefore be strengthened. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, I hear from survivors about the impact on them of childhood sexual abuse and its clear link with domestic violence. The needs of survivors of sexual violence are not fully addressed in the Bill. I will work constructively across the House to ensure that the Bill is as strong as possible for all survivors and that children have the support they need to ensure that the terrible legacy of domestic violence that they have experienced does not transcend generations.

5.30 pm

Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con) [V]: Nearly 10 years ago, one summer's day, I remember sitting in a stifling hot room looking at a photograph of a cute, blond four-year-old boy who was beaming up at the camera. Nothing remarkable in that, you might think, and I expect that many of us have similar photographs of our own children smiling and laughing at the camera, just as they should be at that age, making happy memories. The difference on this occasion was that I was in court, sitting as a magistrate. The photograph had been taken by a police officer, and the little boy had an enormous black eye. He had been trying to protect his mother from being attacked by his father and had strayed too close to a flailing fist. He was just four years old, and he had already been subjected to more emotional and physical trauma than most of us can imagine. Domestic abuse is a crime and an abomination against victims and their families. It is a crime against our whole society. I have been lucky; I have never personally experienced it, but other Members of this House have done so, and they have spoken incredibly movingly about their experiences.

I will be supporting the Bill today, and I am proud that the Government are taking this lead. I pay tribute to all those involved in the development and drafting of the Bill. It is remarkable that until now there has been no cross-government statutory definition of domestic abuse, and no commissioner to give a voice and prominence to this issue and to hold the Government to account. I welcome those measures, along with the trial of protection orders and protection notices and the extra cross-court safeguards in the justice system, which will give more effective protection to victims and their children—explicitly, whatever their immigration status might be. I very much

[Julie Marson]

welcome the legislative inclusion of Clare's law. I would also like to take a moment to recognise the pioneering work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), who worked tirelessly for this legislation and to ensure that provisions on coercive control would be included for the first time.

In Hertford and Stortford, we are fortunate to have Future Living, a charity founded and run by the amazing Sandra Conte, which provides outstanding community support and services for victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, male and female alike. Everyone who meets Sandra and knows what she and her colleagues do at Future Living becomes an evangelist, and I am no different. Unapologetically, I shall use this opportunity to encourage the Government and our local authorities in Hertfordshire to continue to provide Future Living with the support and resources it needs to do its vital work, especially as Sandra has told me today that she is seeing a significant increase in cases, particularly where a separated, abusive parent is using the covid crisis to keep children away from their victim and flouting contact orders. We expect even more of an increase in demand for the charity's services as we come out of lockdown.

I truly understood the dynamics of domestic abuse for the first time only after I experienced the training given to magistrates. It opened my eyes and completely changed my perspective. It is vital that those involved in policing and the justice system have rigorous training so that they can recognise the abuse cycle, from subtle control to murderous violence, and the fact that the most dangerous moment for a victim is often when they leave the relationship and try to regain control of their own lives.

Domestic abuse is a dangerous and destructive cycle. It was about 10 years ago when I saw that photograph. That little boy will be 14 or 15 by now, and what I wonder most is whether he spent his childhood in that environment or whether things might have changed for him. Perhaps his father received the justice or indeed the help he needed; perhaps his mother managed to escape. Heartbreakingly, that boy might be condemned to repeat the cycle of control and abuse he grew up with, knowing no different and believing that that was normal family life. I support this Bill, because I think it will help children like him. It has been a privilege to contribute to this debate.

5.35 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab) [V]: I, too, welcome this long overdue Bill and many of its provisions. Since becoming the Member for Bristol South in 2015, the impact of domestic violence has been one of the most heartbreaking and dominant parts of my casework. My surgeries have been filled with women, mainly in their 20s, with children, who have been desperate to remain part of their community and have had family support but who have been seeking refuge from their perpetrator. The impact is wide, and when in recent discussions with headteachers and local police we have been trying to identify behavioural problems locally, we have often come back to a background of young men experiencing violence at home and then repeating it.

This Bill is crucial for many of my constituents, because our area has some of the highest rates in the city. In 2018-19, police figures for Bristol showed more

than 10,000 domestic violence and abuse incidents, but there is a shocking disparity between levels of violence across the city. A 2017 report on women's health showed that the rate of domestic violence against women in some wards in my constituency was double the national average. There has been a problem for some time, and one that I raised with the UN rapporteur on human rights in 2018. In some of our communities it is embedded, normalised and long-term, and often not discussed. A significant part of the problem is that cases are not reported, which presents huge difficulties for people supporting the victims. Some 14% of the population in one of our wards think that abuse is a private matter—compared with a figure of 7% across Bristol as a whole. Sometimes a reluctance to speak out against abuse is related to the amount of time it has been going on. A report by the south-west rape crisis centre partnership entitled "The chilling silence" identified sexual abuse among older women in particular, and often not much publicity is given to those women. I would like to see that issue addressed in this Bill.

In February, I held a surgery especially for women who had come through domestic violence—they were largely on the other side—and I asked them what services they would like to see changed. I am grateful to them for sharing their experiences and being brave. Most of the suggested changes centred on the justice system, but many related to mental health support once a victim has managed to flee their abuse, because the trauma does not end when someone leaves. I heard many examples of how the state apparatus is then used to manipulate the victim from a distance; for example, childcare arrangements and child maintenance payments can all add to the psychological trauma once someone has left.

I wish to focus my comments on part 4 of the Bill. Bristol City Council is doing some excellent work in this area, alongside some brilliant partner organisations, but I am deeply concerned that the duty placed on local authorities to support and protect victims is not sustainable without the Government providing the necessary funding. After the past 10 years of cuts locally, this is an unrealistic ask, and funding must accompany duty and responsibility. Housing is also key. Having enough accessible and appropriate housing to accommodate victims quickly is essential, but far too often I have seen women and their children forced to move out of local areas, away from support networks and their families, while the perpetrator remains in the house. Where it is safe and appropriate to effect change, I hope that measures will be taken forward in this Bill.

The Justice Secretary, in his opening remarks, identified a complex landscape locally, and the role of local authorities and police and crime commissioners. He said that the new commissioner would seek to understand that. I hope that she works closely with those in Bristol, as people there are doing a remarkable job. I wish to highlight the work being done by Avon and Somerset police, and I pay tribute to the police and crime commissioner, Sue Mountstevens, who over eight years has led tremendous work in this area, working with voluntary organisations.

The police could not do such work without our excellent voluntary sector's work with victims. The sector is coming particularly to the fore at this time, doing tremendous work to support women locally. However, if the Government are really serious about making an impact, they should support the call from my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds)

for a duty to provide funding for this work, and particularly to ensure that good, quality-assured perpetrator programmes are in place.

5.40 pm

Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con) [V]: I am honoured to have the chance to speak in the debate. Having listened all afternoon, I am proud of so many colleagues for their brave testimony, but I particularly applaud my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe), who made an historic maiden speech. I congratulate both Front-Bench teams on the dedication they have shown to this issue. We have heard from strong Welsh voices on both Front Benches, but I am proud to be the first female Welsh speaker in the debate.

The Bill could not be more timely. While most of us take refuge in our homes from covid-19, it is important to recognise that the virus is not the biggest threat to those enduring the lockdown with an abuser. At the heart of the Bill is a new definition of domestic abuse that will ensure that all domestic abuse is properly understood, as it is evident that abuse can be perpetrated in many forms and knows no bounds.

As I am sure is the case for many colleagues, I have been contacted by several different organisations with views on the proposed definition. Particularly compelling was the call to include so-called honour-based violence. Although it is important not to limit the understanding of domestic abuse to specific acts, I hope to see recognition of the abuse experienced by specific groups and communities included in the Government's guidance for the Bill. I am pleased that the Government have begun a review into what support can be provided to migrant victims of domestic abuse, but I ask that the Government revisit there being no recourse to public funds for victims with certain immigration statuses. I congratulate the Government on the Bill's gender-neutral status, thereby including the 2.9 million men who have experienced domestic abuse in their lifetime—a figure thought to be considerably under-reported—and reiterating the Government's commitment to seek to protect everyone from abuse.

I am particularly pleased to see the new definition include economic abuse. An incredibly brave constituent recently contacted me who had moved to my constituency to start a new life after leaving an abusive marriage. She was subject to physical and mental abuse from her ex-husband, and left with nothing but the clothes on her back when she fled. It took her three years to obtain a divorce, but a divorce in and of itself will not address the financial relationship that arises in a marriage and that can often continue after separation. This lady's ex-husband would not agree to a fixed period to address their joint mortgage. In her words:

“It has been over 7 years since we parted, and I am still tied to the person who emotionally broke me. It is like a hold still over me—something he always wanted.”

Her story convinces me that we must review the financial ties that can exist within abusive relationships and find ways to help victims free themselves completely. We must ensure that the Bill helps those in situations such as my constituent's. Our courts cannot simply allow financial ties to facilitate coercive control over victims long after relationships end. I have spoken to the Minister about this privately, and I look forward to working with her on this point.

My constituent had the courage not only to leave her abusive relationship but to find herself a new career, in the Dyfed-Powys police force, where she deals with domestic abuse reports almost every day. I know my constituent is watching this debate, and I take this opportunity to repeat that I find her courage and service a genuine inspiration, and I know that others do as well.

I also applaud the work of Welsh Women's Aid, which has been supporting women and campaigning for change in Wales for more than 40 years. One area where I agree with it is around reforms to the family justice system. The Bill will ban perpetrators from being able to cross-examine their victims in family courts, and will also provide domestic abuse victims with automatic eligibility for special measures in criminal cases, but I believe that we could go further. I urge the Government to look at extending the ban to any family, criminal or civil proceedings in domestic abuse, sexual abuse, stalking or harassment cases.

I have one final point. The beauty of areas like Brecon and Radnorshire can often mask issues such as domestic violence. I know that the safeguarding Minister represents a heavily rural constituency, as I do, so I urge her to give careful consideration to the challenge of policing and safeguarding in rural areas as the Bill goes through its later stages.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, you for giving me the opportunity to speak. I give the Bill my firm support. It gives me huge pride to be part of a Government who, at this time of national crisis, prioritise legislation that protects vulnerable people from harm.

5.45 pm

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP) [V]: I thank the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones) for her speech. I am extremely grateful to have the opportunity to participate in this important debate.

In paying tribute to the Secretary of State for Justice, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), I am mindful that in the circumstances in which we live—the stresses and strains of enforced isolation and the consequential pressures on family life—the Bill is now perhaps more important and timely than we could have predicted.

I am acutely aware that the Bill is no longer the same as the one we considered in October last year, and that with the restoration of devolution at Stormont and the Northern Ireland-specific sections removed, our devolved Assembly at Stormont has this afternoon given a Second Reading to its own related Bill. I support the Northern Ireland Assembly in its quest to locally shape and advance important safeguards at home, and I know that my immediate predecessor in this House, Naomi Long MLA, will, as Justice Minister, robustly and purposefully advance the protections required in Northern Ireland.

As I said, the Northern Ireland Assembly has today made progress on its legislative provision on coercive control in Northern Ireland, providing protection that abuse victims in our Province have not had to date. There are also additional replicating provisions relating to evidence given in court, which has been referred to throughout this debate. I am concerned, however, that despite that attempt to level up today, the passage of this Bill will consequently mean that Northern Ireland

[Gavin Robinson]

will remain behind the curve, with the provision of a domestic abuse commissioner available only in England and Wales; domestic abuse protection notices available only in England and Wales; domestic abuse protection orders available only in England and Wales; and a statutory duty on the provision of hostel accommodation and support services available only in England and Wales.

Women's Aid in Northern Ireland, which is one sterling example of the important and vital work that is done, has provided 654 woman with refuge accommodation over the past year, but has highlighted the fact that 381 others could not secure a necessary space. None of the important progressive provisions that I have just mentioned feature in the Northern Ireland Bill that was before the Assembly today. I trust that through the passage of the Northern Ireland legislation, the Minister and my colleague Paul Givan MLA, who is Justice Committee Chair, will resolve that in Committee, if they can draw on the benefits of the legislation that we are considering. In catching up with one aspect of protection for Northern Ireland victims of domestic abuse, we do not want to lag behind in others.

I have never spoken on this legislation without highlighting the lack of legislative protection against stalking in Northern Ireland. As is clear from the Bill, in part 2 of schedule 2, the extraterritorial provisions that apply in Scotland specifically include stalking; those provisions are absent from part 3 of that schedule, which relates to Northern Ireland, because in Northern Ireland we do not have stalking legislation as part of our framework. I earnestly hope that that is yet another absent gap that the Northern Ireland Assembly will consider and incorporate; it is a glaring disparity in the protections for victims of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland.

Additionally, I trust that the rationale for failing to incorporate in the Bill at an earlier stage provisions on stalking for Northern Ireland—that it would have been out of scope—will similarly apply to the enthusiastic suggestion that some hon. Members would seek to hijack this Bill to make sweeping changes to the Abortion Act 1967.

With femicide rates in Northern Ireland being the highest in Europe, and comparable to Romania, and with a high-profile domestic murder in Northern Ireland last weekend, these changes could not come quickly enough.

5.49 pm

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con) [V]: It is fair to say that there are several Members on both sides of the House who are more expert in this topic than me, but I wanted to speak in the debate because I have known a number of people in my personal and professional life who have been the victims of domestic abuse. I pay tribute to them today—they know who they are.

Our public understanding of domestic abuse has moved on quite a bit from an outdated notion of a man of a certain age hitting his wife. We know that the perpetrators can be white and black, young and old, able bodied and disabled, gay and straight. They can also be male and female. That point is important and I support the Government in not including gender in the definition in the Bill. Up to a third of victims are male—under-reporting has also been touched on—and it would not be right, when we are trying to uncover what is often hidden, inadvertently to hide that experience.

However, I completely support the Government in making it clear in the guidance that the overwhelming majority of people who suffer are female. It is right to recognise that.

We should welcome several aspects of the Bill. To stick with the definition, it is right that we have included emotional abuse and economic abuse. Again, that gets away from the idea of just physical violence because emotional and economic abuse can crush the spirit and restrict the freedom, independence and confidence of the victims almost as much, if not more, than some other forms of abuse.

It is also right to prohibit the cross-examination of victims by their abusers in family courts. We should question why we ever thought that was acceptable.

I want to talk about three Cs: the commissioner, the charities and the children. I warmly welcome the appointment of a domestic abuse commissioner. We have seen in several other areas how such a person can put a clear, single voice in Parliament that keeps us all on our toes. We have seen that with the Social Mobility Commission and the Children's Commissioner. I encourage the designated appointed officer to be fiercely independent. If she does her job correctly, there may be times when the Government regret appointing her, but that will only show that she is doing her job properly in holding their feet to the fire.

The second C is charities. Although not the only area by any means, domestic abuse is a key area where charities have done much to aid our understanding. They have done so much to put the issue on the agenda—in my judgment, more than any other key institution. There are many of them, but I want to highlight one that helps in Wantage and Didcot, and also across Oxfordshire and other counties: Reducing the Risk. It has trained 1,100 domestic abuse champions who support people for an average of between six and 18 months to help them try to be safe in their own homes. They place a heavy emphasis on prevention. We have probably not heard enough about prevention in the debate, although some Members have mentioned it. We need to have prevention always in our minds.

The third C is children. Again, I support the Government in not including children in the definition, but they should be uppermost in our minds. Children will not be involved in every case, but as the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) highlighted, when children experience domestic abuse around them, it contributes to toxic stress. It is right at the top of adverse childhood experiences. We know that some of those children will go on to become abusers and others will become the abused and recreate the relationships that they have seen at home. A far larger number will never escape the feelings they had when growing up in such a home, and it will affect their education, their employment, their relationships and most aspects of their lives. In supporting the Bill for what it does for the adults and its support for them, I have firmly in my mind the fact that it will also support the children.

5.54 pm

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): I apologise for being here in person rather than virtually. I thank the Speaker's Office for confirming that earlier today. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for her powerful and brave contribution, which I watched from my office earlier today.

This week saw a tragic and terrible set of domestic killings in Ilford, just over the border in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), just next door to where I used to go to Scouts as a young man. The full motives that led a father to brutally murder his two very young children before killing himself are not yet known. It brought home to all of us in Ilford, though, the dark reality that in this time of lockdown and isolation, there are too many families and too many victims—more than we may yet be aware of—suffering anguish. Indeed, when I spoke earlier this week to our Metropolitan police borough commander, as I do each week, he noted an approximate 60% increase in DV-related calls to the police in our area.

There will be other people suffering domestic violence who are isolated with a perpetrator and who do not have the space to escape and raise alerts, so there is bound to be under-reporting and I fear what may be revealed when children eventually return to school. After all, children can be the victims of domestic violence. Even if it is not directed at them, the emotional pain of seeing a parent hurt can leave trauma for a lifetime. Barnardo's says that the number of calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline has increased by 49% and only 5% of those vulnerable children are attending school at the moment. As other Members have mentioned, the charity Refuge has reported that the National Domestic Abuse Helpline experienced a 25% increase in calls during the first week of the covid-19 lockdown and its website has experienced a 700% increase in traffic. That is a truly chilling statistic.

Like many MPs before lockdown, I sat in my non-virtual surgeries and heard heart-wrenching and chilling stories of domestic abuse. Truth be told, I often found it difficult to offer words of comfort in response to some truly harrowing testimonies. All I could do was listen and promise to work my hardest to help them find the housing or the way forward they needed to try to begin to rebuild their lives. Ilford South, as many Members will know, is a constituency of vibrant diversity, but it also has challenges in terms of the provisions needed to tackle domestic violence and abuse.

It is my view that this Bill needs to be expanded to protect all women, regardless of immigration status, to reach the level set out in article 4.3 of the Istanbul convention and recommended by the Joint Committee of MPs and peers who undertook the pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Bill. Unfortunately, the Government have chosen not to include it at the moment, although they say that they do want to ratify the convention. In my view, and that of many in my constituency, it is unacceptable that migrant women with no recourse to public funds are forced to choose between destitution and remaining with a perpetrator, or risk being treated as an immigration offender if they seek help, instead of getting the protection and support they need. Currently the domestic violence rule and associated access to funds are available only to those on spousal visas. In my view, that needs to be expanded and NRPF abolished so that women and those abused in my constituency can get the support they need, no matter what their status.

There is a great deal of evidence that perpetrators of domestic violence can use immigration status as a coercive tool to control people, to take their liberty and to abuse them. This Bill could and should eliminate that threat. Charities supporting migrants have proposed an

amendment to introduce a statutory duty on public authorities to ensure that services and support are accessible to all victims of domestic abuse, without discrimination on any grounds, including migrant and immigration status. This would be a welcome step and I hope the Government will listen and ensure that compassion, justice and human rights are not dependent on the status of someone suffering abuse.

5.59 pm

Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con) [V]: We have heard a lot about the indiscriminate effects of coronavirus over the last few weeks. We have seen its ability to reach into the lives of people up and down the country, and I start by saying that domestic abuse, similarly, respects no boundaries. No one is immune to it. It will affect one out of three women and girls over the course of their lifetimes. For those who suffer from domestic abuse, time is not the best healer. Healing takes excellent specialist services, such as the vital outreach and support provided in my constituency by ESDAS—East Surrey Domestic Abuse Services—and it takes life-saving refuges, such as the Reigate and Banstead Women's Aid refuge. I thank Michelle, Charlotte and all their staff for the crucial work that they are doing at this time. It also takes a web of health, housing, financial and legal support to help survivors to rebuild their lives.

This ambitious Bill brings many of those elements together. I welcome in particular: the introduction of a statutory definition of domestic abuse, including economic abuse; the appointment of a new domestic abuse commissioner to scrutinise gaps in provision; and the new statutory duty on tier 1 authorities to appoint domestic abuse local partnership boards that must assess and provide for domestic abuse support. I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins)—during my time in Government, I saw how tirelessly they worked to bring this historic Bill to bear.

Many from across the House today have spoken about why domestic abuse should be at the forefront of people's minds now. Sadly, the surge that we have seen at a national level is being mirrored locally, too. ESDAS has reported an increase in physical violence, including in head and face injuries inflicted by perpetrators, who know that survivors will not be seen. As people's financial positions deteriorate, it has seen perpetrators both withholding maintenance and using promises of food and money as leverage in exchange for access to property and children.

For many, the recovery will be a long process. The abuse has often been a long process; the average length of time for abuse is three years. Therefore, the specialist services, some of which will quite rightly be supported by the Government's £750 million charity package, will need a sustainable funding plan too, so that they can carry out this work in the years ahead. I also look forward to the Government's long-term addiction strategy. We know from studies that the likelihood of domestic violence can be increased by eight times on a drinking day and the likelihood of severe violence increased by 11 times, so that strategy will be key as well.

However, if there is one ask I could make of Ministers, it would be to address the urgent need for refuge capacity after lockdown. Sixty-four per cent. of the total refuge

[*Claire Coutinho*]

referrals in England were declined last year. My local refuge had an occupancy rate of 98.8%, and we know a surge in demand is likely to come. The £16 million that the Government provided specifically for this in February is welcome and the £3.2 billion that is going to local government will undoubtedly help as well, but the question in front of us is how to bring additional capacity on stream in weeks. I would therefore like to share the work being done by Charlotte Kneer of Reigate and Banstead Women's Aid, Surrey County Council and others to ensure that we are ready here.

Surrey County Council is funding a number of self-contained units of accommodation and the surrounding support needed in anticipation of a surge in demand. If each local authority with a refuge were asked to find just five units to fund rent and the specialist service needed to support five families for three months, and accept the duty to house those families at the end, that would translate to an extra 1,345 refuge spaces across the country. It would also spread the demand for refuges, specialist services and councils, so that they can manage as well. I have heard from providers that this scheme is miles ahead of other areas nationally. I therefore urge Ministers to look at how it could be replicated across the country so that it is the norm, not the exception. This would ensure that these vital lifelines stand ready for when lockdown ends.

It is intolerable that there are people right now who feel unsafe from the virus outside and yet will be unsafe from abuse at home. It is intolerable that this abuse is rising both in incidence and extremity, but I look forward to the Bill being a springboard in the years to come to help survivors to get the support, safety and wellbeing they deserve.

6.4 pm

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: It is very welcome that, seemingly against the odds, we are finally debating this Bill—a Bill that sadly could not be more needed in the situation we now find ourselves. Lockdown has been hard for many, but none more so than victims of abuse, where the domestic prison already exists. During lockdown, no flags are raised when a woman and her children are not seen by friends or family members, or when they fall out of their social circle, no longer hanging out with friends at work.

Covid lockdown is an abuser's nirvana. Too many women are suffering today and they need urgent action, especially when this surge in cases was foreseeable. Mass isolation, children no longer in school, and the closure of many routes to safety and support: this is fertile territory for those who wish to assert control and increase physical and emotional harm. Sadly, during the lockdown we have seen an escalation of domestic violence, from two women a week murdered by their partner or ex to the shocking number of five women, on average, being murdered a week.

So this Bill is welcome, especially the statutory definition of domestic abuse that includes emotional, coercive and economic as well as physical abuse, as well as the legal establishment of a domestic abuse commissioner, putting the guidance supporting Clare's law on a statutory footing, and the new domestic abuse protection notice orders prohibiting cross-examination of the victim by the abuser in family courts. However, with cases of

abuse rising every day, urgent action needs to be taken now. At least £75 million of the £750 million package announced by the Chancellor for charities should be released as a matter of urgency. Once women are free to ask for help, there will inevitably be a surge of requests for support, and we must be ready.

We all know that economic and physical abuse are not two different issues, and I welcome this addition to the new statutory definition of domestic abuse. They are both about power and control. Women's Aid has said that a woman is more likely to leave an abusive relationship if she has £100 in the bank. Access to money is access to freedom. Those who wish to harm their partners and exes know this. Economic abuse ranges from keeping a woman in poverty to not letting her handle her finances, spending money from the victim's own bank account, running up bills in the victim's name, prolonging the sale of a house that is jointly owned, interfering with a woman's employment—risking her only source of income—or refusing to pay child maintenance.

I have heard many examples of this abuse from a number of very brave constituents from Batley and Spen. I am so impressed by their courage and their resilience. One constituent, Kirsty Ferguson, was coerced into signing up for a number of mortgages against her will. After their separation, her ex refused to pay any bills, refused to sell the houses, even when instructed by the courts, and refused to take her name off the paperwork. His words to her were: "I am going to destroy you." Without any support from the building society, banks or police because of a lack of legislation, she was left alone in this fight. When the properties were repossessed, her credit rating plummeted, making it almost impossible to rebuild her life. She is still unable to get a loan, a credit card or a mortgage. Kirsty and others have been abandoned by the system. Some 60% of domestic abuse survivors are in debt as a result of economic abuse. Government must ensure that joint claimants of universal credit are offered separate payments as a default. Domestic abuse survivors must be made exempt from the legal aid means test, and provided with paid employment leave. A duty of care must be placed on banks and financial institutions to support domestic abuse survivors.

I have also seen in the cases brought to me in my constituency surgeries that the family courts are not fit for purpose. They offer the abuser a second bite at the cherry, driving the victim through painful and unnecessary hearings. Currently, a perpetrator of domestic abuse is seen as a violent criminal in the criminal courts but a good enough parent in the family courts. We desperately need a safer family courts and child contact systems.

Finally, I would like to take a moment to add my support to the campaign by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) to prohibit defendants' reliance on the rough sex defence that their victim consented to her injuries. In 1996, two women a year were killed or injured during what defendants called consensual rough sex. By 2016, this figure had rocketed to 20 women per year—a tenfold increase. I am sure that it has gone up further, with BBC research revealing that a third of UK women under 40 have experienced unwanted slapping, choking, gagging or spitting during consensual sex. In the cases of the 20 women killed, only nine men were convicted of murder, while nine were convicted of

manslaughter and one case resulted in no conviction. I believe that the men who use this claim do so because they see it working. We must do all we can to end this horrific travesty.

6.9 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Batley and Spennings (Tracy Brabin), and also an honour to support the campaign of the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman). To speak generally, and I am very glad to be able to speak right at the end of this debate, I am truly glad to see this Bill back on track, to be able to work with others in the spirit of co-operation and to hear so many excellent speeches today. I will just raise a few specific points because the vast majority of what I would like to say has already been said very well.

I would like to mention that I appreciate the conversations with safeguarding and Justice Ministers—the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) and the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk)—on the matters raised in the Government response to the Joint Committee report last year. I am delighted that so many of the matters have been moved forward, especially those in relation to special measures and the changes to the family and civil courts in the way that evidence may be given.

There are three issues I would like to raise specifically. The first is the domestic abuse commissioner and how her role is set to complement devolved initiatives. I have spoken with the Welsh Government's adviser on violence against women and girls, Nazir Afzal, and she reports a working relationship characterised by the spirit of co-operation. It is very much to be hoped that we will be able to work across the devolved Governments, and that they will be able to work together especially on matters such as commissioning research, as I believe that the domestic abuse commissioner will have a considerably larger budget in that respect.

I note clause 53 in the new Bill—namely, the statutory duty on local authorities in England to provide support and accommodation for victims of domestic abuse—but could it please be confirmed that population-equivalent funding will be made available to the Welsh Government from sums allocated to English local authorities for this purpose? That will enable Welsh legislation and solutions to be as well resourced as possible.

The final point I would like to raise is about the domestic violence disclosure scheme, which is also known as Clare's law. Although in and of itself it is beneficial, it continues to place responsibility on the potential victim to act and to take the initiative: to request information from the police when that person has concerns about a partner's past as a domestic abuse perpetrator. I would continue to ask the Government to consider again the value of a domestic abuse register for repeat perpetrators as a way to shift the responsibility to where it belongs—away from the potential victims and on to the authorities and the offender themselves.

To close, I very much hope to work and look forward to working with all other Members to co-operate on a Bill that will make a real difference to people's lives, particularly at this time when it has been brought home

to us how vulnerable we can be in our own homes. I hope that we will be able to make a difference in this respect.

6.12 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I want to thank everybody who has spoken in this debate. In a rare moment, I agreed with almost all of it. I think I will have a chat with the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) another time; we like our little chats. I want to pay a special tribute to the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe), who appears on the call list as a virtual maiden, which I just think is an absolutely brilliant thing to be called. Her speech was full of heart—it is very odd that I cannot look at her—but from one bloody difficult woman to another, I am sure she will have an impact in this place.

I want to thank Ministers and the officials of the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice, who have always been co-operative. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris); I have worn leopard print in her honour today. She was my predecessor, and she acted with characteristic tenacity in the brief. Ministers will know how often I have fought for this Bill to progress. However, there is still such a long way for it to go for it to be truly groundbreaking. It wants to be that groundbreaking, and we have to allow it to be that.

Covid-19 has laid bare the lack of protection for women and girls from violence. The lockdown has allowed the public to imagine what it would be like if their home, a supposed place of safety, contained the danger they feared most. The Bill is of course about the long term, but we cannot ignore the crisis facing millions of people in this country today—a crisis that is threatening our precious domestic abuse sector. To all those working with victims of violence and abuse and with victims of coercion, both adult and children, I pay tribute. They deserve access to extra, emergency, ring-fenced funding, as laid out by my hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary, and they deserve it now.

So far, the sector has not received a single penny. Not from the £2 million that was announced, or from the proposed £750 million. That money was needed weeks ago. That issue was highlighted today by the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, and I could not agree more that the Minister must listen to the domestic abuse commissioner and the Victims' Commissioner on this issue. We need a ring-fenced fund, and we need it now.

I pay tribute to the Mother of the House, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), and the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier) for their dogged campaign to end the rough sex defence and post-mortem abuse. I have heard some of the worst cases, and it never stops being alarming to listen to stories such as those we have heard today. They have my full support, and from this House I hope that the hon. Gentleman will pass on our love to Natalie's family.

I praise my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) for her nominatively determined wallpaper background, and for her effort to continue the campaign of our friend, Gloria De Piero, to end the asset grabbing of attempted murderers. My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) was as

[*Jess Phillips*]

moving this time as she was last time, and I repeat the praise to the new hon. Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher). It helps so much for people watching these debates when people like them speak out.

In a strange moment today my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen), a firebrand union activist, joined forces with a Conservative ex-Prime Minister to call for better workplace measures and rights for workers. I am sure Ministers will be delighted to join in that union with them.

There is much to cheerlead in this Bill. I welcome proposals for a dedicated commissioner, not just in theory but in practice, and Nicole Jacobs is already breathing life into that position. I also welcome the long fought for statutory duty to ensure future sustainable accommodation-based services. I shall not retire just yet, even though we might have got that, but it is a change I have championed since I worked in refuge, let alone since I have been in this place. Finally, being able to stand here after four years and say that no perpetrator will be able to cross-examine a victim is a welcome relief.

As the Bill progresses, however, I do not want to give the impression that there are not areas that will be contentious. There are currently huge gaps in what the Bill proposes. Members across the House, including the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft), and, movingly, the hon. Member for Bolsover all highlighted gaps in the Bill regarding children. The Bill cannot simply be words written on goatskin in some attic in Parliament that Ministers lean on to prove how much they are doing.

For every part of the Bill I will ask how it would have helped or hindered the victims and their children whose hands I have held over the years. Which of those victims have we forgotten? The only qualification for access to support, housing, refuge, social security, and police protection for victims of domestic abuse in this country should be this: are you human? The issue of migrant women's access to support was raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), my hon. Friends the Members for Brent Central (Dawn Butler), for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare), and for Ilford South (Sam Tarry), and by no means only by Labour Members. Across the House, the issue of no recourse to public funds was raised again and again. We cannot pass a Bill that discriminates against migrant women, or that has a blind spot about the effect of domestic abuse on the children who live with it. Currently, the Bill would not change the lives of those groups for the better.

The past few weeks have shown that we are a community. How can it be that there are care workers, NHS workers and key workers serving the public right now in this crisis who would not be equally protected if they needed to escape abuse? Surely it is about all of us, or it is about none of us. Let the new Bill reflect that.

I am troubled that in this area the Home Office is currently in the middle of a review into migrant women. The gaps are already well known. The right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) spoke about how migrant

women were an issue raised in the report by the Joint Committee, and they remain an issue today. Yesterday, a report by the Home Affairs Committee stated that migrant women are still an issue. This is not something new that we do not know about, or that needs to wait for a review. We need to act now. How can this House or the other place possibly scrutinise and seek to change the Bill without the outcome of this review or the Family Justice Board review? Surely the Minister can see that this seems back to front and that, actually, political will says that she can act today.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) made eloquent cases for the priority housing need, and I hope that Ministers heard their calls, because I am certain that they will only get louder as we head to Committee.

Although we welcome the statutory duty on housing support, 70% of known victims of domestic abuse accessing support do not receive it in a refuge setting. The vast majority of support for domestic abuse victims and their children happens in the community, and the Bill is currently not addressing those needs. These are the women whose names I read out each year. The high-risk women on that list are served by our community services and our independent domestic violence advisers. The domestic violence protection orders regime proposed in the Bill, which seeks to place more of the burden on the perpetrator rather than the victim, is incredibly welcome. However, there must be an agreed set of standards in this area and a proper Government strategy on how we manage perpetrators. It has been done in a wild west fashion in the past, and that needs to change. Without that, these orders will, at best, not change people's lives, and, at worst, place them in further danger.

The Lord Chancellor and my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), who we could actually hear when she thought we could not, mentioned Claire Throssell, and I am grateful that they did. I have to ask: what does this Bill offer to Claire Throssell and the mothers of the other 19 children murdered by known violent perpetrators following decisions in the family court? For three years, Claire has told her story to us policy makers, yet I do not see the loss of Jack and Paul reflected back at me in this Bill. I hope that I will. Many Members spoke ably about their experience of the family courts, but, alone, the changes to cross-examination are not enough to make it better. They would not have saved Jack and Paul.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North did a great job of giving voice to victims. I ask the Minister to ensure that, during the Bill Committee evidence sessions, we can hear the voices of victims such as Claire Throssell. I ask her to assure me that that will be the case.

Standing at the Dispatch Box in this Chamber, making my closing speech to a handful of people and a few more on computer screens, I am reminded more than ever that the decisions that we make in this room have huge consequences on the lives of the British public. Sometimes the decisions that we make here determine who lives and who dies. This is one of those moments. I hope that Ministers will work with us to make this Bill everything that it can be. This is the first major legislative Bill of a post-covid-19 world. Let it help all those who need it. Let it reflect who we want to be.

6.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I thank all Members who have contributed to today's debate. I also thank those Members who tried to contribute but, because of the new procedures, were unable to speak. I thank each and every one of the 87 Members who put their names forward.

The harrowing stories that we have heard today underline the horror of domestic abuse and the devastation that it leaves in its wake. Time after time—not just today, but in debating previous iterations of the Bill—we have heard stories of families shattered and of lives torn apart or even ended by this terrible crime.

One of the most moving speeches today was, of course, that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mark Garnier), who talked incredibly emotionally about Natalie and her family, and the experiences that Natalie had before she died. I went to his constituency to meet Natalie's family, the Andrews, and they set out to me very clearly the journey of domestic abuse that Natalie had suffered before that fateful night. I know that my hon. Friend wanted to include in his speech the sentence that this perpetrator got for his behaviour—a mere three years and eight months for that course of conduct. It was a case that I am sure will live with many of us for a very long time indeed.

Another speech that I would like to highlight for its power was that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher), who brought to the Chamber his perspective as a child living in an abusive household. Many Members have raised the plight of children living in abusive households, which I will deal with in more detail in due course, but I want to thank him for being brave in laying those experiences before us in the Chamber. It does help victims; I know that for a fact.

The speech made by the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) on the Bill's last Second Reading was one of those parliamentary moments that those of us who listened to it will remember for a great deal of time. One of the most moving aspects of her speech today was setting out the wall of support that she has received and the network of women who have risen to support her. I wish her and that network all the very best.

Other Members set out the experiences of their constituents most eloquently. My hon. Friends the Members for Cities of London and Westminster (Nickie Aiken) and for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones) and the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) really did justice to their constituents. If these stories are difficult to listen to, they are unimaginable to live through. In all their stark horror, those stories and all the stories that we know through the experiences of our families—or, indeed, in our own families—and of our friends, colleagues and constituents show us why this Bill is so urgently needed.

We all understand this. It is to the credit of all the parties that the Bill enjoys cross-party support. I know that there will rightfully be discussions about various aspects of it in due course, but it is to our collective credit that the parties can unify around this Bill. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for her work in her previous role, and I welcome the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) to her position. I spoke to her this week, and she said that it was the only job she would accept—I absolutely believe her, so I am delighted for her.

I am conscious that I have to sit down by 6.34 pm, otherwise the Bill falls. We do not want that to happen, so forgive me if I do not address all the points that have been raised. I will write and put a copy in the Library to answer the detailed points that Members have raised.

I must take the trouble to mention the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe). It is a rather extraordinary experience to want to pay tribute to colleagues but not be able to see them in the Chamber. She described herself as the youngest MP, the first female MP for her constituency and the first Member of Parliament to make a virtual maiden speech—what an extraordinary set of achievements. I was so grateful for her speech, because she told us movingly about the struggles that her mother had with substance misuse and the terrible loss that she endured as a child. I can only say to her that I think any mother watching her today would have been extraordinarily proud. I also pay tribute to her father, who had to step into the role of sole parent in such difficult circumstances, and wish him a very happy birthday, which he is having to celebrate alone in these circumstances.

I thank the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) for his steadfast support for the Bill. We have had to remove some sections from the Bill because the Assembly is back, but I pay tribute to him for his contributions to the Bill thus far, and to the Northern Irish Assembly and the Minister there, who I hope will be bringing legislation forward quickly.

We have worked tirelessly to ensure that the risks of domestic abuse in the covid-19 crisis are understood and met. We must be clear with anyone contacting us regarding domestic abuse cases that social distancing does not prevent people from leaving their homes for a place of safety if they need it because they live in an abusive household. Since social distancing came into force, we know that domestic abuse charities have reported a surge of activity in people contacting helplines and accessing web-based services, and we are working closely across government and the charitable sector to ensure that vulnerable people can access the support they need.

Local authorities have access to a £3.2 billion support fund to bolster their services, and the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) and my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho) both raised a point about refuge accommodation in the circumstances. The Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall), wrote to local authority leaders yesterday about domestic abuse services and has suggested help with additional accommodation sources, should local authorities require that.

Other colleagues have mentioned the report by the Home Affairs Committee on that topic, and I very much thank the Committee for its report. I want to reassure Members about the actions we are taking. We have been working closely with the domestic abuse commissioner to ensure that frontline charities will receive a share of the £750 million charitable support package announced by the Chancellor. I cannot go into details at this point, but we are actively working on it. Of course, we have also announced £2 million in addition to that to support technological capability for domestic abuse services, and a further £600,000 from the Ministry of Justice to allow victim helplines to stay open longer. The national campaign, which I know many hon. Members

[Victoria Atkins]

have been kind enough to join, was launched by the Home Secretary earlier this month to raise awareness of domestic abuse and help victims to access support.

Many colleagues have raised the topic of migrant victims. We understand the problems that such victims face, and we are absolutely committed to ensuring that all victims of domestic abuse are treated first and foremost as victims, regardless of their immigration status. As part of our response to the Joint Committee's report, we undertook to complete a review. We have now completed the evidence gathering phase of the review, including focus groups and a final call for evidence from the sector, but if we are to put in place new support mechanisms, we need a clearer evidence base so that it can be targeted properly to meet the needs of those for whom it is intended. That is why today I am announcing that later this year we will invite bids for grants from a £1.5 million pilot fund to cover the cost of support in a refuge or other safe accommodation. We will use the pilot to assess better the level of need for that group of victims and to inform spending review decisions on longer-term funding. We aim also to publish a full response to the Joint Committee's recommendation ahead of Report, and we will of course take into account the comments made during this debate.

Another large topic for discussion was that of children. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), who did so much in her previous role to spearhead this legislation, my hon. Friends the Members for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher), and the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Sam Tarry), all described the impact that domestic abuse can have on children. It is vital that we recognise that in the statutory functions of the domestic abuse commissioner. Indeed, the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (David Johnston) both explained about ACEs and the impact that domestic abuse has on them. One of the key functions of the commissioner will be to encourage good practice in the identification of children affected by domestic abuse and the provision of protection and support. Clause 66 places a duty on the Home Secretary to issue guidance on the effect of that.

I wanted to move on to the gender definition and mention my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) and the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Lilian Greenwood), but I think I will be denied the time to do that. So, in closing, this debate has shown the House at its very best. Across the country, far too many people are experiencing the awful reality of domestic abuse. There is not a single constituency untouched by this terrible crime. Bringing an end to this awful crime is our collective responsibility. Legislation alone cannot provide all the answers, but where it can, the Government are steadfast in our determination to see this Bill enacted and implemented as quickly as possible.

To those suffering today, I can say only this: you are not alone. Help is available, and we will do everything in our power to protect you. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL (PROGRAMME)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Domestic Abuse Bill:

Committal

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

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

2. Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 25 June 2020.

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

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

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

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

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

Other proceedings

7. Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—
(*Mr Marcus Jones.*)

Question agreed to.

DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Domestic Abuse Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(a) any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown under or by virtue of the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—(*Mr Marcus Jones.*)

Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

6.35 pm

House adjourned without Question put (Order A(5), 22 April).

Written Statements

Tuesday 28 April 2020

CABINET OFFICE

EU-UK Future Relationship

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): Negotiators from the UK and the EU held discussions through video conferencing on 20-24 April 2020 for the second round of negotiations on the UK-EU future relationship.

Prior to the round both sides shared legal texts, on the basis of which there were some clarificatory discussions in order to ensure that the round was as well prepared as possible. The UK has shared the following texts: a full draft free trade agreement, and separate draft agreements on energy, law enforcement and criminal justice co-operation, air transport, air safety, civil nuclear, and social security co-ordination. In accordance with normal negotiating practice, the Government have not made these texts public, but keeps this issue under close review and would be ready to do so at a moment when it helped the negotiating dynamics.

This was a full and constructive negotiating round, with both sides adapting positively to the new remote ways of working. The round was opened by the UK's Chief Negotiator, David Frost, and by the European Commission's Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier, in a plenary session on 20 April. There were then discussions across all the issues and the session closed with a further plenary on 24 April.

Discussions covered all workstreams including:

Trade in good—Market access and rules of origin, trade remedies, customs, technical barriers to trade and SPS.

Trade in services—Cross-border trade in services, investment, temporary entry for business purposes, professional qualifications, professional and business services, financial services and digital.

Fisheries—Discussion on control and enforcement, conservation and sustainable exploitation, and scientific evidence.

Transport—Aviation and aviation safety, road haulage and passenger transport.

Energy—Civil nuclear co-operation, gas and electricity trading, climate change and carbon pricing.

Mobility and social security co-ordination—Including the UK's legal text on social security co-ordination.

Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice—UK presentation of the UK Law Enforcement Treaty with detailed discussions on operational capabilities.

Thematic co-operation—Covering health security; asylum and illegal migration; cyber security; and security of information.

Participation in union programmes—General terms for UK participation in programmes, including provisions for financial contribution.

So called "level playing field"—Including subsidies, competition policy, and trade and sustainable development.

Horizontal issues—Governance arrangements, territorial scope.

Discussions showed that there was some promising convergence in the core areas of a free trade agreement, but there remain some areas where we have significant

differences of principle—notably fisheries, the so-called "level playing field", and governance and dispute settlement. Progress in these areas will require the EU to engage with the political realities of the UK as an independent state.

This Government remain committed to a deal with a free trade agreement at its core. We look forward to negotiating constructively in the next round beginning 11 May.

[HCWS209]

TREASURY

Tax Policy

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman): At Budget 2020, the Government published 11 tax policy consultations and calls for evidence. The Government are grateful for the responses to these that have already been received from stakeholders.

The Government recognise that many stakeholders are facing significant disruption due to covid-19. The Government want to give all stakeholders time to submit their views.

Therefore, the deadlines for responses to the following tax policy documents will be extended for three months, to allow stakeholders to engage fully with these documents and to contribute to the tax policy making process. However, the Government encourage early responses from stakeholders where possible, to support their continuing consideration of these issues:

Plastic packaging tax: policy design—now closing on 20 August 2020

Preventing abuse of the R and D tax relief for SMEs: second consultation—now closing on 28 August 2020

Tackling construction industry scheme abuse—now closing on 28 August 2020

Notification of uncertain tax treatment by large businesses—now closing on 27 August 2020

Vehicle excise duty: call for evidence—now closing on 3 September 2020

Call for evidence: raising standards in the tax market—now closing on 28 August 2020

Consultation on the taxation impacts arising from the withdrawal of LIBOR—now closing on 28 August 2020

Hybrid and other mismatches—now closing on 29 August 2020

Tax treatment of asset holding companies in alternative fund structures—now closing on 19 August 2020

Consultation: HMRC charter—now closing on 15 August 2020

The EU exit transition period will end on 31 December 2020. The consultation on duty-free and tax-free goods carried by passengers and the informal consultation on the VAT treatment of overseas goods will therefore continue to the existing timetable. This will provide businesses with clarity as early as possible on the policies that will apply from 1 January 2021. It will also give businesses enough time to prepare and ensure the right legislation is in place for 1 January 2021. The Government appreciate that some stakeholders may not be able to

respond by the deadline, and where late submissions are received, they will take them into account as far as possible.

On 16 April the Government published a consultation on the climate change agreement scheme extension and reforms for any future scheme. The timetable for this will continue as planned, to ensure the extension of the scheme will be in place by September as announced at Budget 2020, supporting energy intensive businesses to operate in a more environmentally sustainable way.

At Budget 2020, the Government also announced they would publish a number of other tax policy documents. In the light of covid-19, the Government will consider the publication of these and other expected documents on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the impact of covid-19 on stakeholders. The Government will continue to publish the following documents over the spring and summer:

The call for evidence for the fundamental review of business rates

The consultation on further entitlement to use red diesel

The consultation on the design of a carbon emissions tax

The consultation on national insurance contributions holiday for employers of veterans

A call for evidence as part of the post-EU exit alcohol review

A summary of responses to the call for evidence on the operation of insurance premium tax

A summary of responses and government next steps to the aggregates levy review

HMRC's civil information powers

A summary of responses to the non-UK resident SDLT surcharge consultation

A summary of responses to the call for evidence on VAT electronic sales suppression

A review of how VAT works in the public sector

The Government will delay the publication of the following documents until the autumn:

A discussion document on the wider application of tax conditionality

The response to the call for evidence on simplification of the VAT partial exemption and capital goods schemes

The consultation on whether qualifying R and D tax credit costs should include investments in data and cloud computing

The consultation on stronger penalties for tobacco tax evasion

The Government will provide more detail on the publication of the following documents in due course:

The consultation on aviation tax reform

The call for evidence on disguised remuneration schemes

The review of the UK funds regime

The consultation on the economic crime levy

The conclusion of the small brewers' relief review

A summary of responses to the call for evidence on social investment tax relief

The Government's position on publication of tax policy documents will be kept updated through the public consultations tracker.

[HCWS211]

EDUCATION

Skills Toolkit

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson): Today I am launching "The Skills Toolkit"—a new online platform giving people access to free, top-quality

digital and numeracy courses to help build up their skills, progress in work and boost their job prospects. The new platform enables anyone who would like to use it to grow these essential skills while they are staying at home to protect the NHS and save lives. The Skills Toolkit is a first step towards longer-term recovery, helping everyone start to build up the key skills we need.

Education and skills are key to opening up opportunities, no matter your background. The Skills Toolkit allows people to access free digital and numeracy training from some of our most prestigious learning institutions, including the Open University and the Institute for Coding. These are skills that everyone needs to thrive in the 21st century and ones that evidence suggests are increasingly in demand across almost all sectors and occupations. Our approach to designing and delivering The Skills Toolkit has been informed by experts in online learning and the courses available on the platform have been carefully selected following conversations with businesses and may be expanded at a later date.

The Skills Toolkit meets a range of needs and is open to everyone—irrespective of age, employment status or current skill level. From a bite-sized course to improve your PowerPoint skills to digital marketing and coding. The courses available support both furloughed workers who want to learn new skills and those who are currently out of work and looking to quickly build up their CV with valuable skills for a new job. Equally, the learning is there for anyone else who is keen to challenge themselves or keep their mind healthy and busy during time spent at home.

The Skills Toolkit offers employers—who are also facing unprecedented challenges—a positive offer to support and develop furloughed employees who are interested in learning from home.

We know the current situation has made home life extremely difficult for many people, and I realise that learning of any type—online or otherwise—may be far from the minds of some people at this point in time. For people who can find the time, however, learning is known to benefit mental health and wellbeing, improving self-esteem, and giving an improved sense of purpose and control. The flexible nature of the offer, which includes short, online courses that can be completed at any pace or time of the day, means that there is something available for everyone when the right time comes. I am hoping that giving the nation a taster of flexible, online learning will help drive a step-change in the way in which we all develop our skills throughout our working lives.

I want to thank all of those training providers who have made these free courses so widely available to the public. It is wonderful to see a fantastic range of organisations including firms and not-for-profit providers contributing to this effort.

The Skills Toolkit is available from today on: www.gov.uk. I urge all Members to use it and to recommend it to their constituents and to local employers so that they can encourage their furloughed workers to grab the opportunity to build skills and discover new talents.

[HCWS207]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Paterson Inquiry

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Ms Nadine Dorries): The report of the independent inquiry into the issues raised by the former breast surgeon Ian Paterson was published on 4 February 2020. It describes significant failures in the ability of the healthcare system to detect and protect patients from the consequences of Paterson's malpractice.

The report contains 15 recommendations, some of which go to the heart of our regulatory system and the performance management of healthcare professionals. Government Ministers undertook to study these recommendations in detail and provide Parliament with a full response within a few months of the report's publication or indeed within three months if that was appropriate.

Our action to tackle the covid-19 crisis has unfortunately diverted resources from this work which has had to be put on hold for the present time. This will inevitably lead to a delay in the Government's formal, written response.

I would like to assure Parliament and the public that we will resume our focus on the Government's response as soon as these unprecedented circumstances are behind us. Also, that we remain committed to implementing considered and effective improvements in the areas set out in the inquiry's recommendations.

In the meantime, we will continue to talk to NHS England and NHS Improvement and Spire Healthcare about the current and ongoing care of patients treated by Paterson.

[HCWS208]

Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2020

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): On 26 March 2020, the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 came into force, detailing regulations on social distancing and business and venues closures. These regulations set out that a review of these regulations must take place every 21 days to ensure they are both necessary and proportionate. The Government completed the first review as required on 16 April 2020.

In this review it was agreed that no change would be made to the existing restrictions and that they would remain in place for at least three more weeks. Recognising the potential for harm to public health and the economy if measures were relaxed too soon, it was agreed that five conditions would need to be met before the measures are eased. These conditions are:

- 1) Evidence that NHS critical care capacity across the UK will not be breached;
- 2) there is a sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rate;
- 3) infection rates decrease to an acceptable level;
- 4) supplies of PPE and testing meets future demand;
- 5) clear evidence that changes won't risk a second peak in the virus.

However, a small number of minor amendments are required to clarify the regulations and ease the operation of the regulations. They relate to enforcement of the measures, and businesses and venues affected.

Publicly available Government guidance on: www.gov.uk is being updated to ensure it fully corresponds with the amended regulations. These are strict measures, but they are measures that we must take in order to protect our NHS and to save lives.

[HCWS206]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Passenger Name Record Data (EU and Japan): Council Decision

The Minister for Security (James Brokenshire): The UK has left the European Union. Before doing so the Government decided not to opt in to the Council decision authorising the opening of negotiations with Japan on an agreement for the transfer and use of passenger name record (PNR) data.

As the agreement to be negotiated will not apply to the UK it was inappropriate to opt in to the proposed negotiating mandate.

The UK's exit from the EU means we can determine and pursue our own policy on the international transfer and use of PNR data, with Japan and other partners, which acknowledges the significance of this valuable and unique dataset for countering terrorism and serious crime subject to safeguards ensuring respect for individuals' fundamental rights.

[HCWS205]

International Civil Aviation Organisation: Council Decision

The Minister for Security (James Brokenshire): The United Kingdom has left the European Union. Before doing so the Government decided not to opt in to a Council decision on the position to be taken on behalf of the European Union in the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) in respect of the revision of chapter 9 of annex 9 ("Facilitation") to the convention on international civil aviation with regard to the standards and recommended practices on passenger name record data.

The Council decision cited a legal base in the Justice and Home Affairs section of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union. As such the Government considered that, in line with the terms of protocol (No. 21) to the treaty, the United Kingdom's opt-in decision applied.

Adopted as Council decision (EU) 2019/2107, the Council decision records that the United Kingdom is bound by directive (EU) 2016/681, on the use of passenger name record data for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime, "and [is] therefore taking part in the adoption of [the] Decision". The Government do not share this view.

In accordance with the principle of sincere co-operation, the United Kingdom shall refrain, during the transition period, from any action or initiative likely to be prejudicial to the position taken by the Council decision particularly within ICAO of which the United Kingdom is a contracting party in its own right.

[HCWS204]

Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): Section 19(1) of the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011 (the Act) requires the Secretary of State to report to Parliament as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of every relevant three-month period on the exercise of her TPIM powers under the Act during that period.

The level of information provided will always be subject to slight variations based on operational advice.

TPIM notices in force (as of 29 February 2020)	5
Number of new TPIM notices served (during this period)	1
TPIM notices in respect of British citizens (as of 29 February 2020)	5
TPIM notices extended (during the reporting period)	0
TPIM notices revoked (during the reporting period)	1
TPIM notices revived (during the reporting period)	0
Variations made to measures specified in TPIM notices (during the reporting period)	2
Applications to vary measures specified in TPIM notices refused (during the reporting period)	3
The number of subjects relocated under TPIM legislation (during this the reporting period)	4

The TPIM Review Group (TRG) keeps every TPIM notice under regular and formal review. First quarter TRG meetings took place on 2, 3, 4, 11 and 12 March 2020.

On 7 February 2020 an individual was sentenced to two years' imprisonment after pleading guilty to 12 breaches of the financial services measure of a TPIM notice.

[HCWS203]

JUSTICE

Sentencing Code Volume I: Report

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): I am today announcing the Government's final response to the Law Commission's report on the sentencing code, published on 22 November 2018. The final response can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-law-commission-report-on-the-sentencing-code>.

In May 2019 the Government issued an interim response which accepted the main recommendation of the report to take forward the Sentencing Bill and the Sentencing (Pre-consolidation Amendments) Bill, and committed to consider its 11 secondary recommendations in further detail. Detailed responses to each of those recommendations are set out at the above link.

The Government reiterate their thanks to the Law Commission for the enormous effort that has gone into producing the report and accompanying legislation, and congratulates the Law Commission on an outstanding achievement.

[HCWS210]

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**not later than
Tuesday 5 May 2020**

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