

Thursday
11 June 2020

Volume 677
No. 68



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**
(HANSARD)

Thursday 11 June 2020

House of Commons

Thursday 11 June 2020

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 4 June).

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

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

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

Leaving the EU: Transition Period

Darren Henry (Broxton) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that the transition period ends on 31 December 2020. [903075]

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that the transition period ends on 31 December 2020. [903087]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): The transition period ends on 31 December 2020. Under no circumstances will the Government accept an extension. Indeed, we have a domestic law obligation not to accept. Extending would simply delay the moment at which we achieve what we want and what the country voted for: our economic and political independence.

Darren Henry: I am keen to ensure that new arrangements following the end of the transition period work for small businesses in Broxtowe. Will my right hon. Friend outline what steps he is taking to support small businesses facing considerable uncertainty over their future because of the covid-19 pandemic and the end of the Brexit transition period?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is right that small and medium-sized enterprises face particular challenges at this time, and that is one reason the Government are doing everything they can to ensure that customs intermediaries and others who can support small businesses to continue to export—indeed, to enlarge their export profile—are put in place.

Christian Wakeford: Does the Minister agree that businesses, not just in Bury South but right across the country, simply want to remove the uncertainty that comes with prolonging negotiations and feel safe in the knowledge that a firm mandate for the negotiations will allow businesses to prepare properly and prosper?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I know that the businesses for which he speaks up so effectively in Bury South and elsewhere want uncertainty removed. That is why we are clear that we will end the transition period on 31 December, which is a position I understand the CBI is now in favour of.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Minister talks about certainty, and he is right: businesses need certainty on the outcome of the talks. On Tuesday, the Paymaster General told the House:

“On... zero tariffs and zero quotas, our policy has not changed.”—[*Official Report*, 9 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 161.]

That was the pledge the Conservative party won the election on. But last week, the Government's chief negotiator wrote:

“we would be willing to discuss a relationship that was based on less than that”.

Who is speaking for the Government—the Paymaster General or their chief negotiator?

Michael Gove: The Paymaster General speaks eloquently and powerfully on behalf of the Government, and it is right that we seek what the political declaration also commits the European Union to, which is a zero-tariff, zero-quota arrangement.

EU Trade Negotiations

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): What recent progress the Government have made on trade negotiations with the EU. [903077]

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the state of trade negotiations between the UK and the EU; and if he will make a statement. [903079]

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the progress of negotiations on the UK's future relationship with the EU. [903090]

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the progress of negotiations on the UK's future relationship with the EU. [903091]

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): What recent progress the Government have made on trade negotiations with the EU. [903096]

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): What recent progress the Government have made on trade negotiations with the EU. [903098]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): UK and EU negotiators held discussions last week via video conference and covered the full range of issues. Both sides engaged constructively, but sadly there was no movement on the most difficult areas where differences of principle are most acute—notably on fisheries, governance arrangements and the so-called level playing field.

Mrs Murray: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will not sacrifice access to our waters for any trade deal with the EU and will he make it clear to Mr Barnier that that is not negotiable?

Michael Gove: Our excellent chief negotiator, David Frost, has made it clear to Michel Barnier that we will be an independent coastal state, that we will control who has access to our waters and on what terms, and that access to our waters will be subject to annual negotiations.

Mr Speaker: We now go to the shadow of Lichfield Cathedral.

Michael Fabricant [V]: Is not the real problem that Michel Barnier has absolutely no room for manoeuvre because he has to do what has been agreed with the other 27 countries? Is not that lack of agility and flexibility the very reason we have decided to leave the EU and why companies such as Nissan and Unilever, which has announced this today, are centring their operations here in the United Kingdom?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend puts it perfectly, and his question is its own answer. I do not think we have heard any sage of Lichfield since Dr Johnson who has put things quite so well.

Anna McMorrin: With such slow progress on the talks, the Government somehow believe they can hold the EU bloc to ransom, but all they are doing is taking the country perilously close to no deal. Will the Minister confirm that the Government will do everything in their power to reach an agreement and translate legally what is written in the political declaration? On one specific point, will he push for the ability of the devolved Governments of Wales and Scotland to participate in the Erasmus programme and other schemes, so that students do not miss out, if he will not stand up and do that for England?

Michael Gove: We all want an agreement, and I am grateful for the support and help that the devolved Administrations have given. I talk regularly to them, as does my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General. We know how important Erasmus is to many, and we will continue to seek membership of those programmes across the United Kingdom.

Alison McGovern: The British people were promised an oven-ready deal, but given the speculation in recent weeks, what they have is half-baked. Will the Secretary of State therefore commit to no unpicking of the political declaration or the withdrawal agreement—the work of the past three years?

Michael Gove: Not only was an oven-ready deal secured, but we had that oven-ready deal delivered and agreed to by this House earlier this year, which is why we left the European Union on 31 January. Of course, we will always honour the withdrawal agreement and, as far as the political declaration goes, it commits the European Union to use its best endeavours to secure a zero-tariff, zero-quota arrangement, and we hope that the EU will do that.

Robert Courts: As my right hon. Friend knows, article 184 requires both parties, including the European Union, to use their best endeavours to reach that agreement. Will he update the House on the progress that has been made, and cite one significant thing that he thinks would help things further?

Michael Gove: Progress has been made and, on a number of issues—on fisheries and on state aid—Michel Barnier has indicated that he is inclined to move. Some EU member states have been a little more reluctant. It would be in everyone's interest—EU member states, the Commission and, of course, the United Kingdom Government—if Michel Barnier were able to use the flexibility that he has deployed in the past to secure an arrangement that would work in everyone's interests.

Sir David Evennett [V]: I welcome my right hon. Friend's hard work in this area. He has been quite clear that we will have full control over our economic destiny in future. Does he agree that, now more than ever as we emerge from this pandemic, it is vital that we look to forming new trade relationships and partnerships around the world?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is one of the reasons why the Secretary of State for International Trade opened new trade negotiations with Japan this week and why she is in trade negotiations with the United States. However, it is not just trade deals that matter; it is also export promotion. The Department for International Trade is doing a superb job in making sure that businesses are equipped to take advantage of the new markets, which I know that he, as a strong voice for business, is committed to supporting.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): The Government's approach to trade negotiations with the EU and with the US will have huge implications for all of us. The Government's election manifesto guaranteed that food imports would have to be produced at the same standards as in UK farming. The EU also says that a free trade deal depends on the UK maintaining those high standards. Does this remain Government policy in our approach to EU and other trade negotiations, and, if it does, why were such commitments not upheld in the Agriculture Bill?

Michael Gove: It is absolutely our commitment to make sure that we uphold those very high standards. The Agriculture Bill will ensure not only that those high standards are upheld, but that public money is spent on public goods and that environmental enhancement is at the heart of how we manage our countryside alongside high-quality food production.

Rachel Reeves: I am afraid that that does not quite answer the question about why the amendment from the chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee was not accepted. Let me push the right hon. Gentleman a bit further. He said on "Countryfile" in October 2018 that

"there is no point in having high animal and high environmental standards if you then allow them to be undercut from outside."

When pressed on whether it would be a red line in any trade discussions, the Minister stated, "absolutely". Yet on Tuesday in this House, in an answer to a question about such standards, the Paymaster General said that "we should trust the consumer."—[*Official Report*, 9 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 162.]

Are we, or are we not, able to trust the Government to maintain such standards? Can the Minister guarantee absolutely that there will be no dilution of environmental or animal welfare standards, and that the Government

will not risk our ability to secure what is supposed to be an oven-ready trade deal with the EU for the sake of getting any deal with the US that would hurt British farming and water down environmental and animal welfare standards?

Michael Gove: Not only was our deal oven-ready, but anything that goes into UK ovens will always meet high quality standards. More to the point, the Paymaster General and I, and the whole of Government, are like peas in a pod. We are committed to making sure that high animal welfare and environmental standards continue to characterise British farming, which is the best in the world.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): We all know that the right hon. Gentleman is not very keen on economic forecasts, but given the growing warnings from business—the latest today has come from the CBI—he must be aware of the damage that would be inflicted on businesses by red tape, tariffs and loss of access if there is no agreement reached with the European Union in the next four months. We all want a deal, but, with British businesses already reeling from coronavirus, what does he propose to say to those businesses come January if the Government's gamble does not pay off?

Michael Gove: The Government are not gambling. The Government are holding the European Union to account for its commitment to secure a zero-tariff, zero-quota deal and to use its best endeavours, and I have confidence that the European Union will do that.

Digital Technology

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to enhance the Government's use of digital technology. [903078]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): The Government have implemented the technology code of practice and service standard, which provides Departments with technical support and case studies to improve how they design, build and buy digital technology to give citizens the best services. The Government Digital Service is also building digital capacity through the Digital Academy and applying the innovation that we might find in the private sector at public sector scale through the GovTech Catalyst fund, to support the use of emerging technologies.

Andrew Griffith: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply, and I add my thanks to the amazing work that Jen Allum and her gov.uk team have done during this crisis. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a huge opportunity in the fact that the UK has moved quickly to cashless transactions and digital government, and that as we move beyond this crisis, it is important that we do not regress and that we unleash the opportunity for economic growth?

Chloe Smith: Yes, I do, and there are two points to make here. First, the Government have taken unprecedented steps to support the economy through the immediate crisis, looking towards a strong and sustainable recovery. Secondly, I think we all recognise that digital payments have positively transformed the way that many people

buy things and transact, and we are committed to supporting those payments while protecting access to cash for those who need it.

Public Sector Frontline: PPE

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support the procurement of personal protective equipment for frontline public sector workers. [903080]

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): What his Department's role is in the procurement of personal protective equipment for frontline public sector workers. [903099]

The Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt): We are supporting the Department of Health and Social Care to get personal protective equipment to those who need it. We have expanded both overseas supply and domestic manufacturing and scaled up our logistics network for delivering that PPE to the frontline.

Elliot Colburn: I have been proud to join Carshalton and Wallington residents who are volunteering to deliver PPE, and, thanks to the voluntary sector in my area, St Helier Hospital and GPs are well stocked. What assurances can my right hon. Friend give me that as lockdown measures are eased, PPE will continue to reach the frontline, particularly in care homes and on public transport?

Penny Mordaunt: We have 400 officials working on ensuring that we have robust PPE supply chains. I thank my hon. Friend and all those who have volunteered alongside him. That last-mile delivery has been critical in getting equipment to the many hundreds of organisations that have needed it in our constituencies, and volunteers have been critical to doing that.

Jason McCartney: Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking all the wonderful volunteers on my patch who have been making scrubs and all the local textile companies that have switched production to help produce PPE, including McNair Shirts in Slaithwaite, which has been producing gowns for my local hospital? It needs help in getting specialist material, which is being bought up centrally by Government and is sitting in a warehouse. Can my right hon. Friend see whether we can get some of that material to McNair so that it can make gowns for the local hospital?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank all those people in my hon. Friend's constituency, no matter which sector, for the work they have been doing on PPE. It just shows what can be done when the private, public and third sectors work together and are facilitated in doing that. If he writes to me with the details of those organisations, I will see what we can do to get them those raw materials.

Boundary Review

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): What the Government's timetable is for the boundary review process. [903081]

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure equal constituency boundaries for the next general election. [903093]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): The Parliamentary Constituencies Bill received its Second Reading last week. It delivers our manifesto pledge of equal and updated parliamentary boundaries. The Bill determines that the next boundary review, due to start in 2021, will complete by 1 July 2023 at the latest, and after that boundary reviews will take place every eight years.

Bob Blackman [V]: I thank the Minister for that response. The building blocks for all the new constituency boundaries are local authority ward boundaries. In London, the vast majority of local authorities have recently had boundary reviews within their boroughs by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, but they await orders in the House of Commons to implement them. When will my hon. Friend implement those orders, so that the new ward boundaries in London come into operation and the Boundary Commission can commence its review of them?

Chloe Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for that important question, which allows me to clarify that the laying of the orders is the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's responsibility. I understand that, following a pause because of coronavirus-related restrictions, the commission intends to resume laying the orders before Parliament this month. There are nine areas in which revised electoral arrangements are agreed but an order is not laid, all of which are in London, and the commission intends to lay those over the summer and autumn.

Chris Clarkson: My constituency is one of 27 in Greater Manchester, where electorates range from 63,000 to 95,000, and it is under-represented in this place. Does my hon. Friend agree that more up-to-date equal boundaries will give people fairer access to their elected representatives?

Chloe Smith: Yes, that is exactly what they will do. That range in constituency sizes is unacceptable, and the Parliamentary Constituencies Bill will achieve not only updated but equal constituencies and fair votes. A vote cast in any part of Manchester should be just as good as one cast anywhere else in that city or the UK.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): As a result of the Bill, England looks set to increase its number of constituencies at the expense of Scotland and Wales. What action are the Government taking to prevent the weakening of Scottish and Welsh voices in this place and to both strengthen and defend the Union?

Chloe Smith: There is an awful lot of action on those scores. The boundaries Bill does an important thing first—paying equal respect to all nations of our United Kingdom—because we on the Government side believe in the Union. We believe it is incredibly important, and we believe that people's voices ought to be equal between and within the countries of our United Kingdom.

Cat Smith: It is interesting that the Minister talks about the importance of equality and ensuring that every vote counts equally when her Government is

pushing a policy that could see some votes count more equally than others. In the light of the Windrush scandal, where we discovered that some communities find it harder to access proof of identification than others, in the days following the Black Lives Matter protests, and knowing that, for instance, 76% of the white population hold a driving licence compared with 52% of black people, if she really wants to ensure that every vote counts equally, will she ask herself: why continue with these discriminatory policies?

Chloe Smith: Because they are not discriminatory. The hon. Lady sees evils where they do not exist. Everyone on the Government side of the House, and I hope everyone in the House, agrees that black lives matter. She is wrong and has been wrong every time she has tried to run that argument about voter identification. It is a reasonable thing that many other countries do, and it will improve the security of our voting. The evidence shows there is no impact on any particular demographic group.

Lockdown Easing: Public Confidence

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What steps he is taking across Government to increase public confidence in the policy of easing the covid-19 lockdown. [903082]

The Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt): We recognise the range of emotions that people are feeling about the lifting of restrictions. Tremendous sacrifices have been made to get the virus under control, and incredible patience shown. We published our recovery strategy on 11 May and each day our measures follow the approach it sets out. Protecting public health is, and must always be, our No. 1 priority.

Sir Desmond Swayne: To avoid a damaging second spike to our economy, is not a yard more than sufficient?

Penny Mordaunt: We are determined to get the UK economy—including the hospitality sector—up and running again and our schools reopened. Research published in *The Lancet* last week showed that a physical distance of at least 1 metre—or, if my right hon. Friend insists, 1.09 yards—

Sir Desmond Swayne: I do!

Penny Mordaunt: I thought he might. That was strongly associated with a lowered risk of transmission, but a distance of 2 metres was likely to be more effective. The advice therefore remains that wherever possible the public should keep two metres from one another, but the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies keeps that under review.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Can the Minister think of one specific episode in the past few weeks that might have done more than anything else to undermine the Government's public messaging on covid? If she is struggling, let me give her a clue: Specsavers.

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Gentleman raises a serious point, but if he thinks that that has undermined public health messages, I would strongly suggest he might like to stop banging on about it.

Pete Wishart: The failure of this Government to take the Cummings episode seriously has not just compromised the public messaging; it is worse than that for them—it has compromised their credibility and popularity, which have now taken the catastrophic nosedive they thoroughly deserve. The public anger over Dominic Cummings has not abated, as the right hon. Lady will see if she looks at her inbox. The whole battle against covid has been wrecked by the pathetic protection of this odd man. Is Dominic Cummings really worth all of this?

Penny Mordaunt: It is absolutely vital in every part of our United Kingdom that people follow the advice of our respective chief medical officers. They should do that not because I, the hon. Gentleman, any politician or any adviser asks them to, but because it is the right thing to do to protect our families, our communities and our NHS and to get the economy moving again. I know that the hon. Gentleman is angry, and many people are angry, but that is what we need to focus on and that is the message we need to deliver. I thank everyone in this country who has followed that advice, because they are beating the virus.

Special Advisers: Code of Conduct

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the compliance of Government special advisers with the code of conduct for special advisers. [903083]

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the compliance of Government special advisers with the code of conduct for special advisers. [903085]

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the compliance of Government special advisers with the code of conduct for special advisers. [903095]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): Paragraph 9 of the code of conduct for special advisers states:

“The responsibility for the management and conduct of special advisers, including discipline, rests with the Minister who made the appointment.”

It is therefore for each appointing Minister to ensure that their special advisers operate within the terms of the code of conduct.

Margaret Ferrier: I hope you had a pleasant birthday yesterday, Mr Speaker.

Public health experts have voiced concerns that Dominic Cummings did undermine public trust in lockdown rules, going against the principle of integrity that is in the code of conduct. Will the Cabinet Office conduct an investigation into potential breaches of the code of conduct by Mr Cummings, or have Ministers yet again decided that they have had enough of experts?

Chloe Smith: I am not sure whether the hon. Lady listened to the answer I gave, which was that the responsibility for those decisions rests with the appointing Minister. In this case, that is of course the Prime Minister, who has accepted Mr Cummings’s explanations and has defended that at this Dispatch Box and elsewhere. There is little further to add to that. Of course, if it helps you, Mr Speaker, I can also add that Durham

constabulary has said that there is nothing further to do, and the Cabinet Secretary has responded to Opposition Members, including the SNP party leader in this place, to say he is also satisfied.

Alan Brown: The Minister referred to the code of conduct for special advisers in her earlier answer. Paragraph 14 states:

“advisers must not take public part in political controversy”, including speeches to the press. The Prime Minister says that, somehow, Cummings did not offer his resignation, and nor did the Prime Minister think about asking him. What does the Cabinet Minister think would be adequate sanctions for Dominic Cummings to face for breaking the code of conduct?

Chloe Smith: I have answered that question. It is extraordinary that we have heard four questions in a row from the Scottish nationalist party, who have little more to say on the subject of how, as a country, we should emerge from coronavirus and how we should continue, as my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General explained, leading people and asking them to follow the remaining stages of the plans, so that we can keep safe and move the country on. Have they nothing better to say?

Mr Speaker: We have another, with Chris Stephens.

Chris Stephens: Thank you, Mr Speaker. First, it is the Scottish National party—I would hope the Minister would at least get the political party correct. We know that Mr Cummings is in contempt of Parliament for refusing to appear before the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster also said previously that Mr David Frost should be able to appear before Committees, but he could not guarantee it. Is it okay for this country to be run by unelected, unaccountable bureaucrats?

Chloe Smith: Allow me to let the hon. Gentleman into a secret: the country is not run that way; the country is run by Ministers who are accountable at this Dispatch Box. I do, of course, accept that Scotland runs its affairs in respect of what is devolved to it, as does Wales and Northern Ireland. However, we have a huge opportunity here to be working together not only for the good of the Scottish people or people anywhere else in the country, but together as a United Kingdom. I am so sorry that we have not seen a better attempt to do that from the hon. Gentleman and his team this morning. They are focused on the past, not the future.

Weddings: Covid-19 Restrictions

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the extent to which covid-19 restrictions will apply to weddings taking place in (a) 2020 and (b) 2021. [903084]

The Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt): In step 2 of our road map to recovery, we are committed to exploring how we can enable people to gather in slightly larger groups to better facilitate small weddings. My right hon. Friend the Justice Secretary is exploring with ministerial colleagues a range of measures to do that.

Steve Brine: Thousands of couples planning to tie the knot this year have had their plans postponed by the pandemic. The next few weeks, as we approach midsummer day, would of course have been peak season. Through no fault of their own, they will have none of the legal protections of marriage until next year—maybe longer—when they can reschedule. Will the Government consider creating a temporary declaration of intent for those couples, backed by the state, so that they are not prejudiced in law or taxation before they finally take the plunge?

Penny Mordaunt: May I thank my hon. Friend for the campaign he has been running? I have spoken at length with him on many Cabinet Office calls about the cases he has in his constituency. I know that some of his cases, and those of many hon. Members across the House, will involve older people who are taking greater risks. Many people will have gone back into work for the NHS and are deeply concerned, should they become infected, what that would mean for their fiancé/e. The Justice Secretary is apprised of the issue. I think there are some difficulties with the particular route my hon. Friend sets out, but I know that my right hon. Friend will be bringing forward measures very soon.

Test and Trace Application

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the (a) development of the NHS test and trace app and (b) trial of that app on the Isle of Wight. [903086]

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the (a) development of the NHS test and trace app and (b) trial of that app on the Isle of Wight. [903089]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): The NHS test and trace service is already alerting the close recent contacts of everyone who tests positive for the virus, so that they can self-isolate to prevent the spread. The app is intended to complement that service and continues to be piloted on the Isle of Wight. Consideration is being given to next steps in light of the wider NHS test and trace programme.

Afzal Khan [V]: Given that we have known for months about the disproportionate impact of coronavirus on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities across the UK, I am confused as to why the Government chose to trial the NHS contact tracing app on the Isle of Wight, an island with an overwhelmingly white population. We know that BAME communities are less likely to trust the app due to their experiences of discriminatory policing and there is potential for existing biases to be amplified by algorithms. With that in mind, does the Minister still think that the Isle of Wight was the right place to trial the app?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman makes a series of very important points. The Isle of Wight was an appropriate place in which to trial the app, because by definition trialling it in a geographically secure, as it were, community was one way to make sure that we could conduct that trial in an effective way and in a way that allowed us to learn lessons rapidly. Trialling the app in other parts of

the United Kingdom would have posed significant challenges, but he is absolutely right to remind us that the BAME community is more affected by covid-19, and that there are elements within the BAME community that have concerns about the exercise of state power in maintaining public order and in other areas. We are very sensitive to both of those issues. It is absolutely critical that we continue to work to identify more effectively those factors among the BAME community and others which predispose them towards either catching the virus or suffering more adversely. Of course, when it comes to our proud tradition of policing by consent and the protection of civil liberties, we need to maintain those traditions in order to command the confidence of all our citizens.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: It's been a shambles, hasn't it? Announced in May, hiring paused in mid-May, targets missed, tracers reporting that they have been paid to sit at home and watch television as there is no work for them—and now, changes to the app are being considered and it is not going to be working properly until the autumn. Does the Minister stand by his fulsome praise of the Health Secretary or agree with scientists who said only days ago that the Government's whole test-and-trace strategy is simply not fit for purpose?

Michael Gove: Well, I think it is fit for purpose—not just that but it is an effective way of ensuring that we can work together in order to contain the virus. [Interruption.] The hon. Lady says from a sedentary position that the scientists are wrong. I disagree with her; I think the scientists are right.

Critical Infrastructure: Resilience

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to enhance the resilience of critical national infrastructure. [903088]

The Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt): Each Government Department is responsible for the resilience of critical national infrastructure in their sectors. They report to the Cabinet Office on their plans through annual sector security and resilience plans. The Cabinet Office co-ordinates the work of Departments where risks require a cross-sector response.

James Wild: While we welcome investment into the UK, our national security powers on the ownership and control of companies, including national infrastructure, urgently need strengthening. So when the Government bring forward measures, hopefully shortly, will they ensure that telecoms, nuclear and other critical national infrastructure, as well as our technology base, will be protected from hostile states and state-backed enterprises, including protecting assets such as intellectual property?

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend raises an extremely important and relevant point. I would expect nothing less from him given his experience in working at the Ministry of Defence. He will know from that time why it is appropriate that we bring forward the national security and investment Bill.

Covid-19 Services: Private Provision

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the (a) effectiveness and (b) value for money of Government contracts with private companies to provide public services in response to the covid-19 outbreak. [903103]

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the (a) effectiveness and (b) value for money of Government contracts with private companies to provide public services in response to the covid-19 outbreak. [903114]

The Paymaster General (Penny Mordaunt): The private sector has been absolutely vital to the covid response and continues to be so. Despite the speed that procurement has had to run at, value for money and quality remains our top focus.

Liz Twist: Contact tracing is highly skilled and sensitive work. Does the Minister really believe that recruiting contact tracers to work for little more than the national living wage in call centres run by Serco, which in 2019 was investigated by the Serious Fraud Office, is the best way to deliver it?

Penny Mordaunt: If the hon. Lady has concerns about any aspect, whether related to a company or practices within a company, she should please raise it with the Cabinet Office. People have raised questions about Serco which I understand have been answered, and it has self-reported to the Information Commissioner's Office.

Mr Dhesi: Rather than relying on local authorities and public services, since the start of the covid crisis, well in excess of £1.7 billion of taxpayers' money has been spent by this Government on outsourcing directly related to coronavirus. Given that normal procurement rules have been suspended by the Government, there is no requirement for companies to go through the usual competitive bidding process to be awarded contracts. But lo and behold, major Tory party donors and prominent Members on the Government Benches—including Ministers, may I add—have major shareholdings in or are inextricably linked to many of these firms. So will the Minister commit to making public details of all negotiations pertaining to those companies?

Penny Mordaunt: First, procurement rules have not been suspended. One of the absolute key focuses is to ensure that the very many companies that have stepped forward to help this nation in this response are appropriate. We know that the quality of what they are offering to procure has been absolutely where it needs to be. A huge amount of work has gone into that. I pay tribute to the civil service, and particularly to the procurement team in the Cabinet Office, for the sterling work they have done.

With regard to any allegations the hon. Gentleman might make against Ministers—and if he is referring to my hon. Friend in the other place—the Cabinet Office has confirmed that there have been no breaches of rules, and I would urge caution that, having had those categorical responses, people are very careful about what they say in impugning the character of colleagues.

Covid-19: Government Contracts

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): What steps his Department has taken to remove potential conflicts of interest when awarding Government contracts in response to the covid-19 outbreak. [903094]

The Minister without Portfolio (Amanda Milling): As we tackle the covid-19 outbreak, it is crucial that Government contracts are awarded efficiently and responsibly to business of all sizes. Paragraph 24 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 ensures this by requiring all contracting authorities to take appropriate measures to effectively prevent, identify and remedy conflicts of interest arising from the conduct of procurement procedures.

Lilian Greenwood: Further to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), it was clear that transparency is absolutely vital to public trust in Government. Given that the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Lord Agnew, is responsible for the Government's policy on coronavirus procurement and is also a shareholder in Faculty, a company that has recently been contracted to provide coronavirus-related services to Government, should not the Government make public the details of the services that Faculty will be providing and Lord Agnew's involvement in any negotiations?

Amanda Milling: I refer the hon. Lady to the previous answer from my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General, which sets out the situation very clearly.

Voter Identification

Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to implement voter identification requirements for future elections. [903097]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): The Government are, as I referred to, committed to introducing voter identification to strengthen the integrity of our electoral system and give the public confidence that our elections are secure and fit for the 21st century. As promised in the Queen's Speech and our manifesto, we will bring forward legislation to do that.

Mr Mohindra: Across this House we need to make sure that we trust the results of the ballot box to protect our democracy. What assurances can my hon. Friend give that every eligible voter, irrespective of their socio-economic background, is encouraged to vote?

Chloe Smith: I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. This touches on the answer I gave earlier, whereby the evidence of our pilots shows that there is no impact on any particular demographic group from this policy. Indeed, the experience of it in Northern Ireland shows that turnout and participation do not come down. Furthermore, I am doing work throughout this with various organisations that represent groups who may have anxieties on any of these scores, and I am extremely keen to make sure that we resolve those concerns and, as he says, encourage everybody to register to vote.

Future Relationship with the EU

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What plans he has to change the size and strength of the negotiating team working on the future relationship between the UK and the EU. [903107]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): We have no plans to change the size of the negotiating team working on the future relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union. As Eric Morecambe said of Ernie Wise, it is “small and perfectly formed”.

Mr Speaker: I don't know that there is a link there—don't worry.

Mr Sheerman [V]: Some of us on the Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union are very worried about the Secretary of State. He was very lacklustre when he gave evidence to the Committee recently, and we are very sympathetic. This is a tough job. In reality, we have only five months to get it right for the country. Is it not a fact that there is a rift between him and the Prime Minister? The Prime Minister is not good on detail. There is a rift between them—does he need more help to overcome that?

Michael Gove: I am always grateful to the hon. Gentleman for offering to step in as a marriage counsellor. I have to say, notwithstanding my earlier reference to Morecambe and Wise, that the Prime Minister and I, when it comes to everything, are like the two Ronnies, so it's goodnight from me and it's goodnight from him.

Personal Protective Equipment

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What proportion of personal protective equipment procured by the Government during the covid-19 outbreak was manufactured by UK businesses. [903112]

The Minister without Portfolio (Amanda Milling): The whole country is facing an unprecedented crisis, and British businesses have risen to the challenge with offers of help. Businesses across the UK have stepped up to provide PPE including aprons, face masks, visors and gowns. We have now signed contracts to manufacture over 2 billion items of PPE through UK-based manufacturers, and we have already taken delivery of products from new certified UK manufacturers.

Justin Madders: There is no doubt that the devastating consequences of covid-19 were exacerbated because the Government allowed stockpiles of PPE to be run down and were too slow to anticipate the level of need that there would be. Given that in a worldwide pandemic there will inevitably be worldwide demand for PPE, do the Government now accept that it was a mistake to place so much reliance on overseas investors?

Amanda Milling: The Government have been working around the clock to get frontline NHS and care workers the equipment that they need to do their jobs safely and to save lives. Since the start of the outbreak, we have delivered over 1.7 billion items of PPE across the health and social care system within England. Plus, tens of

millions of items have been distributed to the devolved Administrations. We will continue to pursue every possible domestic and international option for PPE procurement.

Topical Questions

[903134] **Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): Tomorrow I will chair the UK delegation at the second meeting of the Joint Committee overseeing the withdrawal agreement, and I look forward to having productive discussions with Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič.

Mr Speaker: We now go to marvellous Manchester again. I call Lucy Powell.

Lucy Powell [V]: It is marvellous here, Mr Speaker. Given the Cabinet Office's unique role in co-ordinating across Government, will the Secretary of State commit to taking up the Leader of the Opposition's call for a national mission to get children active, social and ready for learning this summer by using charities, clubs, theatres, musicians, libraries and others, given the damage caused by his Government's mismanagement of school reopening?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. She is very knowledgeable and committed when it comes to ensuring that our schools do better for all students. We will work not just with the Leader of the Opposition but with others across civil society and do everything possible to ensure that those children who have lost out as a result of not being able to be in school can benefit from appropriate learning in appropriate circumstances.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know more than most that under the amended lockdown regulations, the Government must now review the need for those regulations periodically. Will he commit to publishing a statement at the end of each review period, explaining the reasoning for either amending the regulations or, indeed, keeping them as they are?

Michael Gove: That is a characteristically good idea from the Chairman of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, and I will discuss it with my Cabinet colleagues.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): The terms of reference for the Public Health England report on covid-19 disparities promised recommendations for further action to reduce disparities in risk and outcomes, yet the report did not include a single recommendation. The Government have since announced that the equality hub in the Cabinet Office will review existing actions, commission further data and undertake further engagement. I ask the Minister: where is the urgency? On what date will we see a clear, detailed action plan to stop further preventable deaths and address the appalling inequality of this pandemic? When will the Government demonstrate, with their actions, that black lives matter by putting in place the protections that black, Asian and minority ethnic workers and communities need to keep them safe from coronavirus?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady raises a very broad question. As the Secretary of State for Health has pointed out, many of those who have been in the frontline of the fight against coronavirus have come from BAME communities. We know that they have been disproportionately affected both by the spread of the virus and by its severity. It is vital that we not only develop a more sophisticated scientific and medical understanding of why, but also protect those communities and do everything to ensure that they are safe from the virus and supported if it affects them or their families. Every day, I and other Ministers are asking for more evidence and more action.

[903136] **Laura Trott** (Sevenoaks) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that getting children back to school is vital? Will he commit to marshalling all the resources of central Government to support the Education Secretary to do just that?

Michael Gove: I know that my hon. Friend is a working mother as well as someone who is committed to improving social mobility. She is also an effective champion for the excellent schools in her constituency of Sevenoaks. She is right: we all need to do more to ensure that children can be in appropriate environments, learning, growing and developing. My right hon. Friend the Education Secretary is utterly committed to that. One or two people in the trade union movement have perhaps not been as constructive as they might be, but I hope that they heed the wise words of my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell).

[903142] **Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP) [V]: It is clear that, while sharing the same objective, the nations of the United Kingdom have taken differing approaches to dealing with the pandemic. To enable restart and recovery, the devolved national Administrations may require additional powers under the devolution settlement, particularly with regard to the economy. If the Scottish Parliament seeks such powers, will the UK facilitate that, or will it restrict its ability to act?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question and to Ministers and officials in the Scottish Government for their work in helping us to co-ordinate a response to the coronavirus. The hon. Gentleman is right that because of different situations, geographies and considerations, at different times the devolved Administrations have fine-tuned or tailored their policies as appropriate. However, when it comes to the economy, one thing is clear: the strength of the United Kingdom, the strength of the UK Exchequer and the strength of Her Majesty's Treasury has underpinned the economic resilience of the whole United Kingdom. We know that if Scotland were independent, as the hon. Gentleman fervently and honestly believes that it should be, Scotland would have the largest budget deficit of any country in Europe. It is only in the interests of the Scottish people to maintain our Union, and that is why we need to maintain the power of the Treasury to support Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish and English citizens.

[903137] **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): The exciting plans to revitalise the Lowestoft and East Anglian fishing industry are founded on the principle that my right hon. Friend set down with passion and skill when he was Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that the UK would control who fishes in our waters. I would be most grateful if he confirmed that that principle remains non-negotiable.

Michael Gove: It absolutely does. I know that my hon. Friend has spoken up passionately for fishermen in Lowestoft and indeed for inshore fishermen across the United Kingdom. I look forward to continuing to work with him to ensure that they can benefit from the sea of opportunity that leaving the EU provides.

[903144] **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP) [V]: This morning, the Confederation of British Industry told the BBC that the resilience of British business to a no-deal Brexit in December is absolutely on the floor. The director general warned that if the Government insist on a political timescale that takes us to the last minute to get a deal in December, it will be catastrophic for British business. He finished by saying that just because the house is on fire, it does not mean that we should set fire to the garden shed as well. What economic analysis have the Government done on the likely impact of a no-deal Brexit in the middle of a covid crisis?

Michael Gove: We cannot have a no-deal Brexit because we had a Brexit deal that was agreed and voted on in the House of Commons, which is why we left the European Union on 31 January.

[903139] **Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm that as we come out of the lockdown due to coronavirus and rebuild our economy, the Government will do so in a way that levels up and works for all parts of our country and society, especially those in Rother Valley, as we pledged to do in the general election campaign?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the sad phenomena of last two or three decades is the way in which divisions in our society have grown deeper. It is vital that we heal, unify and level up, never more so than after the coronavirus pandemic. The communities of Rother Valley and others in South Yorkshire are at the heart of the Government's commitment to making sure that opportunity is more equal. That is why my hon. Friend is such an effective voice for those communities that have been neglected in the past.

[903145] **Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman will have read yesterday's damning report from the Social Mobility Commission, which highlights a failure of coherence and effort across Government to address this important agenda. Will he put his personal authority and the weight of his Department behind developing and supporting a cross-Government strategy to ensure that we narrow inequalities and injustices?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. I know that even before she was in this House she had a very distinguished career in speaking up for the

disadvantaged, particularly children and young people, who need the helping hand of Government as well as the support of civil society in order to achieve everything they can. She is absolutely right: there is much more that we need to do. We have touched on schools, but there are many other areas where we need to improve what we do—from child and adolescent mental health services to making sure that those in care are better supported. She is absolutely right.

[903140] **Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): Would my right hon. Friend outline progress in setting up the joint biosecurity centre, and how can we ensure that its work in controlling localised covid-19 outbreaks extends across the United Kingdom?

Michael Gove: The joint biosecurity centre is a very welcome addition to the armoury of weapons that the UK Government have in fighting this infection. It is the case that, for the JBC to work effectively, it needs to work across the whole United Kingdom. I can confirm that devolved Administration chief medical officers and Health Ministers have been working very successfully with the Secretary of State for Health in order to ensure that information can be shared in a way that benefits us all.

[903147] **Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): We know that test, track and trace has been slow to get to where it is, but we are glad it has started. However, the key thing, whatever happens centrally, is local tracking and tracing. Hackney Council is a pioneer borough, and we are really pleased that that is the case, but what is critical is that we are not getting the data that will help us track people. For example—forgive the long question, Mr Speaker—if an individual is tracked as having been close to someone who has tested positive, all Hackney gets is the information that they live in the borough of Hackney. That is not enough to act on. When will boroughs get that detailed localised information from central track and trace so that they can act and help attack this virus?

Michael Gove: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that point. I will be talking to the team who are operating the JBC later today, and I will raise that specific point with them. I am really grateful to her for raising it with me.

[903143] **Simon Baynes** (Clwyd South) (Con): Would my right hon. Friend agree that the work of the UK Government during the coronavirus crisis has been hugely assisted by the excellent performance of local authorities across the UK, including, in my constituency, Wrexham County Borough Council and Denbighshire County Council, and all the town and community councils across Clwyd South?

Michael Gove: I know that in both Wrexham and Denbighshire there have been recent incidences of the spread of infection that have been concerning, and I

know that my hon. Friend, along with colleagues in local government, has been highly effective in making sure that we deal with those in the most appropriate way. He is absolutely right: it is joint working with effective local councils and energetic Members of Parliament like himself that is critical to making sure that we deal with this infection.

[903146] **Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con) [V]: In order to save lives, the covid crisis has actually seen the Government take, I think, the most difficult decision—to deprive people of their freedom—since the second world war. Now, as central Government take a strategic lead to set out the road to recovery, would my right hon. Friend agree with me that the real heroes of the piece are local people, charities and public services, such as the new Buckinghamshire Council and the Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, and should they not be recognised for their amazing work, which has brought out the best in our society and helped everyone?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. I know that people in Chesham and Amersham, and elsewhere in Buckinghamshire, have benefited from her advocacy and from the energetic work of the local authority. She is right that we will, in appropriate time, need to recognise the commitment of those in civil society and elsewhere. I know that her championing of their cause has been heard in other parts of Government, and more will follow later in order to recognise exactly the validity of the argument she makes.

[903150] **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con) [V]: It is lovely to follow my great friend, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan).

What more can the Government do to encourage people from the private sector to become involved in the management of civil services and agencies such as Public Health England in order to give good management expertise to deliver services to the public?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Attracting people from a wide range of backgrounds into Government and into public service is essential for making sure that we have cognitive diversity, as well as entrepreneurial skills. When we look at how the Government use data, it is vital that we get people in from organisations such as Amazon who have experience in this area. When we think about how we communicate our intent to the broader public, it is also vital to have people who have extensive experience in local radio as entrepreneurs. They can often be some of the most effective communicators, managing to combine authoritative communication with a lightness of touch.

Mr Speaker: In order to allow the safe exit of vulnerable Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I am suspending the House for three minutes.

Sitting suspended.

Planning Process: Probity

10.34 am

Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will make a statement on the need to maintain public confidence in the probity of the planning process and his quasi-judicial role in these matters.

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): The Government are committed to maintaining public confidence in the probity of the planning process at all levels, including the Secretary of State's role in deciding called-in planning applications and recovered appeals. Rightly, Parliament has, through the planning Acts, delegated to local planning authorities the powers to determine things at their level. However, Parliament has also created provisions whereby a small proportion of cases are determined by central Government.

The written ministerial statement of June 2008 sets out clear criteria for the use of the powers. For example, some decisions are recovered because of the quantum of housing they involve and thus their potential effect on the Government's objectives for sustainable communities; others are recovered because of non-determination by the local authority. The involvement of Ministers in the planning system is a very long-established process that is clearly guided by both the published ministerial code and the guidance published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on planning propriety, which focuses on the duty on Ministers to behave fairly and to approach matters before them with an open mind.

The vast majority of planning decisions are determined at a local level by local planning authorities. However, as I have said, the planning system provides for decisions to be sent to Ministers for determination, including on the grounds that they involve developments of major importance. In fact, Ministers were involved in 26 planning decisions out of a total of 447,000 planning cases last year. The small number of cases that are referred to planning Ministers for determination are often among the most controversial in the planning system—for example, the 500 dwellings in the Oxford green belt that were recently allowed, and the 500 dwellings in the York green belt that were refused.

Given the nature of the cases before them, it is not uncommon for Ministers to determine against the planning inspector's recommendation, as has happened in around 20% of cases in recent years. In conclusion, I stress that each planning decision is taken fairly and on its own merits.

Steve Reed: The Secretary of State will not have the public confidence that he needs to overhaul the planning system until we have full transparency over his unlawful decision to force through the Westferry development. He gave consent to the scheme on 14 January, in the teeth of opposition from Tower Hamlets Council and his own planning inspector, who both considered the scheme oversized and lacking in affordable housing. When Tower Hamlets took up a judicial review to challenge the Secretary of State, he took the extraordinary step of admitting that his decision was unlawful because of apparent bias. That meant that he avoided publishing

in open court all correspondence revealing the true reasons behind his decision. Will the Minister tell us what that apparent bias was?

The developer, Northern & Shell, is owned by the billionaire Conservative party donor Richard Desmond. Mr Desmond sat next to the Secretary of State at a Conservative party fund-raising dinner just two months previously, and he admits that they discussed the scheme. The ministerial code requires Ministers to act with integrity; did the Secretary of State disclose his conversation with Mr Desmond to the Department before he granted permission? As the circumstances clearly raise a question of bias, why did the Secretary of State not immediately recuse himself from taking the decision?

The Secretary of State gave the scheme consent one day before a community infrastructure levy came into force; did he know that he was helping Mr Desmond to dodge a potential £50 million tax bill? Will the Secretary of State now disclose what contact he or his representatives had with the developers about that tax?

By an astonishing coincidence, just two weeks after the Secretary of State took his decision Mr Desmond made a generous donation of £12,000 to the Conservative party. This sequence of events raises grave concerns about cash for favours. If he wants to restore trust, the Secretary of State must immediately publish all documents and all correspondence relating to this decision. The public need reassurance that the integrity of the planning process cannot be auctioned off at Conservative party fund-raising dinners.

Christopher Pincher: The hon. Gentleman's comments remind me of the adage, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again," because I think, Mr Speaker, that this is his sixth attempt at an urgent question on this matter. I do not deny—

Mr Speaker: Order. We do not discuss urgent questions, and I am the judge of what is right and wrong on the numbers, so we will leave that for today. Mr Pincher, I have the greatest respect for your job, and you need to have the same for mine.

Christopher Pincher: Indeed, Mr Speaker. I was simply going to observe that the hon. Gentleman has shown great persistence, although after listening to his questions I do not think there was much in them that was new or different. He asked four fundamental questions, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry. That is questioning the judgment of decisions we take in a meeting on whether there was something different. You were not present at that, Mr Pincher, and I do not believe that you are aware of our discussions—and if you are, you should not be. So I think we can leave that for now.

Christopher Pincher: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am very happy to answer the hon. Gentleman's question, and certainly never question your judgment.

The hon. Gentleman asked first about the nature of the decision of the Secretary of State for a redetermination. The Secretary of State, with the support of the Mayor of Tower Hamlets and others in the local planning authority, believed the best course of action was for a swift redetermination of this particular issue. The way to achieve that, technically in law, is to accept the action that was brought by the local authority to the court. That is why the Secretary of State made the decision that he did.

[Christopher Pincher]

The hon. Gentleman also asked whether the Secretary of State acted properly and with propriety in making clear to the Department all discussions that he has had with applicants; yes, he did. At all times he has disclosed any conversations that he has had with applicants.

The hon. Gentleman also requests me to describe my right hon. Friend's relationship with the applicant. My right hon. Friend has no relationship with the applicant, so that question is irrelevant. Both the applicant and the local authority have asked my right hon. Friend to make a site visit. My right hon. Friend, in discussion with officials in our Department, weighed up the pros and cons of such a site visit and decided against.

As for the decision on 14 January, which is outlined publicly and which the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members can see online, that decision is all very clear. There were no discussions about the CIL issue between my right hon. Friend and the applicant. My right hon. Friend has been very clear about his involvement with the applicant. I do not think anything further needs to be added.

The applicant has, I think, paid for tickets to a Conservative party event. That is apparently where the funds came from. Ministers have no knowledge of funds provided to political parties through donations or through payment for tickets. These are spendings made by donors which go to parties of all persuasions. They are declared in the proper and usual way. None of this is known to Ministers, and none of it is discussed by Ministers. It certainly was not discussed on this occasion.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): When it comes to planning, nowhere offers greater opportunity for house building, of all tenure types, than here in the capital, yet a total lack of ambition by the Labour-run City Hall leaves a shortfall. What steps can my right hon. Friend outline to get the planning system working in London?

Christopher Pincher: One reason why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has called in the Mayor's plan is that we believe it to be insufficient; it has a paucity of ambition for the sorts of houses and the number of houses we need in London. By his own admission, the Mayor is missing his own target. The reason why this particular application came before my right hon. Friend was the failure of the local authority to properly determine upon it. He came to the conclusion that it should go ahead because of the number of homes and of affordable homes that were going to be built—the sorts of homes the Mayor of London is not building.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): This is like the Dominic Cummings affair and we have a Minister defending the indefensible. When the Secretary of State personally approves a planning application a day before the deadline, which saves the developer £40 million of fees in infrastructure payments, it raises serious questions. When it transpires that the developer then donates to the Tory party, to the public this matter simply stinks. Worse, the Secretary of State's actions overruled the planning decision of the local council and it was against his own Planning Inspectorate advice. Why did he think he knew better? Why do the Minister and the Secretary of State not think it would be better

to have more affordable homes funded? Surely they must agree that a multi-millionaire funding a £1 billion development helps fund future infrastructure for the greater good. Why was the Secretary of State content with his decision until legal action was raised by Tower Hamlets Council? Why do the Government think it is acceptable for the Secretary of State to remain in place after an unlawful decision, which he admits shows apparent bias? This is a party whose former Prime Minister and current Prime Minister once auctioned off a tennis match with themselves for £160,000. Does the Minister understand what these fundraising events look like to the public when other decisions then get made that seem to favour those who attend the events? For a Tory Government, it is one rule for them and one rule for another. Fortunately for us in Scotland, many people in Scotland now see independence as a better option, because nothing the Minister can say gives confidence in this place.

Christopher Pincher: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for his question. As I said, it is not unusual for Ministers to look at and call in significant applications, and for them to come to a different conclusion from that of the Planning Inspectorate. My right hon. Friend's reasons for his decision were clearly outlined in his decision letter of 14 January. He makes it clear that one reason for his decision to allow the application was the very significant number of homes that were going to be built as a result of it, including affordable homes. I might say in response to the hon. Gentleman that in the same week, in an application to the same authority, my right hon. Friend came to a very different conclusion when he refused a planning application made by and supported by the local authority to demolish the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, the one that created Big Ben and the Liberty bell. The local authority, the well-known tribunes of the people in Tower Hamlets, wanted to demolish it and build a luxury boutique hotel. My right hon. Friend will always come down on an application based on its merits and in the interests of the people. That is what he did on this occasion and that is what he will always do.

Mr Speaker: Just to help the House, I should say that I am expecting to run this until 11.05 am.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend set out his plans to increase the supply of affordable homes to rent and to purchase through the excellent first homes programme that he has brought forward, particularly for key workers, the heroes of the covid crisis? Will he consider directly commissioning the construction of those homes on surplus public sector land?

Mr Speaker: Let me just say that we are straying from what the urgent question is about, so, unfortunately, we will have to move on.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): In the interests of transparency, may I say that the Select Committee has not considered this matter? Last night I did receive a letter from the mayor of Tower Hamlets, but the Committee has not given consideration to that. Does the Minister agree that such matters as this are best dealt with when all the facts are in the public domain, otherwise judgments will be formed along the basis of supposition and conjecture, and, were the

Committee to make a request to the Secretary of State, would he be willing to provide us with all relevant documentation so that the Committee could give proper, careful consideration to these matters, based on the facts that are available?

Christopher Pincher: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question. I remind him that the decision of the Secretary of State, as I have already said, is in the public domain. The application is a live one, and documentation will be published in the usual way. We always take seriously, and consider weightily, requests from the Committee, and I am sure that we will happily consider this one. However, my right hon. Friend has published his decision, it is a very clear decision, and all documents will be published in the usual way, as they are through live planning applications.

James Daly (Bury North) (Con): While the Conservative Mayor in the West Midlands is getting homes built by making the best use of brownfield sites, the Labour Mayor in London keeps missing his housing targets and the Labour Mayor of Greater Manchester proposes ripping up the green belt against the wishes of my constituents. Is it only the Conservatives that are able to get it right on housing?

Mr Speaker: Order. Unfortunately, we need to get the question right. The Urgent Question is certainly not about Manchester, and certainly not about that. *[Interruption.]* I think it is for me to decide. It might be helpful if Members were to go and read what the Urgent Question is about, and then we can link the two. I call Rachel Hopkins.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I speak as a local councillor. We are regularly reminded to abide by our code of conduct, based on the Nolan principles, including integrity, accountability, openness and honesty, and declare personal or pecuniary interests, be them real or perceived, in decision making. With that in mind, is it a coincidence that Mr Desmond made a substantial donation to the Conservative party just days after the Secretary of State rushed through permission for the Westferry development, against the advice of his own planning inspector, and one day before Mr Desmond would have become liable for a £50 million tax bill?

Christopher Pincher: I do not know when Mr Desmond made donations or, in this case, payments for tickets to a Conservative party event. I believe he has donated to other political parties, including the Labour party. He is clearly a very generous man. I do not know that, and nor does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, because we have no knowledge of those political donations when we are making planning decisions. My right hon. Friend has laid out very clearly his reasons for his decision, which he has made honestly and fairly. He is mindful, as am I, of his responsibilities according to the ministerial code and MHCLG propriety codes. We will always make decisions fairly, based on their merits and in the interests of the people.

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): One way we can ensure trust in the probity of the planning process is to ensure that it relates to the needs of people on the ground in communities. I was saved by social housing. Were it not for social housing, I would not be

here. How can we ensure that the planning process that local authorities follow respects the communities that they represent and, more importantly, that the standards of social housing are improved? I know that this is an issue that the Minister finds very important.

Christopher Pincher: On the question of social housing, and indeed affordable housing, we are committed to increasing the numbers of affordable homes and social rented homes. It is worth while noting that in the last year alone this Government have built more council homes than the last Labour Government did in the entire 13 years of their history. My hon. Friend has an absolute guarantee that we will work, as will Mayor Street, for the interests of local people, building the homes that they want.

My hon. Friend also makes a point about the planning system. I am keen to ensure that the system acts with speed and transparency, and in the interest of local people. He can always be assured that the Conservative Government have that interest at heart.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Did major Tory party donor Mr Desmond ask to sit next to the Secretary of State at the Conservative party dinner, on a table where—by mere coincidence, according to accounts—other developers involved in the scheme were seated? Mr Desmond himself has admitted that they discussed the scheme over dinner, but the Secretary of State says that they did not. Who, out of the two, is misleading the British people?

Mr Speaker: We must be very careful about the word “misleading”. I am sure that no Member of this House would ever mislead anybody.

Christopher Pincher: My right hon. Friend has been absolutely clear: the applicants raised the issue of Westferry with him at that dinner, my right hon. Friend made it clear that he could not discuss planning matters and would not discuss that planning matter, and the issue was closed. I have no idea what Mr Desmond asked for at that dinner, where he wished to be seated or who made the decision on where he was seated, because Ministers in my Department and others do not know what donations or funds are being spent by donors on political parties. There is a firewall, quite properly, between the two.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): I completely agree on the need to maintain public trust in the planning process. I have the honour to represent the historic market town of Newcastle-under-Lyme, and one concern people have is that our historic buildings and heritage are not always protected in the planning process. What steps is the Ministry taking to ensure that buildings of importance, such as the Guildhall in Newcastle-under-Lyme, are protected in the planning system, in the public interest?

Mr Speaker: I liked the last bit of the question.

Christopher Pincher: Heritage assets are vital to us all, and we want to ensure that they are protected. The Guildhall is clearly of great interest to my hon. Friend and his constituents. One reason why my right hon. Friend made the decision he did with respect to the Whitechapel bell foundry was its huge historic interest to the people of Tower Hamlets and to people in this place. His decision there was the right one, and I think all his decisions have been right.

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP) [V]: To recap, we have a planning decision that is unlawful, weaved through guidance on tall buildings, downplayed the heritage impact on the Greenwich world heritage site, increased the intensification of the housing units by 113% at the same time as reducing the proportion of affordable units by 40%, was taken on a timescale that exempted the developer from making contributions and saw a substantial donation to Tory party coffers. Does the Minister not understand how bad this looks? Why is the Secretary of State not coming to the House to explain why he sought to exercise his powers in the manner in which he did? Will he now ensure that all the documents and correspondence germane to this decision are released, so that people can understand for themselves the nature of the apparent bias in this case?

Christopher Pincher: My right hon. Friend's reasons for his determination are quite clear—as I have said already, they are laid out in his decision letter of 14 January, which is open to public scrutiny and, indeed, legal challenge. My right hon. Friend made a decision in favour of local homes for local people, including more affordable homes. I remind the hon. Gentleman that, when it comes to tall buildings, other Ministers in my right hon. Friend's position have made decisions in their favour, including John Prescott, who in 2003 accepted a building for 750 asylum seekers that was particularly tall. My right hon. Friend will always act in the interests of local people and will act fairly, proportionately and properly.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): I welcome the additional investment in the affordable homes programme secured by my right hon. Friend in the Budget in March—a scheme responsible for the delivery of almost half a million new homes since 2010. What assurances can the Minister give me that developers will continue to be held to their obligations to provide affordable units within residential developments?

Christopher Pincher: We have a very effective affordable homes programme under way. As a result of the work of this Government and previous Conservative Governments, we have built something like 450,000 affordable homes in the last 10 years. We should compare that with the 399,000 built by the previous Labour Government during their nine years in office, at a time when apparently the economy was rosy and they had lots of money to spend. The Chancellor announced at the Budget £12 billion for the next affordable homes programme. We will make sure that the tenure and geographic mix is right for local communities and that it builds affordable homes and the homes that people want and need.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): Given that the Prime Minister pushed through the original scheme for the same developer when he was Mayor of London, did No. 10 have any involvement in events or conversations leading to the Secretary of State's unlawful decision to grant approval?

Christopher Pincher: With respect to the hon. Lady, she is wrong. That was an entirely different application. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was determined to leave a legacy in London of more homes—more of the right homes in the right places—so that people could live the lives they wanted to live. In comparison,

the present Mayor of London is missing his own targets and the Government's targets. It is the reason we have had to call in his plan—to demonstrate that he must do better.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): I thank the Minister for his responses on this very important topic. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Daly) for raising his concerns about the green belt, which I share. With public engagement in the planning process at an all-time low, because meetings are now held online or not at all, what advice is the Minister giving to planning authorities to maximise public probity and prevent any decision from being steamrollered through?

Christopher Pincher: As I said in my opening remarks, planning is essentially a local matter. The vast majority of local planning decisions are made locally. Sometimes they are appealed against to the Planning Inspectorate, but only on a small number of occasions will those applications come to a Secretary of State. I am very keen to ensure that the planning system is swift, transparent and reflects and adheres to local needs, and I shall make sure that my hon. Friend's comments and concerns are properly reflected in all our considerations about planning processes.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): Campaigners in Warrington North have been battling to save Peel Hall from development for over three decades. With planning law already weighted so heavily in favour of development, what assurances can the Minister give that the developer cannot simply make a substantial donation to the Conservative party to subvert the process and that residents will get the fair hearing they deserve and can have confidence in that process?

Christopher Pincher: The planning law in this country is very clear, as the hon. Lady knows. I suggest that she go and read it.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the probity of the planning system has been enhanced by the Secretary of State's decision to proceed with South Oxfordshire District Council's local plan and that the holding of an examination in public online is a very good, transparent way of proceeding?

Christopher Pincher: Virtual proceedings are an effective way of ensuring that the light of public interest shines upon planning decisions, and I think the decision made in respect of South Oxfordshire was the right one. As I have said before, we will act always with fairness and probity, but we will also act to make sure that the Government's objectives to build more homes in the right places—the sorts of homes people want and need—are met.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): When I was elected to the council, one of the first things I did was sit on a planning committee. Does the Minister agree that transparency in that quasi-judicial role is really important, especially when constituents still feel there is a lot of secrecy around the planning process? Does he believe that there needs to be that full, transparent process in order not to undermine the planning system for our constituents?

Christopher Pincher: I certainly agree that transparency in planning is important. That is why the decisions that Ministers make, if they are involved in those planning

decisions, are properly published and open to full public scrutiny, as they have been in the case that the hon. Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed) has raised.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Like the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi), I sat on my local planning committee and in my training I learned that only the most contentious of applications, or those of national significance, come before the Minister. We have an example on our doorstep, just over the road, where the 50-storey St George's Tower was granted by John Prescott against the wishes of the local council. Can the Minister clarify why certain applications require a ministerial decision?

Christopher Pincher: There are some applications which, because of the number of homes, will involve a ministerial decision. Other applications, which are timed out because the local authority has not been able to come to a determination and the applicant appeals, also come before a Minister. That happens in a small number of cases. It happened in the Westferry case, but I remind the House, because I think it bears repetition, that the issue came before the Secretary of State because the local authority failed to make a determination. It came before the previous Secretary of State in the early part of last year and went through the normal adjudication process in MHCLG.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): In my constituency, the local planning authority has just rejected a planning application aimed at reducing the number of affordable housing units. What confidence can my constituents have that the Government will not overrule that decision? Most importantly, should Ministers who are making planning decisions not be under the same obligation as local councillors working on planning decisions to declare personal and prejudicial interests?

Christopher Pincher: Ministers are obliged to adhere to the ministerial code and the MHCLG proprietary and ethics policy. We will build the homes that we think people need. We are going to spend £12 billion on the affordable homes programme to ensure that the right sort of homes are built in the right places. It is for the local authority, whichever local authority it is, to determine need and to bid for some of that AHP money if it wishes to build socially rented homes. Homes England will also take bids from applicants to build homes according to the land supply of local authorities. Let us see what the hon. Lady's local authority achieves. I trust that it will build the right sorts of homes for the people of Bath.

Mr Speaker: In order to allow the safe exit of hon. Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I am now suspending the House for three minutes.

11.7 am

Sitting suspended.

Business of the House

11.11 am

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): May I belatedly wish you many happy returns for yesterday, Mr Speaker? I hope it was duly celebrated across the land.

The business for the week commencing 15 June will include:

MONDAY 15 JUNE—Motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the draft Electricity Capacity (Amendment etc.) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020; followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the draft Environmental Protection (Plastic Straws, Cotton Buds and Stirrers) (England) Regulations 2020; followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (Amendment) (No.3) Regulations 2020; followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the draft Fatal Accidents Act 1976 (Remedial) Order 2020.

TUESDAY 16 JUNE—Opposition half day (8th allotted day—1st part). There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the official Opposition, subject to be announced, followed by a motion to approve statutory instruments relating to the draft Over the Counter Derivatives, Central Counterparties and Trade Repositories (Amendment, etc., and Transitional Provision) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 and the draft Financial Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020; followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to the draft Public Service Vehicles (Open Data) (England) Regulations 2020.

WEDNESDAY 17 JUNE—Committee and remaining stages of the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill [*Lords*].

THURSDAY 18 JUNE—Motion to approve statutory instruments relating to the draft African Development Bank (Fifteenth Replenishment of the African Development Fund) Order 2020, the draft African Development Bank (Further Payments to Capital Stock) Order 2020, and the draft African Development Fund (Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative) (Amendment) Order 2020; followed by a motion to approve statutory instruments relating to the draft International Development Association (Nineteenth Replenishment) Order 2020 and the draft International Development Association (Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative) (Amendment) Order 2020; followed by a debate on a motion relating to the effect of covid-19 on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. The subject for the debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 19 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the Leader of the House for the forthcoming business and for the unexpected treat of an Opposition day—we did not even have to ask for it—but could he also confirm the recess dates? He alluded to them being moved slightly over for the summer recess. It would be really helpful if he could, in his reply, give us those dates.

Mr Speaker, a belated happy birthday to you. It is a birthday you share with His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead

[Valerie Vaz]

and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) wants us all to join her in wishing Gabriella Zaghari-Radcliffe a very happy sixth birthday. How sad that an innocent child must suffer in this way. Clemency is all we ask for our British citizens: Nazanin; Anousheh, who is facing a covid-19 outbreak in prison; and Kylie. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) has consistently raised the case of Luke Symons, who is being held hostage by the Houthis in Yemen. Would it be possible for the Foreign Secretary to update the House next week on our British citizens? They belong here at home.

The other place is moving to a virtual Parliament and remote voting next week, while we are sort of moving backwards. However, I am pleased that the proxy voting system has been extended and I hope it is given the widest possible interpretation. Perhaps the Leader of the House will look again at the possibility of not excluding hon. Members from substantive proceedings, so that they can take part in legislative debates too.

I was quite surprised that, given the events of this week, the Prime Minister did not come to the House to make a statement on what the Government will do on the Black Lives Matter movement that is sweeping the world. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned inaction on a number of reports: the Public Health England report, the Lammy report and the Windrush report.

To that, I would add the McGregor-Smith review of race in the workplace. It was commissioned by the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), and found that helping black, Asian and minority ethnic people to progress in their careers could add £24 billion to the economy. This is not just an economic issue; it is a moral issue, too. Its report gave signposts for action. The only action we have seen is that by the chief special adviser marching a young BAME woman out of her job and out of No. 10.

These reports are so numerous that I hope they are not becoming a footstool for the relevant Minister in the race disparity unit. I asked last week which Minister is responsible for taking all those reports forward. I hope the Leader of the House can write to me and place the letter in the House of Commons Library at to who is responsible, because there seems to be a crossover between two Ministers. Could the Prime Minister make a statement on this race tipping point? We need points of action and a timeframe.

I notice that the No. 10 Downing Street spokesperson said that the Cabinet did not observe the minute's silence that you, Mr Speaker, had across the House for George Floyd on Tuesday. I suppose it is too much to ask that they would take the knee. We also had a minute's silence for those who died in Grenfell Tower three years ago. Is it too much to ask for an urgent statement for an update on what is going on now?

Speaking of the Cabinet, we see that zoos are opening next week, but the Secretary of State for Education has no plan for the reopening of schools. Headteachers, teachers and the teaching unions—who, let us remember, continue to work to teach our children—said that the return could have been eased back safely. The Government always talk about Labour in Wales, but Labour in Wales consults, discusses and then announces, while the UK Government seem to be announcing first and then scrambling back. May we have an urgent statement from the Secretary of State for Education?

This is Carers Week, and the deputy leader of the Labour party has said that one in four adults now has a caring responsibility. Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that covid-19 deaths account for 28% of all deaths in care homes and nursing homes. We have previously raised the delay in the Government response to the virus. We ask again what happened in January and February. The Prime Minister missed Cobra meetings because he did not clock that this was a pandemic sweeping the world. We were told that sporting events could not be cancelled because people would meet in the pub. Public Health England said that we were two weeks behind Italy, so there were many countries we could have learnt from. That is why we need an urgent explanation from the Secretary of State for Health, not just about his bunions but about the breach in patient confidentiality.

Finally, it is our gracious sovereign's official birthday on Saturday. Trooping the colour will take place in Windsor. We thank her for all her public service.

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I begin at the end? Yes indeed, that will be a proper occasion on which to celebrate the Queen's official birthday and an extraordinary period of decades of service to the nation as our longest-reigning monarch. May the Queen live forever—amen, amen, alleluia, alleluia, amen.

As for recess dates, those are always subject to the progress of Government business, and the right hon. Lady will be aware that the Government's business has inevitably been delayed because of the current crisis, but I can assure her that as soon as it is practical to bring forward any changes to dates, they will be brought forward.

May I join the right hon. Lady in wishing a happy birthday to Gabriella Zaghari-Radcliffe? We remain very concerned about this situation, and I remain grateful to the right hon. Lady for raising it every week. It is continually taken up by the Foreign Office and by our diplomatic service in Iran. The Foreign Secretary will be here to answer questions later in the month, on 30 June, and the issue relating to Luke Symons in Yemen can also be brought up at that point, but the right hon. Lady knows that I pass messages on to the Foreign Office after these sessions every week.

As regards virtual participation, the Procedure Committee is looking into the possibility of people participating in non-interrogative sessions—or substantive sessions, if the right hon. Lady prefers—and we will have to wait and see what that Committee comes forward with.

In relation to the Government's record on race and faith and equality since 2010, a great deal has been done. The race at work charter was launched, helping to create greater opportunities for BAME employees. The apprenticeships diversity champions network was set up. In other areas, the right hon. Lady mentioned the Lammy review of the criminal justice system. That is being looked at, as well as how to collect and publish more and better data on race, improving diversity in the prison workforce, and working towards incorporating ethnicity when gauging performance. So this is work that is under way within the Government. The Prime Minister was obviously here yesterday to answer questions, as he is every week. The Government are very well aware of these important and sensitive issues and are committed to improving equality in this country. We take the issue with the utmost seriousness.

The right hon. Lady mentioned the third anniversary of the Grenfell disaster. Once again, the Government would like to reiterate their heartfelt condolences to the survivors and recognise what a terrible tragedy it was. The Government are committed to ensuring that something like this does not happen in future. That is part of the reason the Fire Safety Bill was introduced and is making progress through the House.

Coming on to the schools question, the Secretary of State was here on Tuesday to make a statement with regard to what was happening in schools. It is an issue that we are all facing as to how things reopen in a way that protects safety and health.

The right hon. Lady referred to what has been going on in care homes. It is now good news that the deaths in all settings, including care homes, are falling, but every death is a tragedy—we must always remember that. Early death is something that Government policy has sought to avoid. That is why we have had the lockdown. It is why steps continue to be taken to help care homes, with testing kits, an overhaul in the way that personal protective equipment is delivered, and provision of very significant funds to local authorities, including the £600 million infection control fund to tackle the spread of covid-19 in care homes. In the face of an unprecedented pandemic and emergency, the Government have taken the steps that are suitable and the best steps that they could take at the time.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Will the Leader of the House introduce a measure next week which will efface all remaining trace that there was a Roman civilisation on this island?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend, as so often, comes to the heart of the matter. I am surprised that he has not raised Stonehenge, which is known for being the site, or thought to have been the site, of human sacrifice. It does occur to me that if it were removed, then of course the A303 could be widened more easily, making it easier to get to Somerset.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP) [V]: First, may I associate myself with the comments of the shadow Leader regarding Black Lives Matter? I think most people will find it astonishing, given the depth of feeling in the country, that the Government do not wish to lead a parliamentary debate on the matter.

The Scottish National party did not oppose the motion to establish proxy voting last night, because we believe that something is better than nothing, but the Leader of the House should not think we are in any way satisfied with the Government's defence of democratic expression in the age of coronavirus—we are not. Given that the right hon. Gentleman has been dragged kicking and screaming to accept the right of Members to vote by proxy if they cannot attend in person, why does he continue to oppose electronic voting through a system that has already been perfected by our staff? Switching that back on would not only allow Members to vote remotely, but would permit those on the premises to vote safely without the need to congregate in one place.

Secondly, does it not seem odd that there is no place in our future agenda for Parliament to debate the overall approach of the Government to the covid-19 pandemic? We need a full debate on that, not just glib 20-second answers and well-rehearsed soundbites. Given that the

Government seem to be losing their grip and are in danger of losing public confidence, is this not the time to reach out and engage all parties in a renewed consensus?

Finally, can I ask for a statement on the Government's willingness to answer questions from elected Members? Many of us have raised repeated questions with the Chancellor on behalf of our constituents relating to the various support schemes run by his Department and its agencies—most notably, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. It now seems that the Treasury is refusing to answer individual queries and has taken to issuing generic circulars instead. That is not acceptable, and it marks a serious departure from the way in which the Government are held to account in Parliament. I am well aware that things are not normal at the moment, but elected representatives must be able to get answers from those who serve the public. Does the Leader of the House agree?

Mr Rees-Mogg: With regard to the final part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I agree absolutely. I view it as one of the roles of the Leader of the House to take it up with Departments when answers are not felt to be satisfactory by Members, and I will unquestionably take up what he has said with the Treasury. Answers ought to be specific to the question raised by a Member of Parliament. That is one of our rights as a Member of Parliament, and if that is not happening, that is a lacuna in the service the Government are providing, so I assure him that I will take that up.

The hon. Gentleman started by saying that he was not satisfied. I so look forward to the day when an SNP Member stands up and says he is satisfied about anything of any kind whatever. He conjured up this fascinating image of my being dragged kicking and screaming. I have to confess that since my earliest infant years I have not been one of the greatest kickers or screamers in any circumstances. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) says I am now, but no, no kicking, no screaming; just listening and seeing how things can be done and working out a system that ensures we have a physical Parliament that can get through the Government's busy legislative programme. We now have three Public Bill Committees up and running, and we will have four. That is very important and it is why we had to come back physically, while recognising that circumstances require some Members to be absent from this House.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) sort of made my point for me, because he asked for an overarching debate on the coronavirus. He has clearly forgotten that we had one lasting two days when we had a virtual Parliament. Clearly, what went on in the virtual Parliament was so unsatisfactory that it has passed from people's memory.

Mr Speaker: Just to help, I ask Members to speed up questions and answers, because we are going to run this until about midday.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on Sessional Orders, which determine how close to this building demonstrations can take place? Over the weekend, Winston Churchill's statue was desecrated, a flag was burned at the Cenotaph and two wicked people threw bikes at horses. Parliament needs to act.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has been quite clear about these criminal acts, which are entirely unjustifiable. We are lucky in our police who, according to Sir Robert Peel's principles of policing, police with consent. It is absolutely right that peaceful protest should be allowed. That is part of a democratic system, but people have to obey the law. That is incumbent upon all of us, but my hon. Friend will know that to ensure access to Parliament, discretion is given to constables by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis under section 52 of the Metropolitan Police Act 1839 to

"disperse all assemblies and processions of persons causing or likely to cause obstructions or disorder on any day on which Parliament is sitting".

In the past, both Houses passed Sessional Orders at the beginning of each Session, but the effectiveness of that is a matter of debate, and something where I think you and I do not necessarily share the same opinion, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: If we want to make a real difference, we should add it to a Bill.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): Mr Speaker, we have something in common, because you share your birthday with the Duke of Edinburgh, and I share my birthday with Her Majesty the Queen, so we are a match made in heaven.

We anticipate an allocation of time in early July for debates on departmental estimates. I remind Members on both sides of the House that applications for those debate days should be submitted to the Backbench Business Committee by a week tomorrow—19 June.

The tap has been turned on: we have an allocation of time for a Backbench business debate next Thursday on the important issue of coronavirus and its impact on black and minority ethnic communities. However, there is other business that day, and there could be urgent questions or statements, so would the Leader of the House please look at providing a measure of protected time for that debate? It is an important subject, and it would be dreadful if the debate was foreshortened by other business that came up on the day.

Can we arrange a better flow of information from Government sources to local health public health officials about the results of covid-19 tests? Quite often, local public health officials are in the dark as to the whereabouts of someone in their locality who has tested positive through the national testing system, so could we have a better flow of information to local public health officials? That is vital.

Lastly, in his response to the shadow Leader of the House, the Leader of the House did not mention the recess dates. If there is to be a change, Members on both sides of the House would welcome knowing about it sooner rather than later.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Celebrating birthdays is becoming a theme, which we should try to bring up at all business questions. My birthday happens to be shared with Her late Majesty Queen Victoria, so we all have some royal association somewhere or other.

Ian Mearns: You must have enjoyed that when she was alive.

Mr Rees-Mogg: If only I were as time honoured as that would indicate.

The hon. Gentleman raises an important point about protected time. I am not unsympathetic to that, but I will ensure that it is discussed, in the way these things are. As regards co-ordination with public health officials, there are the local resilience forums, which are probably the right place for that to be organised.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, during the coronavirus crisis, local papers have provided an essential lifeline for many in our communities? However, as we come out of the crisis, we also need our papers to help bolster our economy. Will he join me in applauding the *Rotherham Advertiser's* Restarting Rotherham campaign, which will help to get the local economy back on its feet? May we have a debate in Government time to discuss that important issue?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and commend him for highlighting his local paper's superb initiative. I hope it will devote pages to his campaigning for the interests of his constituents. That is one of the important contributions that local newspapers can provide, as one of the public's most trusted and cherished sources of news, and they deserve credit for their journalism and local campaigns. The spotlight of media attention has always played an important role in encouraging considered decision making. Local newspapers, radio and television are fundamental to our democracy, holding local government to account in much the same way that national press and broadcasters hold the Government in Whitehall to account. I commend my hon. Friend's local paper, and I commend him for bringing the issue to our attention.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): After my repeated questions regarding the locations, admissions, recorded deaths and usage for the Nightingale hospitals and temporary mortuaries, the Government's responses have been nothing short of stonewalling. When it comes to the costs and the private firms that built the Nightingales, they simply will not say anything. Will the Leader of the House explain what the Government are trying to hide and how I can get answers to these very straightforward, simple questions?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that. The Government always seek to provide information in a timely fashion. I would point out that the relevant Departments have been exceptionally busy recently dealing with the coronavirus crisis, but if any right hon. or hon. Member is concerned about the quality of answers being received, I am happy to take that up. If people get in touch with my office, I will see what I can do to assist.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): I am afraid I can claim no royal birth connections, but I do share my birthday with Muhammad Ali, which is my best bet. I am sure that like me, my right hon. Friend wants to see the UK sign a trade deal with the EU before 31 December. He will be aware that if that does not happen, the disruption threatened to my constituency and large parts of east Kent will be huge, and disastrous for the local economy. Will he guarantee that the Government

will not only keep this House updated regularly on the progress of the negotiations, but do everything in their power to avoid the terrible disruption that would come with a disorderly end to the negotiations?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend no doubt, like Muhammad Ali, floats like a butterfly and stings like a bee with his political insights and precision. The negotiations between the Government and the European Union on our future relationship continue, but we did get a deal back in January, and that is the basis for now going on to a future relationship. However, I assure him and his Kentish constituents that planning for the end of the transition period is well under way to ensure that we are ready to seize the opportunities of being outside the single market and the customs union. We are engaging with industry, including ensuring that our borders are ready by the end of the year, and we will continue to do so. I hope that my right hon. Friend can share my confidence in our ability to manage our borders both as the global pandemic continues and in relation to the EU. I am happy to say that our negotiators are working valiantly with their European counterparts to reach a deal on our future relationship, but whatever the outcome of the negotiations, we will be leaving the single market and customs union at the end of the year and plans are being made for that.

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP) [V]: I invite the Leader of the House to reflect on his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), and may I gently suggest that it was offhand, dismissive and wholly inadequate? Members across the House are experiencing significant problems in getting responses, be that to parliamentary questions or letters—particularly from the Treasury but I am waiting for a letter from the Health Secretary that was promised a month ago. We are aware that there is a pandemic happening, but Ian and Lesley McIntosh have been waiting nine and a half weeks for a reply to a letter that I sent about an urgent tax matter on 7 April. An airy assurance from the Leader of the House is not sufficient. We are aware there is a pandemic. We are aware that officials are stressed, but the House is experiencing a systemic problem in holding the Government to account, and we need a proper debate on it.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman simply did not listen to what I said—that is the problem with not listening and having a pre-prepared question. I have given really serious consideration to these issues and will continue to do so because I think they are of fundamental importance. The role of this House is to seek redress of grievance for our constituents, and Ministers have to respond to questions that are asked. That is what I said to the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) and to his hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard). I have continued and will continue to take up these matters up with other Ministers to ensure that proper responses are received. My office is looking very carefully at the level of responses to written parliamentary questions to ensure that Departments are doing well. I add one crucial caveat to that: I do have sympathy for the Department of Health and Social Care particularly, under these current circumstances, because the people drafting the answers are the people who are dealing with the pandemic, and I think that the House must have patience with that Department.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Can we have an urgent debate on changing from a 2-metre to a 1-metre social distancing rule, because that is the only way we will save hundreds of thousands of jobs in pubs and hospitality, tourism and hotels?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My right hon. Friend raises a crucial point. The Government are, of course, considering this with their scientific advisers, but we need to think back to our school days, because it is all about Pi R squared—if the radius is doubled, the area quadruples. That is the difference that is made, but it applies both to the numbers we can include in an area and the transmission of disease, and that is why the Government are considering these issues in both directions.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has published this morning its six-monthly report on Hong Kong, and for once I can tell the Leader of the House that it is a refreshingly robust piece of work in both its tone and content. Can we have a debate in Government time on our relationship with Hong Kong and China? It is something about which I wrote to the Prime Minister, along with 58 other Members across all parties in this House. We need to hear in detail, and with some urgency, exactly what the Government mean when they say that they will provide a “pathway to citizenship” for British national overseas passport holders.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising that crucial topic again, because we obviously have, as the Prime Minister said, a duty to those with British national (overseas) status. If China continues down the path it has gone down, undermining the principle of one country, two systems with its national security legislation, the Government will look to amend the arrangements for BNOs, to allow them to come to the UK and apply to work and study for extendable periods of 12 months. The Government are deeply concerned about China’s plans. This is very important. The Chinese Government need to remember that they signed the joint declaration, which Deng Xiaoping authorised in agreement with Margaret Thatcher, and it is expected that the Chinese will follow their international obligations.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): Last November, a horrific mass brawl broke out on Norwich Road in Ipswich. Last month, only one of the 11 people required to attend Suffolk magistrates court in connection with the incident bothered showing up. So far, one of the 10 has been arrested, and Suffolk constabulary is currently working with the other EU country in question to try to locate these individuals, because they are all foreign nationals. Will my right hon. Friend find time for the House to debate how we can ensure that such people are brought before our courts, even after the end of the transition period, and will he urge his colleagues in government to work with Suffolk constabulary to fulfil any European arrest warrants issued?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I share my hon. Friend’s concern. He raised the issue of law and order, which should be taken with the utmost seriousness by the Government and by society as a whole. That is part of the reason why the Government are seeking to recruit 20,000 more police officers. With regard to the specific case he mentions, it is shocking and outrageous that 10 out of 11 suspects

[Mr Rees-Mogg]

refused to attend court and fled the country. I will pass his concerns to the Home Secretary, who is always very robust on these matters and will, I am sure, follow up with great seriousness.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab): As other Members are talking about important anniversaries and dates, I would like to remind the House that today is the 33rd anniversary of black Members being elected to this House. I, for one, am proud to be part of the most diverse Parliament we have ever seen. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]

I was going to ask about the farcical parliamentary procedure, but something that the Leader of the House said irked me. He did not really respond to the question asked by the shadow Leader of the House, and I would like to associate myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard). They asked specifically whether there would be a statement from the Prime Minister on Black Lives Matter and asked for a debate. I would like to take it one step further and say that it is very important for us to have a full debate on this country's history with slavery and colonialism and the racism that has stemmed from it. No one is born racist. Rather, it is something that we learn. It is very important that this is in our education system. Some of the comments that I have heard give me the view that people do not really understand the mood of the country at the moment. We in this House far too often find ourselves removed from the public mood, so I think it is very important that we have this type of debate. I would like a straight answer from the Leader of the House: will he ask the Prime Minister to make a statement, and will he give us a debate in the House?

Mr Rees-Mogg: May I, as I noticed those on the Benches behind me did, join the hon. Lady in celebrating the 33rd anniversary of the election of the first black person to the Houses of Parliament and the desire for this Parliament to represent the nation as a whole, which is fundamental to the way our debates are conducted? She will know that the Prime Minister is here every week at Prime Minister's questions, and that regular interaction with the Prime Minister is a very important part of how the Government are held to account. She will understand that the difficulty for me in promising individual debates is the pressure of parliamentary time and the loss of time over the coronavirus period. We are behind with the legislative programme delivering on the commitments made to the electorate last December, but we have made time for both an Opposition half day and a Backbench half day, and therefore there are opportunities to get the debate she wants outside of Government time.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): May we have a debate, or at least a statement, specifically on incorporating black history into the national curriculum? I say that quite aside from recent events; the period when the former colonies gained their freedom and the people who took part in that struggle is now slipping from memory and into history. We do not want that collective memory to be lost. Just to add one other thing, the first non-white person to be elected to this

place was actually Shapurji Saklatvala, who was elected just after the first world war. I would like that to be on the record.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point. It is always important that we have as full an understanding of our history as possible. By understanding our history, we avoid making mistakes in the future, so I am always sympathetic to requests for debates on our history. The difficulty is the pressure of parliamentary time and the full legislative agenda that we have.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am the chair of the all-party group on Belize—[HON. MEMBERS: "Mr Speaker!"] Goodness me! That's it: I am finished—I'm dead. I am so apologetic. It is not your birthday as well, is it, Mr Deputy Speaker? [HON. MEMBERS: "Mr Speaker!"] Oh, that was yesterday. I had better get back on track, as we were told to keep our questions short.

I am the chair of the all-party group on Belize, and I once commanded the north of Belize for six months in the defence of Belize, so I have a lot of sympathy with Belize and like it a great deal. May we have a debate about how we can support smaller Commonwealth countries such as Belize after the implementation period? Belize in particular is very worried about its trading relationship with the United Kingdom, as are a lot of the others.

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the economic health of our Commonwealth allies is of key concern to this country. One of the great opportunities—one of the reasons why I have supported Brexit so enthusiastically—is that we have the ability to strengthen our economic ties with our friends throughout the Commonwealth, be it the giant that is India or the littler powerhouse of Belize.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): If any schoolchildren are watching our proceedings rather than being at school, I should point out to them that the Leader of the House's hand gesture when describing the radius of a circle earlier indicated, in fact, the circumference of a circle. I do not know what they teach at Eton College, but it was important to clear that up, just in case.

On a more serious point, I thank the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House for mentioning the case of my constituent Luke Symons, who is held captive by the Houthi rebel regime in Yemen. May we have a debate on Yemen? I know that Foreign Office questions are coming up before the end of the month, as the Leader of the House quite rightly said, but in a debate there is an opportunity to range more widely than at Foreign Office questions and we can cover a number of subjects. Will he give that some consideration?

Mr Rees-Mogg: For the sake of clarity, I was talking about the area of a circle, which is obviously encompassed within the circumference. I hope that is helpful to any schoolchildren—

Kevin Brennan: You said the radius.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I was talking about the circumference, which is $2\pi r$, and the area, which is πr^2 , as we all know.

Let me turn to the important issue of Mr Symons. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman, who knows the House's procedures extraordinarily well, that an Adjournment debate would be the suitable way to start, as it is a specific constituent matter. The whole House sympathises with what he is trying to do. It is important always to encourage the Foreign Office to do its best.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May we have a statement from the Home Secretary on the excellent idea from my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland), so far supported by 125 colleagues, of a desecration of war memorials Bill? Such a Bill would enable special circumstances and special penalties to be considered when memorials to those people of all races who saved the world from Hitlerism and Nazism are attacked. I hope it is common ground on both sides of the House that we want to honour those who died, including such people as the black airmen of the Tuskegee squadron, led by one of my personal second world war heroes, the great Benjamin Davis.

Mr Rees-Mogg: In our island story, we have stood up against tyranny in the 16th century, twice in the 18th century and twice in the 20th century, and that has led to a lot of lives being lost by brave warriors, and they are commemorated across the country. They are commemorated at the Cenotaph in a coming together of our national sentiment about people who gave their lives, they are celebrated in every village churchyard across this country, and they are commemorated abroad in the churchyards that are run by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The desecration of these sites is contemptible, and there is no Government, no Minister, no Member of this House who would think anything else. Therefore, the Government will undoubtedly consider earnestly any proposals that are made.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD) [V]: It would be very ill-mannered of me to miss this opportunity to thank the Leader of the House for granting me the right to vote by proxy; I am grateful, my constituents are grateful, thank you.

Tourism is crucial to the economy of the highlands. It employs many young people. Tourism has been clobbered by the pandemic. Does the Leader of the House agree that it would be appropriate to have a debate about how we can safely look after tourists for the next 12 months, and by "safely" I mean in a manner that will not spread the virus?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am very grateful for the hon. Gentleman's characteristically kind words and gentle approach to parliamentary proceedings. His question is very important. Tourism is the industry that is most affected by these closures, and the Government have taken huge steps for the economic revival of the country, with the furlough scheme, the schemes to help small businesses get access to loans from banks and the rate cancellations so that they have less cash outflow, but no doubt other things will need to be done to help people get the confidence to travel once again without risking the health of the nation.

Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): Following on from the previous question, will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate in the House on

supporting seasonal businesses as we move out of the covid-19 crisis? One in five jobs in Cornwall depend on tourism, but actually the figure is much more than that as we have a lot of musicians and actors, and people who work in sectors such as the music festival industry and outdoor theatres, who are also struggling with what they are calling "the three winters" of poor trade or no trade at all. It is incumbent on us as representatives to find time, if we can, to discuss how we can best support those businesses going forward.

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thank my hon. Friend for her question and know that the tourism and hospitality industries are exceptionally important to the economy of her constituency and indeed to her county. It is essential that we make every effort to try to restore the economy to full health, and as the economy opens up I hope that the seasonal economy in and around Cornwall will benefit, although I note her point about three winters, and it is particularly difficult. I would reiterate the points I have made about the huge sums of money the Government have provided to businesses struggling in the pandemic—more than £33 billion of loans and £10 billion of grants offered to small and medium-sized enterprises, and the abolition of business rates—but my hon. Friend makes a good point about musicians, actors and the festival industry beyond what one naturally thinks of as the tourism industry, and that is of course a matter of concern.

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP) [V]: Following our convivial meeting pre-covid-19, what progress has the Leader of the House made on re-establishing the Scottish Grand Committee?

Mr Rees-Mogg: We did manage to get the Scottish Select Committee up and running, after objections and filibustering from the Scottish National party at an earlier stage, but there are no immediate plans to re-establish the Scottish Grand Committee.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): May we have a debate on the production of personal protective equipment by volunteers? In my constituency, people like Aaron Shrive, Chris Lee and Thomas Barwick have been working through the night to produce much-needed equipment, but they have been stopped in their tracks by the costs of getting accreditation. I know Lord Deighton is working on pre-accreditation, but this is an urgent issue that we must solve, so may we please have a debate on it?

Mr Rees-Mogg: My hon. Friend is right to raise this issue. Finding enough PPE is an international challenge that many countries are facing, and I commend his constituents for their vital public-spirited efforts to manufacture equipment for careworkers. Such work is something in which the whole country should take pride.

In this national effort, I hope that we can make it as easy as possible for small producers to contribute to the PPE supply, just as the little boats assisted the Royal Navy in the evacuation of Dunkirk. Some 1.7 billion pieces of PPE have been delivered, but my hon. Friend is right to highlight the frustration when bureaucracy stops people doing what the country needs, and what everybody wants to see done. I shall therefore take up the matter within Government.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) [V]: Yesterday, I met in a safe, socially distanced manner with small hospitality traders in Heaton Chapel in my constituency, including the award-winning Heaton Hops and Feed. They are concerned that they will still be unable to trade within the guidance when the food and drink restrictions are lifted because of the lack of space available to them. Will the Leader of the House relay those concerns to the relevant Ministers, and can we have a statement from Ministers on how the Government will assist the small independent hospitality sector to continue when the measures are eased?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The concerns that the hon. Gentleman raises are well appreciated. It comes back to the issue that was raised with me earlier about the six-and-a-half-foot rule, which is based on the scientific advice, but the Government are keeping that rule under review.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): Many children in Buckinghamshire are due to take their 11-plus examinations in September, but given the obvious disruption to so many of their educations due to covid-19, our excellent grammar schools are looking to the Government for advice on how they may push them back to October or November. Can my right hon. Friend arrange for an urgent statement to give our grammar schools the advice and guidance that they need?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that crucial point. It is an unsettling time for children facing important exams, and I will pass on his concerns to the Education Secretary to see whether a full reply can be given to him in that regard. I remind him that Education questions are on Monday 22 June, but again, the subject may well be suitable for an Adjournment debate.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I regret that the Leader of the House did not announce the albeit unlikely Second Reading of my Employment (Dismissal and Re-employment) Bill, which would protect workers across the UK. Perhaps he would facilitate a debate on the protection of workers such as those at a hotel in Erskine in my constituency, which was bought over. The appropriate paperwork was filed with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, but the real-time information was sent one day after the arbitrary and retrospective cut-off. Some 73 employees have had continuous employment but no wages and no follow-up support from the Government.

Mr Rees-Mogg: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. It is very difficult when some bureaucratic accident leads to a perceived unfairness for a constituent. That is exactly why we are here: to seek redress of grievance. I assume that he is taking it up with the relevant authorities, and if my office can give any help in seeking a detailed answer I will certainly do what I can to facilitate him.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the return of the physical Parliament, as well as the measures to allow Members who cannot be present to contribute, and could he update the House on how many Bills are now progressing through Public Bill Committees, such as the Immigration Bill Committee, on which I am sitting and to which I shall return shortly?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I thank my hon. Friend for his commitment to a physical Parliament and for taking up his share of the burden by being on a Public Bill Committee. We have three Public Bill Committee going at the moment, and we will shortly have four. That means that the sausage machine of legislation is back in action. We in the Chamber essentially create the outer covering, but it is the Committees that push the meat inside before it comes back here to be finally tied up and sold in strings—or sent in strings, actually, to the other place. That process is now back in operation. The sausage machine is working and the sausages that we promised in our election manifesto will soon be barbecued.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House ask the Government to review the role of Babylon GP at Hand in the NHS, following the extraordinary breach of personal data security whereby subscribers were given access to private consultations of up to 50 other patients, especially because the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care is not only the leading cheerleader for Babylon but a patient? He, presumably like all the other 2.3 million patients, is entirely ignorant of the breach.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Breaches of data are always a serious matter, and we have the general data protection regulations in place, which are there for the Information Commissioner to take action if there are these breaches. This is, in essence, a legal, rather than a political, matter.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): We all appreciate the great work that our charities are doing, and last week's national Volunteers' Week gave us a great opportunity to show that appreciation to the likes of the Friendship Circle and the blind society in Whitefield in my constituency. I appreciate the funding that the Chancellor has provided to charities so far—and I have done my own bit by shaving my head for The Fed and raising vital funds for it in my constituency—but will the Leader of the House commit to a debate or a statement on the impact of covid-19 and on what further support is needed as we come out of lockdown?

Mr Rees-Mogg: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his noble efforts on behalf of charity. I am not going to follow his example, but people are doing wonderful things to raise money for charities across the country in these difficult, unprecedented circumstances. That is why the Government have provided a package of support, so that charities can help vulnerable people who need it most. We have spent up to £750 million of taxpayers' money for frontline charities, including hospices and those supporting domestic abuse victims. On top of that, charities can benefit from the coronavirus job retention scheme and the coronavirus business interruption loan schemes, but he shows that charities actually do best because of individual effort by committed people of good will, and he is leading by example.

Mr Speaker: In order to allow the safe exit of Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I am now going to suspend the House for three minutes.

12.1 pm

Sitting suspended.

Probation Services

12.4 pm

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the Government's plans for the future of probation services in England and Wales. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the commitment and hard work of staff in both the national probation service and the community rehabilitation companies who have jointly risen to the challenge of covid-19 in swiftly adapting to the new restrictions, and who have continued to deliver critical frontline services during this difficult time.

Beyond the immediate changes to our ways of working, however, covid-19 also presents an ongoing challenge to the implementation of our ambitious programme of probation reform. Probation services are currently split between the NPS, supervising high-risk offenders, and private sector CRCs, supervising low and medium-risk offenders. Those changes were made as a result of a 2010 manifesto commitment to end the situation where short-term offenders received no support after their release from custody. That commitment was the right one to make and, of course, it still stands. The current CRC contracts will come to an end in June next year, and last year my predecessor announced plans in this House to replace the current CRC contracts by moving to a unified model. This will see responsibility for the supervision of all offenders transfer to the NPS, while each NPS region will have a private sector partner—a probation delivery partner—responsible for providing unpaid work placements and behavioural change programmes.

Covid-19 does not change our ambition to cut crime, to keep the public safe and to tackle reoffending so that fewer people become victims of crime. Strong and reliable probation services are essential in realising that ambition. However, given the significant operational impact that covid-19 has already had and the uncertainty it brings for the future, it is right that we should reassess our plans. Protecting the public is my and the Government's absolute priority. For that reason, I believe it is essential that we continue to deliver changes to how offenders are supervised by June next year as planned. However, the disruption caused by covid-19 makes delivery of other parts of our plans considerably more complex, and looking ahead, it is vital for public and judicial confidence that we have the flexibility to deliver a national response to any future challenges that covid-19 presents. For these reasons, I am today setting out changes to streamline the reforms, giving priority to unifying the management of offenders under a single organisation by June next year as planned, while giving us greater flexibility to respond to an uncertain picture across the criminal justice system and beyond.

Under those revised plans, we will end the competitive process for probation delivery partners. The delivery of unpaid work and behavioural change programmes will instead be brought under the control of the NPS alongside offender supervision when the current CRC contracts end in June next year. This will give us a critical measure of control, resilience and flexibility with the services that we would not have had were they delivered under 12 contracts with a number of organisations. We can reassure the judiciary and the public that, whatever lies

ahead, offenders serving community sentences will be punished and make their reparation to society, and that programmes to address their behaviour will be delivered.

In making these changes, we cannot forget the role of specialist and voluntary organisations, which are vital in providing rehabilitation and resettlement support to more vulnerable individuals, such as women being released from prison or serving community sentences. They have also shown great innovation in continuing to deliver critical services during this challenging time, for which I commend them and express my deep gratitude. I am determined to preserve a role for these types of organisations, as well as the private sector, in the delivery of probation services. In the future system, we will, therefore, retain a dynamic framework for specialist rehabilitative services, but we must take account of the pressures that the market is currently facing. We will therefore prioritise the delivery of those specialist resettlement and rehabilitative services that are most needed in order to build a solid foundation that can be delivered within this timeframe and later built upon. We will be opening the dynamic framework for eligible organisations to register their interest in the coming days, and I encourage all organisations with an interest in providing rehabilitative services to register.

The unified model for probation delivery will ensure that we make the best use of the talents and skills in the public, private and voluntary sectors. For staff currently employed by the CRCs, the arrangements will mean that they will be in scope to transfer into the national probation service or to dynamic framework providers once CRC contracts expire in June 2021, depending on the work that they do. As we adopt a whole-system approach to criminal justice reform, it is vital that we continue to work together in partnership.

The Government remain fully committed to a mixed market in delivering custodial services, including our private sector partners, who run a high number of high-performing prisons in our estate. We are currently running a competition to operate the new prison that we are building at Wellingborough, which is due to end shortly, followed by a further competition to operate another new prison at Glen Parva. Our private sector prison partners will thus continue to play an important role in the custodial services sector, including as we deliver our ambitious programme of prison reforms, investing up to £2.5 billion to transform our prison estate and to create an additional 10,000 prison places.

I am confident that the changes I have set out represent the most sustainable approach for probation to deliver justice and to cut crime in the face of an unprecedented crisis. This approach will allow us to gain a critical measure of control over their recovery from covid-19 and to ensure that we are best placed to respond to any future disruption. I believe that these changes will also support our proposals to reform the sentencing framework, as I set out to the House last October. We have already made significant progress as a Government in delivering that agenda, including longer prison sentences for serious, violent and sexual offenders, but there is much more work to do if we are even better to protect the public and restore fuller confidence in the justice system. As part of this package of reforms, I want to deliver robust community penalties that offer an appropriate level of punishment while tackling the underlying drivers of offending.

[Robert Buckland]

These changes to the probation structures will help us to realise that ambition by giving us greater control over the levers necessary to strengthen community sentences. My officials will work closely with current providers, stakeholders and staff to ensure a smooth transition during this challenging time, ready for the new unified model to come into effect in June next year. I commend the statement to the House.

12.12 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. I, too, want to give my thanks to the National Probation Service and for the work of our CRCs, particularly at this challenging time. The Opposition welcome the U-turn that the Government are announcing. It is a U-turn that we have called for for many years. Anyone who looks at *Hansard* for debates in this Chamber and indeed looks at successive Select Committees will be aware that the Secretary of State has made an important announcement.

The playwright Alan Bennett wrote that the probation service is about the

“remedying of misfortune...which...has no more to do with profit than the remedying of disease”.

The probation service may seem abstract to many who have had lives of privilege. Unlike the health service, most of us will never come into direct contact with it, but every Member of Parliament knows that a properly run probation system is essential. At its best, it can be the national service of second chances: offenders rehabilitate, former criminals become good citizens and people are allowed to make up for their past mistakes.

Just as our national health service must be publicly run, so, too, must probation services, but the Conservative Government's part-privatisation of the probation service was the deepest privatisation that the criminal justice system has ever experienced. The reforms led by the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling)—it is such a shame he has not made it to the Chamber—transferred 70% of the work done by the public probation service to private and voluntary sector providers. Coming in 2015, in the middle of a decade of austerity, these were, in essence, cost-cutting measures. The Government were warned, but, as we have seen with so many of their attempts to cut corners through underinvestment, ultimately these measures have cost much more in the long run. Since the reforms, reoffending rates have climbed up to 32%. Members of the public and victims of crime across the country would not have been subject to the trauma they were put through had this privatisation not been introduced in the first place. One service provider, Working Links, was found to be wrongly classifying offenders as low risk to meet Government targets. Profit was put before public safety, ethics were compromised and lives were lost. It does not matter what language the Secretary of State uses in this House, he should apologise for that mistake made by his party.

The Government cannot say that they were not warned about the devastation that their part-privatisation of the probation service would cause. Trade unions, including Nao and Unison, have been campaigning for probation

services to be fully publicly run for seven years. The Labour party, too, has warned this House of the dangers of these reforms again and again. The chief inspector warned that the use of private firms to monitor offenders serving community sentences is irredeemably flawed. Lord Ramsbotham, the former chief inspector of prisons, even produced an interim report on how the Government can best return the services to public hands.

The Opposition welcome the Government's U-turn today, but the obvious question is why the Government tried to make profit out of probation in the first place, and why it took so long for them to realise their mistake. More than a year ago, the Justice Secretary's predecessor announced that the system was not working. He outlined that offender management would be renationalised, so why did the Government fail to renationalise the second pillar of the private probation service then? Why were unpaid work programmes and accredited programmes still put out for private tender? When the Government knew that their model was broken, why did they only go part of the way in fixing it?

As we move towards the return of the probation services into public hands, this Opposition will scrutinise every detail seriously. Probation services are too important to be messed around with again, so what is the timescale for reintegration of all probation services into the state? Can we be assured that this will not be used as an excuse for any more cuts? Will all the savings from not renewing private probation contracts go towards an improved, better staffed, trained and managed National Probation Service? Keeping expertise is vital. How will the Government ensure that private probation staff will be encouraged to continue their work? Local probation services must be able to draw on the voluntary sector and create connections with local employers, adult education colleges, health authority and jobcentres. How will the Government ensure that the National Probation Service is organised so that there are those strong local links?

Many prisoners are released without suitable accommodation, so the connection to local authorities is absolutely vital. Ex-offenders need to be helped to find a home from which they can start a better life. The Government want to frame these reforms as purely down to the coronavirus, but we all know the truth: the problems are much deeper than that. Let this momentous U-turn be the end of the assumption that the private sector always knows best. The Government outsourced school dinners and we ended up with obesity and turkey twizzlers. The Government outsourced the cleaning of hospital beds and we ended up with the highest rates of the superbug. The Government outsourced probation and we ended up with higher reoffending rates. The private sector is not the answer for everything.

However, probation is founded on the idea of second chances. It is in this spirit that we are open minded to the Government as they try to atone for their past sins. Will the Government commit to making these changes part of a broad, coherent strategy for investment in rehabilitation and greater safety for the public? The Government should not just try to put the clock back. They should work with the Opposition, work with our unions and work with our non-governmental organisations and other experts to build a better probation service than we have had before. This is how they can make up for their past mistakes.

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. He talked about turning the clock back, and in some of his remarks I felt as if the years had fallen away and we were back in the 1980s in some sort of ideological death struggle—public good, private bad. Let me reassure him that I take no ideological view as to what works. I will follow the evidence, and when the facts change I will change my mind. I make no apology for doing that today. He will of course acknowledge that the course was set last year, when the announcement was made by my predecessor and I, as the Minister of State, very much supported that decision. This is a necessary adjustment in the way in which we are going to deliver the new service.

I am not going to dwell for too long on the rhetoric; I will deal with the substance of what the right hon. Gentleman asked, and he asked a number of questions. *[Interruption.]* Well, rhetoric has its place, but we are talking here about the lives of people we are under a duty to protect and to support. I can tell the Opposition that I spent the best part of 30 years working with probation officers and with the probation service, reading hundreds of pre-sentence reports and respecting the professionalism of probation officers in court, both as counsel and as a part-time judge, so I do not need noises off to tell me what I know or do not know about the probation service, with the greatest of respect.

This is a service, as the right hon. Gentleman said, that is unsung. Its work is vitally important, but often goes unnoticed, unheard and unobserved. That is something that I am doing my very best to put right, and I can reassure him that those dedicated public servants who are working in the CRCs will have the opportunity to transfer, as I said in my statement, to the NPS, when the time comes in June next year. That is the timescale that we have kept to.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to talk about the need to focus on the reduction in reoffending. He will be glad to note that in last year's spending review I secured an extra £155 million for probation services—one of the biggest rises and cash injections that the service has seen in many a year—and it is my aim to keep annual expenditure well over £100 million for each of the next several years. That is our ambition, and it is matched with investment and with a bold agenda on embracing technology. This is a service that will not only be able to keep pace with change, but be very much in the vanguard of it.

I am proud to be at the helm of a Department that has such a set of dedicated public servants. This is the right decision at the right time. I make no apology for it whatsoever, and I look forward to a non-ideological future in which the right hon. Gentleman and I can genuinely work together in support of the probation service that he says he values.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am going to try to get everybody in. However, I need to finish the statement at 12.50 pm. That will require short answers and short questions.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Madam Deputy Speaker, I will do my level best, but I was the probation Minister between 2010 and 2012. One of the proudest moments of my time was attending a dinner where the Princess Royal presented the British Quality Foundation's gold award to the National Probation Service. The reforms

that subsequently were done to probation service would not have been done by me. They were visited upon the Department to a degree by some whizz kids—bright people—some of whom are now very senior in the Government.

There were two faults. The first was that the companies were too large and did not equate with the geographical area of the police force. I would have given them, had I done it, to the police and crime commissioners, saying that they were responsible for the input and the output. A very good point was made by the shadow Lord Chancellor about engaging local authorities in all the services we have to bring to an offender for there to be a decent chance of getting them rehabilitated.

Secondly, I say to my right hon. and learned Friend that, attractive as going back to the position of 2012 might seem to me, we were trying to find the opportunities to make sure that we can get the charities, the private sector and everyone else engaged in the great work of rehabilitation of offenders. We are in many ways back to square one, but there is a huge opportunity to be grasped.

Robert Buckland: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. I pay tribute to the work he did as a Minister in the Department. I can reassure him that this is not a return—a “back to the future”—but a new departure. He is right that I will focus relentlessly on the need to harness the smaller organisations; we are going to do that. At force level, we will do it by working with PCCs. I have already engaged with them on several occasions about the need for co-commissioning. Where we have PCCs working together in reducing reoffending boards, I see that as another vehicle for the commissioning of truly localised services. I hear my hon. Friend, and we are going to act on it.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): I am pleased that the Government are recognising what Labour Members and many others have known—that privatised probation is a flawed system that enables companies to put profit before people. I would like to thank my trade union, the Public and Commercial Services Union, as well as Napo and Unison, and their members, for highlighting the failures of privatisation. How will the Secretary of State improve morale in the profession, particularly after many experienced and highly skilled probation staff were lost as probation services were part-privatised?

Robert Buckland: I am sure that the hon. Lady would seek to qualify her remarks by paying tribute to the ethos that I have seen among the CRCs and their teams in terms of their dedication to the public service approach to probation that we all believe in. I do not want to ignore that for one moment, and I pay tribute to them for their work. With regard to morale, she will be encouraged to know that it is my aim, as a result of the increased funding we are providing, to reduce the workload of individual probation officers by about 20%, and to mix that workload so that they are able to manage it in an even more effective way. That will, I believe, help to increase morale and a sense of value. I hope very much that we can attract new talent, and indeed bring back talent that has left the service. That is something that I am very, very focused on.

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con): In Kent we have an excellent community rehabilitation company. I am pleased that the Lord Chancellor has confirmed that the staff

[Laura Trott]

can transfer across, but can he also reassure me that their expertise overall will not be lost, and that there will be no disruption to the offenders they manage?

Robert Buckland: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, who has long taken a keen interest in these issues. She is absolutely right to highlight the good work of that particular organisation—in particular, its specialised work with regard to stalking and the victims of stalking, which is very much on my mind. I want to harness the best of that in the future with the dynamic model, and dedicated staff would indeed be able to transfer across.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): One of the biggest causes of reoffending has been the failure to ensure properly effective through-the-gate services. We know that suitable housing, stable employment and strong family relationships all help to reduce the risks, so will the Government now ensure that the last few months of the custodial sentence are devoted to creating that foundation, and involve third sector organisations in that work?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. She will be glad to know that last year we invested a further £22 million in through-the-gate services in England and Wales. I have seen for myself how probation officers working in prison on offender management in custody really creates a cohesive approach where the prison officers, together with the probation service, are working weeks or even months in advance of release. That is very much part of our ethos. We are going to increase our emphasis on that and use tools such as release on temporary licence in order to make the transition as smooth and as safe as possible, not just for the offender but for the public.

Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): I very much welcome what my right hon. and learned Friend has said about the involvement of voluntary sector organisations in the delivery of rehabilitation. As he has recognised, private sector organisations have played a role in the criminal justice system and its central challenge of reducing reoffending over many years, under Conservative Governments and Labour Governments. Does he agree that it is important now not to denigrate the efforts of anyone who has worked hard to reduce reoffending, whatever the correct shape of probation services in future, just because they have a private sector employer?

Robert Buckland: I am very grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend, who served with distinction in the Department I now lead. He is right to make that point that this is not about blind ideology, but about people and the shared values we have across the sector. That is very much within the CRC. I will make this point, and he will remember this: it was this Government who finally created licence and supervision periods for people on short-term prison sentences. That was a singular omission from the system that the previous Government failed to address.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Two years ago, the Justice Select Committee, on which I served, produced its highly critical report, “Transforming

Rehabilitation” on the performance of the privatised probation service. One of the criticisms was how those contracts were measured on outputs, not outcomes. Will the Secretary of State confirm that sufficient funding will be available to tackle the issues of heavy caseload, poor IT systems and the need to work with specialist services and the voluntary sector to ensure that probation officers can deliver a decent service and help reduce reoffending?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who I know has a long interest in these issues, but I remind him of what I said a few moments ago about the £155 million uplift in this current financial year that we secured as part of the highest increase in the Ministry of Justice revenue budget in more than a decade. We will continue to match that in the years ahead with more investment, and he can be confident that that will translate not only into reduced workloads, but increased sophistication and development when it comes to the harnessing of new technologies and better ways of working. We have learned a lot from the current crisis about how we can do things even better.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): I regret to say that I am worried by the statement that my right hon. and learned Friend has made this morning, for the simple reason that I have seen probation services for my constituents improve over the past few years, with more people given the second chance that the shadow Secretary of State referred to. He has just praised the work of the Kent, Surrey and Sussex CRC, as he has done in the past from the Dispatch Box, so can he give me some reassurance that with this statement today he is not in danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, and I can give him that reassurance because, as he reminds us, we are talking not just about a service, but the people who deliver that service. Those dedicated public servants will be able to transfer across to the NPS, and I want to retain the ethos that they have and the specialisms that they bring, so that we can enhance the probation service and make it even better in the future.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): This has been a sorry episode, and it is a sobering reminder of what happens when we let ideology push ahead of the evidence in public policy making. That is something I hope those on the Government Benches will reflect on, but frankly it is something for all of us to reflect on. Secretary of State, you have a real opportunity as you build your unified model. There is so much talent in the NPS and those CRCs, so will you commit to getting staff around the table, finding the best of their experiences and building on them?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that he really should not be referring to the Secretary of State as “you”.

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who I know takes a keen interest in these issues. Perhaps I will emphasise the second part of his question. I thoroughly agree about the need to harness that experience and talent. That is what we are going to do. We will

work with the unions and all the representative bodies to make sure that as we emerge from June of next year, we will be in an even better position to reduce reoffending.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): Having been a non-executive director of HMPPS before my election to the House, I was privy to some of the challenges that have perhaps contributed to the decision today. With that perspective in mind, the timetable for reintegration seems tight, and I wonder whether my right hon. and learned Friend has considered further extending the CRC contracts, as is permitted, by six months, to enable that to happen smoothly. When that transition does happen, can we make sure that we keep the ethos of innovation, flexible staff and empowered staff so that we bring the very best back into the public sector?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He knows that I value the work that he did prior to his election to this House very greatly indeed. He is right to outline some of the options that were before me. I looked very carefully at that option among others. I could not see that bringing real value in time or space in order to make the necessary changes. The Government rightly committed to June or to the spring or summer of 2021 as the time by which we had to make these reforms. I thought that we needed simplicity and clarity, which is why I have elected to take this course.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement this morning—it is an important discussion area. Brixton prison sits in the neighbouring constituency to mine and I used to be the ward councillor for that prison. I will always remember the first time I visited and my conversation with the governor and his staff members. They said to me that short sentences do not work because the reoffending rates are so high. Will the Secretary of State consider the fact that to get those reoffending rates down, there needs to be a link with the local community? Will he look at ensuring that local links are formed with colleges, other education provision and local employers to make sure that we work to get those reoffenders back on track?

Robert Buckland: Like the hon. Lady, I have visited Brixton prison. I know the current governor well and I know a lot about the importance of having those establishments within a community. The hon. Lady makes a powerful point about the need to link community education facilities and structures that provide a support network for released prisoners or people on community orders. My ambition is to ensure that community sentences are so robust and effective that, when it comes to decision making by judges and magistrates, they will be the default choice as opposed to very short sentences that can frankly do more harm than good.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): I commend everyone at the Ministry of Justice and in our Prison and Probation Service for their hard work at this challenging time. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the debate about the creation of new, modern prison places should focus on the need to create better educational, training and rehabilitation outcomes?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend has put his finger on it, as usual. He is absolutely right to talk about the focus and purpose of the prison and probation environments. We must relentlessly think about the future: what will be the outcomes? How do we reduce offending? I always say that there are three things: a home, a job and a friend. If we can get those three right, we will do right by the community.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I am very pleased that the Secretary of State has had the good grace today to admit that the ideological experiment has failed. What can he say to residents in my constituency who feel that the regime that his Government brought in lacked accountability in places such as the Beverley Road spine in Hull, a large area where many ex-offenders lived? What accountability will be put in place by the Secretary of State's measures?

Robert Buckland: I know that the hon. Lady will be familiar with this: the structure will be regional, within the national framework of the national probation service. The accountability will then of course be through Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and ultimately me. Locally, it is important to get that link with police and crime commissioners—the “and crime” bit of commissioners should come into play. That is why I want to focus on more localised commissioning. I want to get a sense of responsiveness and more than that, get ahead of trends in local areas such as Hull. The hon. Lady makes a good point, which we understand very well.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): Education, health and social policies are key to supporting the work of the probation system. What does the Secretary of State make of the findings of the Thomas Commission on Justice in Wales? In particular, does he agree that the devolution of responsibility for the probation service would allow for better integration with Welsh health and education policies, thereby improving rehabilitation outcomes?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Gentleman makes a thought-provoking point and links the Thomas commission to it. Of course, the Welsh Government must respond to that, but we are ahead of the hon. Gentleman. As he knows, in Wales, the probation service was unified from the end of last year and is already supporting the people of Wales. The unified service, headed by Amy Rees, an outstanding civil servant, is delivering that integrated service that the hon. Gentleman so badly wants. We do not need further devolution or a separate jurisdiction.

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I would like to think that private enterprise has no greater friend than me on this side of the House, but I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's announcement because we should follow the facts, and there are a great many benefits in the statement in terms of unified leadership, clear accountability and mobilising resources.

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. These decisions are never made lightly or easily, and I can assure him that they are made on the evidence and not as a result of ideology, which, I am afraid, still seems to infect some of the comments of my friends in the Labour party.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I welcome this announcement, because probation privatisation has failed, and a cohesive outcomes-led rehabilitation strategy is key. The Secretary of State spoke about links with the police and crime commissioner, but how will he ensure that accountability is improved in probation services? Is there an enhanced role for devolved English authorities such as the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, where the Mayor has PCC powers?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He knows that there is already an agreement between my Department and Greater Manchester to devolve more powers and to work on a commissioning basis, to allow the authority to commission the sort of services that he and his residents want to see. I am extremely driven towards that model, and I am working with PCCs across the country to help deliver that flexibility.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): It is deeply worrying that young men from the black community are disproportionately likely to end up in the criminal justice system. Will the Secretary of State encourage the probation service to engage intensively with that cohort so that we can ensure that all offenders have the chance to move on from their past mistakes and make a success of their lives, whatever their background?

Robert Buckland: My right hon. Friend raises an important point. She will be glad to know that a lot of work is being done to improve the training of probation officers, particularly as regards the preparation of pre-sentence reports, which are vital documents for judges and magistrates to make decisions—in other words, to be more informed about black and minority ethnic issues, the services that might be available and the alternative ways of dealing with matters for members of that community. I would also make the point that, when it comes to the delivery of services, we are extremely privileged to have higher than average BAME representation among the probation workforce, which is a really good example to the rest of our community. However, it is about more than just getting people; it is about getting that ethos right and making sure people understand the alternatives that are available.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Probation services have without doubt suffered immensely because of deep Government cuts and the increasing fragmentation and privatisation of the service, as highlighted again and again by Napo, PCS, Unison and the Labour party, so I wholeheartedly welcome today's momentous Government U-turn. However, will the Secretary of State establish a strategy for the resettlement of offenders, to link all the aspects of probation together—from through-the-gate support, planning and assessment in prisons to more frequent contacts and relationship building with offenders?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Gentleman will be glad to know that that is precisely the approach I take. I have a strategy—it is called reducing reoffending. He will know that that means bringing together all agencies—not just criminal justice. Frankly, they have more of a role to play, whether that is public health, education—which has been mentioned—housing or other vital local services. We cannot do this on our own. The criminal justice system is often the repository of failure caused by other

factors. Unless everybody puts their shoulder to the wheel and realises that all parts of public service have a criminal justice dimension, we will not achieve what we need to achieve for our communities.

Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's statement. Can he confirm that a key element of the future probation service system will be focusing on reducing the £18 billion cost to the taxpayer of reoffending?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is right to highlight the stark figure for the financial cost of reoffending—of course, it does not deal with the emotional, physical and mental cost of reoffending. Reducing reoffending means fewer victims of crime. We have succeeded in reducing it in certain parts of the criminal justice system, but I am afraid there is still a lot of work to do, particularly with offenders on short-term sentences. The focus will be very much on reducing reoffending levels among that cohort in the years ahead.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I want to stand up for the Lord Chancellor, who is being attacked from both sides of his own Benches today. Either it should not have happened at all, or the renationalisation should not be happening now. Why have we waited until now, when most of the service was taken back in-house last year? Does he want to take credit for that? As he is known—perhaps more than some of his colleagues—for his candour and thoughtfulness, will he admit that this privatisation has been an unmitigated disaster from start to finish?

Robert Buckland: As ever, the hon. Gentleman is the champion of the leading question, and I am not going to fall for that old trick. As he knows, I do not take an ideological view of this. There are aspects of the last few years that have brought much new learning and experience that we will incorporate into the National Probation Service. I am talking about the people who have delivered for the CRCs on the ground. There are plenty of examples of local best practice that we want to hold on to and propagate and that we will expand through the dynamic framework.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his statement. One of the frustrations I see in magistrates courts in Cheshire and Merseyside, particularly for victims, is when probation staff cannot conduct stand-down reports on the day, which means that justice is delayed. How will the steps he has announced today improve efficiencies in magistrates courts?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend asks a very pertinent question. There is a tension, as I think he would acknowledge, between the need for swift justice and the value that properly crafted and prepared pre-sentence reports can play in the sentencing process. Where the ground has been prepared before the hearing and the options are very clear to the court, there should be no obstacle to the passing of a swift sentence. I will pray in aid the value of pre-sentence reports. I want to see more of them used, but with the eye to case management that delivers the swift justice that he and his residents want to see.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): Short prison sentences do not work, especially for women, because the whole life of that woman and her dependants falls down. What can the Ministry of Justice do to instil confidence in the whole system that alternatives to prisons, such as women's centres, work?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady will be glad to know that, as part of the female offender strategy that we agreed in 2018, we are making investments in organisations that work in that specialist sector, and we have also announced that we will fund a new centre in Wales, which will be delivered by the end of next year. It is a smaller unit that will cater for more localised sentencing and will support women effectively, albeit in a secure setting, but in a way that aids rehabilitation rather than the cycle of reoffending.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is correct for any Government to try different mechanisms for delivering the best outcomes for service users and for the taxpayer? Leaving the word "ideology" to one side, is it not right to follow in the footsteps of former Prime Minister Tony Blair, who introduced independent sector providers to the NHS?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. We need very short questions without long preambles, and a short answer.

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend, who speaks for the residents of Dudley so powerfully, is right to remind us about those ideological experiments indulged in by a Government of which the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) was a member not so many years ago. It pays us all to focus on the evidence, rather than the ideology.

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): I want to thank the Government for finally doing the right thing and ending privatisation in the probation service. Let us hope that this is a catalyst for bringing detention centres, prisons and other criminal justice services back within public hands. Most of all, I would like to thank the probation unions Napo and Unison, and their members, who have waged a hard-fought seven-year campaign against this wasteful and ideological experiment. Will the Secretary of State join me in paying tribute to those unions and encourage all workers across the UK to join a trade union?

Robert Buckland: I am always happy to encourage free association of workers. It is part of who we are as a civilised society. The hon. Lady represents the great city of Durham, so many of her constituents will be public sector workers in Durham prison and Frankland high-security prison, which is not too far away. We should value that ethos of public service, wherever it comes from, and I am sure she will join me in paying tribute to those CRC members of staff—we hope they will make the transfer to the NPS—who have been serving the public diligently, even though they have been in the so-called "bad" private sector.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): The Secretary of State may not wish to talk about ideology, but will he reflect on morality? Does he think it is morally right to make private profit out of incarceration and rehabilitation, because I do not?

Robert Buckland: I think it is morally right to harness whatever we can to help us deal with not only offenders, but the causes of offending. That will often be Government-led and state-led, and that is right—we have a duty under law to do that—but there will be plenty of occasions when the genius and talent that might be in the voluntary and private sectors should also be harnessed. So I do not accept this suggestion that somehow there is a moral difference between the mixed approach that I want to take and one that rigidly sticks to an ideological position that I do not really think the hon. Gentleman believes in.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Places such as Eden House in Bristol provided an important alternative to custody for vulnerable female offenders, but the services were slashed under privatisation. Will the Minister commit, based on the work of my predecessor in this place, Baroness Corston, to making sure that services such as Eden House are returned to full capacity, so that we can fulfil that agenda of trying to keep women out of prison and providing a safe alternative for them?

Robert Buckland: I pay tribute to the work of Baroness Corston, which has informed policy over many years. I know that she would welcome the female offenders strategy, which enjoyed cross-party support in 2018. We are now putting that into implementation. I have announced a centre in Wales, which will really help to provide that small-scale residential but secure environment. I am keen to try to replicate that wherever possible. I have to work within a budget, but, as I have announced, it has seen an overall increase, and I want to make sure we can drive that forward in a way that I think the hon. Lady will applaud.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): The Secretary of State has acknowledged today, as he did last year, that the employee-owned CRC in Kent is an example of good practice and innovation, and it has rightly received national and international recognition. Given the ambitious timetable that he has set out, will he confirm that he remains committed to a mixed market, so that the likes of our employee-owned CRC can continue to make a positive contribution to delivering services that matter in terms of keeping my constituents safer and helping to change lives?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has consistently raised these issues in the past year to 18 months. She is right to hold me to account on that need to maintain a mixed economy approach, to harness the excellent work of the employees that she talks about in the new structure and to make sure that that initiative—that sense of personal ownership of the programmes—is not lost as we make that transition. I am grateful to her.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): In order to allow the safe exit of hon. Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival of those participating in the next, I am suspending the House for three minutes.

Virtual participation in proceedings concluded (Order, 4 June).

12.53 pm

Sitting suspended.

Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill [Lords]

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 1

PAYMENT OF A LIVING WAGE

‘(1) Within 3 months of this section coming into force, the Secretary of State must direct the Organising Committee to prepare a strategy for ensuring that a living wage, as a minimum, is paid to all staff employed—

- (a) directly by the Organising Committee, and
- (b) by organisations awarded contracts to deliver the Games.

(2) In preparing the strategy under subsection (1), the Organising Committee must consult representatives of businesses and trade unions in the Birmingham area.

(3) For the purposes of this section, the hourly living wage for the year 2020 is—

- (a) £9.30 outside of London, and
- (b) £10.75 inside London.

(4) For the purposes of this section, the living wage for each year after 2020 shall be the amounts determined by the Living Wage Foundation.

(5) The Secretary of State must direct the Organising Committee to seek accreditation from the Living Wage Foundation once it is eligible to do so.’—(*Alison McGovern.*)

This new clause would secure the payment of a living wage to staff involved in delivering the Games and would direct the Organising Committee to seek accreditation from the Living Wage Foundation.

Brought up, and read the First time.

12.56 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Before I say a few words on the importance of the living wage, I just want to say that the games are a massive opportunity for Birmingham, one of the most important cities in our country, and the west midlands. I pay tribute to all those, including my predecessor in this role, who have seen the Bill through its stages so far. Glasgow, Manchester, Edinburgh, London and Cardiff have all hosted the games at various points in their almost 100-year history. Birmingham more than fully deserves this opportunity, particularly given the circumstances under which the city has taken on hosting the games. I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to everybody in the west midlands who I know is working very hard to get ready for the games. It is a challenge made all the more difficult by the current virus outbreak, but I know they are working with complete dedication to make sure that, as much as possible, Birmingham will be ready for the games.

In a way, the situation we are in makes 2022 all the more important as a date to look forward to. I know that sport is only relatively important, whatever people from my native Merseyside might think, in comparison to the challenges we face as a country, but I know that many people will be looking forward to the Commonwealth games as a moment that near enough represents a return to the great sporting culture of our country. In many ways, the Bill is made more important by the current coronavirus context.

This week, we think about our diversity as a country. It is poignant to end this week in Parliament with a Bill that will enable one of our country’s most diverse cities to host an esteemed sporting event which, as well as competition, has at its heart a celebration of that diversity. We will celebrate the games bringing together 71 teams from around the world, and it will feature 24 disciplines from across 19 different sports. Three new sports will be introduced—women’s cricket, beach volleyball and para-table tennis—and I am sure the Minister will join me in celebrating that this Commonwealth games has the potential for more female medals than male medals, and will also host a fully integrated para-sport competition. So sport can be—I stress can be, not necessarily is—an important vehicle for diversity.

1 pm

With those words of introduction said, let me turn to new clause 1. This new clause is about the living wage, and I am tempted to spend a long time debating low pay in the United Kingdom, the labour market and the importance of a real living wage for people in this country, but I think that might tempt you to intervene, Madam Deputy Speaker, given the scope of the Bill. However, I just want to point out a couple of important facts and small matters of history that have led us to table this amendment.

As everybody in the House will be aware, the national minimum wage was established in 1998, and it brought about the Low Pay Commission, which set the legal minimum wage for the first time in our country and did a huge amount to protect workers from the scourge of low pay. Unfortunately, however, the problem of low pay in this country is a light sleeper; it always re-emerges. That is why the Low Pay Commission’s work is very important, and the campaign for the living wage was established to try to improve wages for people in this country.

Meanwhile, a previous Chancellor decided to rebrand the national minimum wage as a living wage. However, the national minimum wage that we now refer to, which is set by the Government, is not the same as the real living wage, and the difference is how they are set. The real living wage, which is accredited by the Living Wage Foundation, is a rate that refers to the real costs that people pay—the real challenges that people have to face in paying their rent and for food and for all the things they need in society. The difference is not nothing. The current national living wage—the so-called living wage, as we might refer to it—is £8.72, while the real living wage for the UK is £9.30. That is a big difference for those who are working and who are struggling to put food on the table, as unfortunately many people are at the moment. It is a major difference.

Whether rebranding the national minimum wage undermined the fight against poor pay in this country is a discussion that is perhaps beyond our debate, but the point remains that many of us rightly aspire to a real living wage, and the Government and all their associated arms, including the organising committee of the Commonwealth games, should use their power to raise people’s wages. Sporting events, valuable as they are in themselves—valuable as the happiness that sport brings about is in and of itself—also have an important economic power. We know that for many regional economies across the United Kingdom, sporting events play an important part. Sport not only brings fame around the

world that drives the visitor economy, but also enables a lot of people to take up roles and create jobs that otherwise would not be there. So it is highly important that we take every possible opportunity to use sport to have a positive influence on the labour market.

As I have said, low pay is a light sleeper in the United Kingdom. It is an ongoing battle to make sure that low pay in business is not perpetuated by people who are prepared to undercut each other and make workers pay the price for their business practices. That is why sport's positive role in improving wages is so crucial. The value must be spread as widely as possible; it must not just be held by those who host major sporting events and those who are already involved, but must also reach every single person who is involved in creating these games. We want that sense of influence over the labour market, using this fantastic sporting event, which will raise the ambitions and aspirations of so many.

That leads into my final point. I will not tempt your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker, by going into the many arguments in favour of the living wage that we wish we could rehearse, but we do know that there are short-term gains for the individuals concerned when their wages are raised and that there are long-term productivity gains, too. That is because people who are better paid can afford to retrain, and they can use their time in a way that helps them to get more out of the labour market over the long term.

The last time that I was aware of it, the Treasury had significant ambitions for productivity improvements in our country. I simply say to the Minister that if the Treasury wants to improve productivity in the UK, it needs to think first and foremost about those at the bottom end of the labour market, who are earning the least. It should ask itself the question, in the context of the Commonwealth games: if we raised our sights and ambitions for people's wages, would they not have a bit more time to engage in training and development and give themselves a better chance of earning more in future, and more broadly, would it not do the right thing for our country and improve our labour market and economy? It might seem like a big ambition for the Commonwealth Games to have such a positive impact on our labour market, but I think that in sport and in everything else, ambition is nothing to be sorry about.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I will speak in favour of new clause 1 in slightly blunter terms than my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern). The message to the Minister is pretty simple: this is his last chance to tell the House that he shares our ambition that the Commonwealth games organising committee will be accredited as a real living wage employer. He has hummed and hawed about this throughout the passage of this Bill and during his time as a Minister. Today is decision time, and we are looking for a clear commitment from him that the organising committee will be accredited as a real living wage employer.

The Commonwealth games, as my hon. Friend said, is an extraordinary opportunity for our city at an extraordinary time. It will be the greatest Commonwealth games that we have ever seen. I join others in putting on record our profound thanks not only to the chair, John Crabtree, and Mr Ian Reid and the team, but to Ian Ward and Yvonne Davies and the teams at Birmingham and

Sandwell councils, as well as the team at West Midlands Combined Authority, for doing the impossible—bringing forward these games in four and a half years, against a timetable of normally seven years, which is what it normally takes to put a Commonwealth games in place. They stepped up when Durban stepped out, and that is why we will be the host—because people were prepared to have that ambition for the festival that my hon. Friend spoke of.

Opposition Members know that we will be judged not just by the medals that we win, but by the lives that we change. This great festival of Commonwealth sport is also for us a great festival of civic spirit. It is a chance for us to reanimate the spirit of one of the great founders of our city, the most extraordinary civic entrepreneur of the 19th century, Mr George Dawson. He was the author of the civic gospel and he inspired six Lord Mayors, including someone called Joseph Chamberlain. He was one of the reasons why we became known as the best governed city in the world, but one aspect of his genius was that he knew that culture, like sport, should be an entitlement for all, not just a privilege for some. But that civic spirit that we want to celebrate with great pride demands that the Commonwealth games organising committee is accredited as a real living wage employer.

Why is this important? Because 571,000 people across our region are paid less than they actually need to live on each week, including, I might say, many of the carers we have been clapping for every Thursday night. Let me tell the Minister the real-world consequences of living in a place where about one in five people are not paid enough to live on. It means that, in constituencies such as mine, more than half of children grow up in poverty. Fifty-three per cent of the children in my constituency live a life of poverty. That means that during the summer holidays, the food banks run out of food—literally. In the second city of the fifth or sixth richest country on earth, food banks are running out of food because people are not paid enough to live on. I challenge the Minister to stand, as I have done, in a food bank in Birmingham and watch the little arms of a nine-year-old boy strain as he picks up the food bags to help his mum carry them home. I ask the Minister to tell me that that experience is not going to scar that child for life, and tell me how many thousands of children in our city, Britain's second city, are in exactly that position, because so few people are paid enough to live on.

Across our region, only one in 1,000 businesses are accredited as real living wage employers. We need all of them to be accredited, and if we are to achieve that, we need to set an example and that example—the best example available—is the Commonwealth games. That is why we need the organising committee to accredit as a real living wage employer.

The time has come in this debate for a bit of honesty. We know that officials from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport have said to the organising committee, "Please don't accredit as a living wage organisation, because it undermines the case that the Government's so-called living wage is not enough to live on." Well, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South brilliantly rehearsed, the so-called living wage that this Government introduced is not a living wage; it is a living lie. It is £8.72 an hour, which is not enough to live on. What people need per hour to live on is not £8.72, but £9.30. I know that that 58p per hour

[Liam Byrne]

does not sound a lot to many people in this Chamber, but over the course of a 40-hour working week, that is worth £23 a week. That £23 extra income a week makes a difference when it comes to taking decisions on heating and eating. That £23 a week extra in the pocket of my constituents lifts children out of poverty; it actually allows people to live. That is why this debate is so important.

We have offered this new clause to the Minister. I am full of hope that he will stand up and cut the argument away from me, by saying that he agrees with it and that the organising committee must now accredit as a real living wage employer. Let me warn him that, if he does not, over the next year, as he knows, I will be mounting something of a political campaign across the west midlands. If this Government refuse to take on board the new clause, I will hang that decision around every Conservative running for office next year in the west midlands from the Mayor down. This is an opportunity for the Government to do the right thing—the right thing against the judgment of history, the right thing for the people of the west midlands and the right thing for those who live their lives in poverty today.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): May I say how pleasing it is to hear us debating this Bill yet again, as we did in Committee when I was the shadow Sports Minister? I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) for doing such a wonderful job of promoting sport, particularly women's sport, through her Twitter feed. One of the exciting things about the Commonwealth games is that women's sport will be up in lights. For the first time in the Commonwealth games, we will have women's cricket, which will provide a fantastic backdrop and a great example for the many girls who live not just in the midlands, but across the UK, as it will enable them to think of themselves as potential first XI players for the women's cricket team and even to play internationally.

Following my visit to Birmingham, I want to put on record my thanks not just to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), who has already spoken today, but to the team at Birmingham City Council, who are the best example of municipal pride, putting on a wonderful show for visiting Members of Parliament. We saw all the exciting preparations going on around the stadium and the swimming pool—that was particularly exciting for me as chair of the all-party group on swimming—which will be finished in Sandwell in time for the 2022 Commonwealth games.

As the Bill has made its passage through the House, this has been a really important time to debate principles in sport: not just ticket touting and how ticketing will be done properly for the Commonwealth games, which I am sure the Minister will come to, but gambling issues and the promotion of alcohol, where the games can promote best practice in stopping some of those rather negative images seen throughout the sporting world.

1.15 pm

It is terrific that the new clause has been tabled, giving us a chance yet again to put on record Labour's commitment to a living wage that would be another pound more—so instead of £8.72, which is the minimum wage, it would be up to £9.30 an hour. That could have a

considerable impact on the construction sector in Birmingham in the next two years. We are not necessarily talking about the top-paid engineers or those coming in as consultants; we are talking about local people and the impact that an accreditation path towards the living wage would have in the region on small businesses and on the many ethnic minority communities who run those small businesses, with a real boost for the local economy in general while our economy is going through a really tough time. We know from reading the Bank of England's reports that our recovery and resurgence from coronavirus is likely to be compromised, which is all the more reason to give the region that boost during the construction phase.

I also want to put on record the work being done by the local trade union movement in Birmingham to press for this change. As I said, it is not just for the public sector supply chain, but in particular for the construction industry and the services that come into that industry in the next two years. I had a visit with my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill, who I am sure will make an excellent, important figure in the coming 12 months as he calls for the living wage. I have seen from his social media the moving images of food banks in his constituency and the importance of feeding the constituents whom he serves. A fitting aim would be that, when we open the Commonwealth games in 2022, no more people will be using food banks. When one looks at colleagues' Facebook pages, one does not want to see images of food banks; one wants to see people being paid properly so that they can afford food.

From the testimony through local boroughs of carers across the country whose employers have been on an accreditation route to the living wage, we know that makes a huge impact—it is the difference between a worker working one job or having to work three. That also has an impact on families. We want to move towards the kind of society where a carer or a construction worker can, instead of working three jobs, work one job and get paid properly for it, giving them time to look after their family.

I congratulate the Commonwealth team up in Birmingham as well as the excellent new shadow Minister for Sport—it is great to have another woman in that role. I wish my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill all the very best in the coming 12 months. What a wonderful opportunity these games are, if done properly, for the midlands.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Nigel Huddleston): I thank the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) for tabling the new clause and congratulate her and the hon. Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) on their appointments to the shadow ministerial team. I look forward to working with them in the run-up to the games and on many other issues. I also thank them for the constructive way in which we have already discussed many issues, which has proven that sport can indeed be a great unifier. Long may that continue.

Members of the House may know that, as an arm's-length body of Government, the Birmingham 2022 organising committee has its pay scales set in line with civil service pay rates. All direct employees of the organising committee are paid above the level of the Living Wage Foundation's rates. While these rates do not apply to the

organising committee's contractors, I am confident in the steps being taken across the partnership to ensure that an excellent example is being set, and will be set, on fair pay. Of course, all employers must pay at least the national living wage, which has recently risen to £8.72 for the over-25s, and the Government have set an ambition for that to rise to £10.50 by 2025, should economic conditions allow.

Let us not forget, as the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) seems to have done, that under Labour in 2010 the minimum wage was £5.93, compared with £8.72 now. The tax-free allowance was £6,475 under Labour; it is now £12,500. There is a party and a Government that have taken quite a lot of action on raising the standards and wages of the lowest paid in society, and it is the Conservatives. That is a record of which I am proud. Much as the hon. Member may wish to talk about the efforts that he would like to make to raise the living standards of the lowest paid, perhaps he would like to take action. The reality is that, in government, it is the Conservatives that have taken more action than his Government did.

Liam Byrne: I am proposing some action that the Minister can take this afternoon. He could tell us whether he is confident, as he just said a moment ago—I think “confident” was the word he used—that contractors across the supply chain will be paid more than £9.30 an hour. Will he just tell the House whether he hopes that the Commonwealth Games organising committee can accredit as a real living wage employer? A simple yes or no will be fine.

Nigel Huddleston: I expect—in fact, the Government require—all employers to pay at least the national living wage. That is Government policy. I respect the right hon. Gentleman's goals and ambitions, but I wish he would stick to the reality of what actually happens in government, rather than playing politics in terms of conversations and ambitions.

In the aftermath of covid-19, the games will be more important than ever in supporting the economic, cultural and social renewal of the west midlands. There will be more than £300 million in procurement contracts for local businesses, support for thousands of jobs and an integrated trade, tourism and investment programme, which will help to ensure that the games are at the heart of recovery efforts across the region.

Alison McGovern: I really must draw the Minister back. This is not a matter of party politicking; this is about whether we have food banks or not. Given what he has said, could he just answer the question about the actual real living wage that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill just asked him? Does he believe that the organising committee will be able to accredit to the Living Wage Foundation and meet its standards or not?

Nigel Huddleston: As I said, the Government's policy is already for a national living wage. That is Government policy. I understand the ambition and intent of the Opposition. It is the same as the Government's: to raise the living standards of the lowest paid in society, and that is what this Government are delivering on, instead of just talking about it.

In 2020 alone, £145 million-worth of contracts will be available, with the organising committee continuing

to promote these in recent weeks through webinars involving the local chambers of commerce. The trade, tourism and investment programme will showcase the best we have to offer a global audience and strengthen our economic ties with our friends right across the Commonwealth. It will be supported by £21 million of Government funding, ensuring that we can take advantage of the economic opportunities created by the games to deliver on the ambition that Opposition Members have just talked about. The Mayor of the West Midlands, the fantastic Andy Street, also announced just a few weeks ago that the West Midlands Combined Authority had launched a new Commonwealth jobs and skills academy to improve regional skills and employment opportunities through the games. This will be underpinned by a further £1 million of public money.

Liam Byrne: Will the Minister give way?

Nigel Huddleston: I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman one final time.

Liam Byrne: I am grateful, but if the Minister refuses to answer the substance of the argument, I will keep seeking to intervene. While he is on the subject of not playing politics and celebrating the role of the Mayor, will he confirm to the House whether the Mayor of the West Midlands has written to him to ask him to ensure that the organising committee accredits as a real living wage employer? Has the Mayor written that letter—yes or no?

Nigel Huddleston: I have no reason to respond to the right hon. Gentleman's comments. I have a regular and very constructive dialogue with the Mayor of the West Midlands, who is doing everything he can to ensure that the games are highly successful. He has been absolutely pivotal in the success achieved to date, and will continue to do that for as long as he is in office—hopefully for a much longer period of time.

Let us not forget that the Birmingham 2022 games will be the first Commonwealth games with a social values charter. Accordingly, the organising committee has ensured that its procurement processes place added value on promoting those values. Added weight is being given to those companies that prioritise local employment opportunities and skills development. Alongside that, work continues to ensure that local organisations and voluntary, community and social enterprises can benefit from the opportunities of the games.

The best way to improve the economy and pay in the west midlands is to invest in skills and support business growth, which is exactly what the Commonwealth games programme will do. I hope that with those assurances, and taking into account the significant economic uplift that the games will generate for the local and regional economy, the hon. Member for Wirral South sees fit to withdraw her new clause.

Alison McGovern: Having listened to the case made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), I simply do not know why the Minister would not get to his feet and just say yes. This is not about some political to and fro; it is about the important distinction between what has been sold to people as a living wage and what is in fact a wage that is calculated on the basis of people being able to live on

[Alison McGovern]

it. That is the difference; that is what we are arguing about. It is a simple choice: food banks or not. I think the answer is not.

The social values charter that the Minister mentions is welcome, if woolly. It is a good ambition, but it does not really commit the organising committee—it certainly does not commit them to enough, and it does not commit them to the specifics. People will judge the games by not only how successful they appear but the reality of their lives when they have been able to participate in them. As I withdraw the clause, with your leave, Madam Deputy Speaker, I say simply that this will not end here. We will not stop going on about this, because the money in people's pockets is of the most profound importance. Until the Minister is able to make that commitment, we will go on, but I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 2

LOCAL COMMONWEALTH GAMES LEVY

‘(1) The Secretary of State must make regulations to provide the powers necessary for the relevant local authorities to levy charges on hotel occupancy and short-term rentals in their respective areas for the duration of the Birmingham Commonwealth Games in the United Kingdom.

(2) The regulations must define “relevant local authorities” to include the local authorities for each Games location.’—(*Alison McGovern.*)

This new clause would provide for money to be raised during the Games by the relevant local authorities charging a levy on hotel occupancy and short-term rentals.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Alison McGovern: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I am tempted to engage the House in a long discussion about local government finance in relation to new clause 2; however, I will try not to go on and on. The hotel levy proposed in new clause 2 has been previously proposed by Members of the House of Lords—Lord Rooker of Perry Barr and Lord Hunt of Kings Heath—and is supported by not only Birmingham City Council but, to my knowledge, a number of local authorities that have strong experience of hosting large cultural and sporting events.

Without going into too much detail about the terrible impact that austerity policies have had on local government over the past 10 years—I hope that most Members are more than well aware of that—the fact is that we in this country now have a national challenge to figure out how we can properly fund local government. Local authorities are struggling through the coronavirus crisis, having been told by the Government to do whatever it takes to fight the virus, and now the Government are falling short of their commitment to fund local authorities to do whatever it takes. That is the background and the backdrop to the situation in which we find ourselves.

Catherine West: Does my hon. Friend agree that, given that coronavirus is currently so job-destroying, the Government should look at this particular measure urgently?

1.30 pm

Alison McGovern: My hon. Friend pre-empts what I am about to say. She is absolutely right, and of course as an experienced leader in local government herself, she would know more than anybody that the challenge in funding for local government has been exacerbated over the past 10 years.

We need to focus on means by which we can enable local authorities to do what they do best, which we are seeing with the work of Birmingham, Sandwell and all the boroughs across the west midlands. They know their areas best and they are able to create amazing events and opportunities that not only drive forward a city's and a region's economy but are a game changer in the status of a place whereby people can experience, perhaps for the first time, or the first time in a long time, what that place is like. That has incredible knock-on positives for that place.

We therefore need to concern ourselves, as a House, with opportunities to enable funding for these events. The Commonwealth games is a massive opportunity to pilot an idea that has huge support from various city leaders right across the country. The idea of applying a small levy to hotels has been discussed and investigated for quite some time now. I encourage the Minister to look seriously at this option, given the possibilities that it could create.

There are a couple of reasons why I suggest that the Minister take this seriously. The visitor economy is a growing area in our country. Until the recent coronavirus crisis, I am not sure that that was widely understood or accepted, but given the impact that the measures needed to control the virus are having on the economy, I do not think anybody would doubt it now. As a country, we rely hugely on the tourism and visitor economy, but that part of our economy must be sustainable. It takes considerable investment to get the right facilities and the right infrastructure, and to make sure that people's experience of visiting a place is good. We need to consistently offer people a really enjoyable place to visit so that the reputation of an area grows and grows over time. That is where events like the Commonwealth games come in. They are showcase opportunities. They are a reason to visit for many thousands of people who will be excited to go to Birmingham and Sandwell. Therefore, in order to make these places sustainable, they need sources of income. That is just an economic fact of life.

With the undoubtedly positive impact of the Commonwealth games on the economy of the west midlands, we need to be sure that it is worth it to Birmingham and the wider west midlands to be hosting these games. There are measures in the Bill that require reporting by the organising committee on the impacts of the games, but we also need to be clear about how we measure the economic impact.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I hope the Minister is going to accept this suggestion, but if he does not it would be helpful if he at least offered to discuss it with the Chancellor, because surely our tourism and hospitality industry is searching for new ideas to stimulate it, and the Chancellor would welcome a chance to look at these proposals.

Alison McGovern: I thank my hon. Friend. I trust that the Minister was listening carefully and will respond to that request. In my experience, Members of Parliament who go to the Chancellor or the Treasury with requests for funding get one kind of response, and Members of Parliament who go with ideas on how to raise funds get a different kind of response, so I can only be encouraging of my hon. Friend's suggestion. I hope the Minister will beat a path to the Treasury door, and might take with him some colleagues—perhaps my hon. Friend and some from the other place, where there are experienced leaders of local authorities who would help him to make the case. I think that would be an excellent thing to do.

I say this in all seriousness: I have a strong suspicion that people in the world of economics and finance have slightly poooh-pooohed the impact of tourism and the visitor economy on the UK and the role it plays. We talk about the service sector in these broad, sweeping terms without ever really breaking down what that means, the jobs that people do and the roles they play. That is why it is important that we seek these opportunities to put the tourism and visitor economy on a sustainable and solid footing, and this idea ought to be considered as part of that.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): I have been listening carefully to what the hon. Member is saying, and I am trying to understand it. Is she arguing for more tourism by taxing more people? I cannot get my head around that, so could she explain it a little better? She says, "We want more tourists to come, but when you come, we'll tax you more." Is that it?

Alison McGovern: On the face of it, the hon. Member makes an argument that is understandable, in that taxes might constrain economic activity. However, many years of having taxes on economic activity show that the thing we use those taxes for can also generate and sustain economic activity. I am arguing that we ought to have a stream of investment to help local authorities sustain themselves and be able to put on events like the Commonwealth games now and in the future. If he thinks that that is not necessary, I would simply invite him to discuss the matter with any leader of a large local authority in the United Kingdom.

Catherine West: Does my hon. Friend accept that it might help to burden-share across the region, so that local council tax payers do not have an increase in their council tax bill? If some of the funded visitors were able to pay a small amount extra on their hotel bill, that could spread the burden of this exciting international opportunity, so that not just Birmingham has to pay for this, and it can be spread a little wider.

Alison McGovern: My hon. Friend, with her experience, makes a very good argument: it is important that we spread the burden. In any case—

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con) *rose*—

Alison McGovern: If Members want to make arguments against taxation, who am I to stop them?

Saqib Bhatti: Prior to entering the House, I was the president of the Greater Birmingham chambers of commerce—

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): And a very good one too!

Saqib Bhatti: I appreciate the positive remarks. I can assure you that no business in the tourism and hospitality sector would advocate a levy on people coming to stay, especially when you yourself have accepted—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. We really must not refer to individuals as "you". You can refer to the hon. Lady or shadow Minister, but not "you". I hope you understand that.

Saqib Bhatti: I realised that as soon as I said it, so I appreciate that intervention.

The hon. Member has said that the coronavirus has impacted jobs. Surely an additional levy—an additional cost—impacting demand is not something that businesses in the west midlands would want.

Alison McGovern: I welcome the hon. Member to the House. He has worked in the service of a city and a region of our country that is one of the finest anywhere, so I applaud his work in that. I simply disagree with him. I am sure he is right about the situation that tourism businesses are in. The problem is that we need local authorities to be sustainable, so that they can provide the environment in which those tourism businesses can succeed.

Liam Byrne: Sometimes it helps to read the clause. If a £1 per night levy will be a significant deterrent for the hotel industry, why is such a tax in place in Austria, Germany, France, Spain, Greece—in fact, most of western Europe? Has it been a significant deterrent to hotel stays in western Europe, in my hon. Friend's experience?

Alison McGovern: In my experience, it has not. My right hon. Friend makes an extraordinarily good point. What I think is a deterrent to the tourism industry is when local authorities cannot afford to fund the things that make events like this a success. Local authorities need the ability to make these events sustainable.

Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): Will the shadow Minister give way?

Alison McGovern: I will in a moment. Just let me finish responding to my right hon. Friend, although the enthusiasm for debate in this place is always to be welcomed.

Local authorities need the ability to make sure that events are a success. That is what they do best, and I know that Birmingham City Council, Sandwell Council and all the other boroughs are working their fingers to the bone to make sure that in 2022 we have a games that the whole country can be massively proud of. All the new clause seeks to do is levy a very modest amount on hotel bills so that they can succeed in those efforts.

Gary Sambrook: I get the point about councils needing the budget to do things, but Birmingham has proved itself to be completely useless at managing a budget. The Perry Barr bus depot will be three times over the original allotted budget. Another example is the Paradise Circus development in the city centre—all three phases of that budget were spent in the first phase. Birmingham City Council is badly managed and cannot manage a budget properly.

Alison McGovern: I am sure that that intervention would be excellent content in a party political leaflet, but it is not really the subject of the new clause in hand.

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): The point was made that the levy is a small amount of money, but there is an administrative cost as well. Does the hon. Lady think it right at this moment, when the hospitality industry is already struggling, to place extra burdens on it?

Alison McGovern: I am sure the hon. Lady wants to defend hotels and tourism, as I do, but I simply make the point that I made previously: local authorities are crucial to making sure that the tourism and visitor sector is successful in Birmingham and other boroughs in the west midlands, and everywhere in the country that has a significant visitor economy. The level of austerity and the funding cuts that local authorities have borne to date have been significant and are causing problems and challenges for our ability to host such events. This is a modest proposal in pursuit of the sustainability of such events.

Liam Byrne: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Birmingham Hippodrome made significant job cuts this week, that the Birmingham Rep is running a significant deficit this year, and that the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery is also running a significant deficit? Is she also aware that a crisis in the cultural sector is breaking upon us now? Those institutions will be coming to the Secretary of State next week to ask for his help, so he has a choice: either he can find the money himself or he can support small, common-sense measures such as this.

Alison McGovern: I was not aware of the specifics, though it is no surprise to me, because I am aware of the situation in the cultural sector right across the country. My right hon. Friend knows very well that the art collection in Birmingham city is one of my favourites. It is a brilliant art collection that will do a great deal for the cultural offer alongside the Commonwealth games. It is a reason people go to Birmingham. Without funding, such things cannot be sustained, and their loss would fatally undermine the tourism offer in cities up and down our country. Again, I simply say to Government Members that this is a modest proposal. Do they think, at this point in time, that the Treasury and the Conservative Government could do with a few modest proposals to bring in a small amount of income? Might the Minister not therefore consider this seriously?

Finally, it is important that we have proper metrics and measures to assess the economic impact of these games. It could be substantial—it could be substantially positive for the economy—so will the Minister commit to discussing with me a set of metrics that we can agree on to monitor the economic impacts of the games on all the various sectors that Members on both sides of the House have discussed, so that we can make the case that cultural and sporting events do properly benefit the economy? Will he consider this fully and take seriously the question of sustainability for the tourism and visitor economy, which at the moment should be at the heart of all our concerns?

1.45 pm

Liam Byrne: I, too, wish to speak in support of new clause 2; we would be content this afternoon with a commitment from the Minister that he will explore this proposal with the Chancellor in the spending review, which we know is forthcoming.

I shall give some numbers, because I think they will help this debate. The total cost of the Commonwealth games is about £778 million, about three quarters of which is being provided by Her Majesty's Government. Some £184 million is coming from Birmingham City Council and its partners, with £25 million going towards the Alexander stadium from the combined authority, plus a further £165 million going to kick-start the housing development, including the athletes' village, from the combined authority.

I say that because the Minister will be aware of two significant risks to the local contribution, which makes up about a quarter of the budget. First, there is a risk to the local government contribution. At the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet said to local authorities up and down the land, "Do whatever it takes to get through this crisis, keep the receipts and we will pay you back on the other side." The House will be amazed to learn that the deal is now beginning to unravel and the Minister's Cabinet colleague in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is beginning to query whether all the bills will be paid. In a city such as Birmingham, that means we could be confronting a deficit of £164 million this year. That is why the Minister has an obligation to take steps now to de-risk the local contribution to the games.

It is not just Birmingham City Council that is in jeopardy; the combined authority is, too. We revealed just a week or two before the elections were postponed that the Mayor's budget has a £1.2 billion black hole in it. He has made commitments £1.2 billion in excess of the funds he has available. That is because he failed to get his precept through, he failed to get any movement on supplementary business rates and the funding that was going to novate from the local enterprise partnerships to the combined authority has not come through. In addition, there is a £700 million funding gap on the transport plan, because the Department for Transport is beginning to query some of the transport schemes. The broad point I want to make is that coronavirus has created a significant risk to the local authority contribution, and it would appear that there is a significant risk in respect of the combined authority as well.

Gary Sambrook: On the point of commitment, it is cheap to try to bring coronavirus into this, given that we were having this discussion about the city council's contribution before the pandemic started. I have to remind the right hon. Gentleman that it was the leader of the council, in order to get the Birmingham Commonwealth games through his own group, who made the commitment that the contributions of the city council would not have an impact on the revenue budget. He has gone back on that commitment, one that many Labour councillors are very annoyed about. So does the right hon. Gentleman share my disappointment in the leader of the council who cannot keep his own budget in order?

Liam Byrne: I can scarcely believe what I have heard this afternoon. This council has had its budget halved by this Government over the past 10 years, yet its area is home to some of the worst deprivation in the country. The leadership of the council in the past few years have been miraculous, given the challenges that they have had to go through. They have gone over and above that, helping the country out by offering to host the Commonwealth games when Durban pulled out, and we should be grateful for that, not curmudgeonly, like the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Gary Sambrook). He should be less curmudgeonly and more welcoming of the leadership the city is providing.

I do not want to let hon. Members escape from the substantial point we are confronting now and going forward. Coronavirus has created a fiscal risk to the city that totals about £164 million, because of the um-ming and ah-hing from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. That is not unique to Birmingham. The Local Government Association and Tory and Labour Members alike have written to the Government about this situation. One way we can de-risk it a bit is to have a pilot scheme in which a £1 levy on hotel rooms is created to help to fund some of the brilliant cultural work that needs to go on around the Commonwealth games.

Just so that hon. Members know, we have two risks coming up in the west midlands. The city of culture in Coventry has now been moved from January to June next year and that will run straight into the Commonwealth games, which will start in the summer of 2022. Frankly, it will be a pretty thin affair if all of the cultural institutions in the west midlands have collapsed. I say to the Minister today that they are on the brink of collapse now. The Hippodrome is already firing people. The Rep, which is a signatory to the letter to the Secretary of State from UK Theatre, is running a serious fiscal deficit. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery is also looking at a serious deficit. In fact, when I convened a meeting with Culture Central from the west midlands last week, they were all reporting significant deficits.

I know that the Minister, because he is a responsible sort, will be working on a rescue plan for the cultural sector. I know that he is going to have difficult conversations with the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. I know what the other side of those conversations looks like, because I had them with Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Ministers in my time. The Minister's arm will be strengthened if he is able to bring to the table imaginative proposals such as that in new clause 2. We are not asking for the moon; we are asking for £1 a night. That could, across the region over the course of four or five years, create a fund of about £4 million or £5 million, which could offset some of the costs that are needed and help to save the magnificent cultural institutions in Britain's second city.

Catherine West: My right hon. Friend is making some excellent arguments. Does he remember that during the London Olympics—as a London MP, I remember this well—a series of MPs went to the Government to say that it was an extra thing for our city and therefore more resource, ideas, innovation and creativity were needed? The west midlands taxpayer cannot fund the whole project, so it is well within the remit of every MP in the region to be asking the Government for specific help and this proposal is a particularly imaginative solution.

Liam Byrne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It could be that the Minister has a better plan, in which case now is the time to set it down. The letters from the cultural sector are coming to him next week. I hope they will be signed cross-party, because we share an interest in the rich cultural life of Britain's second city. If this is not the way forward, I ask him please to tell us a better way. If there is not a better way, I hope he will accept new clause 2.

Nigel Huddleston: We have discussed the issue of a hotel tax at great length during the Bill's passage, but may I first say that I completely support and appreciate the comments on the importance of the tourism sector made by the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) at the beginning of her speech? It has perhaps not been recognised as so important partly because of the fragmented nature of the industry, but I assure her that I consider the tourism sector to be of great importance and will be doing everything I can to support it.

The Government have always been clear that the Bill is not an appropriate vehicle for a proposal such as the hotel tax. It is not a money Bill; that would be for Her Majesty's Treasury to bring forward. My colleagues in the Treasury have been crystal clear that any case put forward for a hotel tax would need to be fully costed, including balancing the additional burdens on businesses. In any event, were such a tax to be introduced solely for the duration of the games, it is estimated that it would raise for Birmingham City Council about £4.5 million to £5 million for the whole year. That would be only a small part of the financial contributions owed by the council and its partners to the games. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) mentioned the £184 million contribution from Birmingham City Council, and of course central Government will contribute nearly £600 million directly.

Alison McGovern: I want to stop the Minister at that point. He mentions the relative investment of the Treasury and the city council, but surely he accepts that the resources of those two bodies are not the same. We are trying to come up with proposals to help the city council and other authorities. Will he concede that the proposal is something that should be taken forward?

Nigel Huddleston: I do not believe that the proposal should be taken forward for a variety of reasons. The discussion about the financials of the Commonwealth games was sorted out and agreed some time ago—and it is still agreed.

We should consider the wider context. The tourism and hospitality sector has been impacted by covid-19 and the Government are focused on doing what they can to support the sector throughout this challenging period. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Marco Longhi) said, I cannot see how an additional tax would help. Only a few moments ago, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill lectured me about the importance of £1 and what a big difference that would make. Now he tells me that it is trivial. Which is it? It would not just be £1; it would be another pound and another and another. The potential for incremental increases in that kind of taxation is dangerous.

Liam Byrne: I respect the economic argument that the Minister tries to make, but the proposal is for a pilot scheme, which can be governed jointly, that delivers a

[Liam Byrne]

£1 a night tax. A pound a night in the context of the average hotel bill in Birmingham is frankly pretty insignificant, but across a spectacle as grand as the Commonwealth games, it could mean a significant amount of money. If the Minister has got a better way of de-risking what is now a dangerous fiscal situation for the Commonwealth games, let us hear it.

Nigel Huddleston: I will come on to the financial contributions in a moment.

The new clause would or could inadvertently discourage people from staying overnight in Birmingham and the west midlands at games time—the very time we want to welcome the world to the west midlands and when the region is doing whatever it can to increase visitors and the opportunities generated by the games. On top of that, even though we do not charge a tourism tax in the UK, we charge full VAT on hotel stays, which many other countries do not. Many other countries do not charge full VAT rates on hospitality and leisure.

Furthermore, local authorities have a range of existing revenue-raising and fundraising powers that they could explore to support them to meet financial contributions that are associated with events such as the Commonwealth games. Most important, the council has always been clear that it can and will deliver its financial commitments to the games without the need for a hotel tax. As ever, we remain in close contact with the council on all aspects of the games, including the budget. It is also worth noting that early analysis of the financial impact of covid-19 has demonstrated that the additional costs arising from the pandemic can be met from the existing games budget.

Mr Mitchell: Thanks to the miracle of modern technology, I have managed to elicit a direct response from the fabulous Mayor of the West Midlands to the suggestion that there is a black hole in his budget. Rather than test your patience with a long intervention, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall reserve his comments for the House if I catch your eye on Third Reading.

Nigel Huddleston: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention and look forward to his contribution on Third Reading.

There should be no increase in Birmingham's financial contribution. Although we recognise the additional pressures that local authorities are under in dealing with the covid-19 pandemic, central Government have already announced additional funding of £3.2 billion to support that.

All games partners continue to work closely together to ensure that any additional cost resulting from covid-19 can be absorbed in the current budget so as not to increase Birmingham's financial contribution to the games, to which it has already committed without the need for a hotel tax. That close partnership and working relationship will ensure that we deliver a memorable games with lasting benefits in Birmingham and the west midlands. I therefore ask the hon. Member for Wirral South to withdraw the motion.

Alison McGovern: I thank the Minister for his comments, but as one of my hon. Friends has just pointed out, £1 is about half an hour's parking. In the context of what we are talking about, the idea that that would massively

dissuade people from a hotel stay would probably bear interrogation. However, this idea, similarly, is not going anywhere, and it is well supported across the country by civic leaders. For now, however, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Third Reading

2 pm

Nigel Huddleston: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

We are moving at speed today. I would like to thank the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), who led the Bill through Committee for the Opposition, and to wish her all the best in her new role. I would also like to thank all Members who sat on the Public Bill Committee and who have otherwise contributed to the Bill's passage, including the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood), the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), the hon. Members for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) and for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Northfield (Gary Sambrook), for Dudley South (Mike Wood), for Dudley North (Marco Longhi), for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey), for Stourbridge (Suzanne Webb), for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon), for West Bromwich East (Nicola Richards) and for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey), and many more.

I would also like to thank all the games partners, including Birmingham City Council; the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Mayor, Andy Street; Transport for West Midlands; West Midlands police; and, of course, the organising committee itself. As a games partnership, they have provided excellent support during the passage of the Bill. As I am sure hon. Members would agree, they have been open and have engaged with Members right across the House.

My thanks also go to the officials, who have worked so hard on this Bill since its first introduction last year, and to my noble Friends Baroness Barran and Lord Ashton, for steering the Bill through the House of Lords in such a collaborative and accomplished fashion. I would also like to thank Members of this House and the House of Lords for their scrutiny and for the thoughtful and constructive contributions we have seen throughout the Bill's passage. Indeed, we have seen many positive changes on the back of that scrutiny—for example, the organising committee is now required through this legislation to report on certain areas of games delivery, ensuring full transparency and accountability.

Now seems the right moment to reflect on the preparations for the Birmingham 2022 games, which have already had to overcome an unprecedented level of challenge and uncertainty. We started out with a truncated delivery timeline of four and a half years, rather than the usual seven for a full games cycle. We should not forget that the games were originally awarded to Durban, and it was not until the end of 2017 that Birmingham picked up the baton. Of course, the current pandemic has also brought its own set of challenges. However, despite that environment, great progress has been made to ensure that we are still set to deliver a fantastic games on time and on budget, delivering real benefits to those in the region and beyond.

As Members know, significant upheaval has been caused in the international sporting calendar because of the impact of covid-19, with many major competitions being postponed or cancelled altogether. Following collaborative discussions with the organisers of other major events, including the world athletics championships, I am pleased to confirm that the start of the games will move back by one day, with the opening ceremony now taking place on 28 July 2022. That change will ensure that there is a summer showcase of major events in 2022, and Birmingham 2022 will continue to get the exposure it deserves, as broadcasters showcase the games to over 1 billion people across the world. Further, the change will ensure that the opening ceremony of the games does not clash with any matches of the UEFA women's European football championships, which were due to be held in England in 2021, but which have now been moved back to 2022—they are still in England, of course.

All of this will ensure that 2022 continues to be a fantastic year of celebration for our country and an opportunity to champion all that is great about this United Kingdom—a year where, alongside welcoming the world to Birmingham for the 22nd Commonwealth games, we will be celebrating Her Majesty the Queen's platinum jubilee, marking the 100th anniversary of the BBC and staging a major nationwide festival showcasing our creativity and innovation.

I would also like to reflect on and celebrate those things that will make the Birmingham 2022 games unique. This will be the first time in history that a major multi-sport event features more women's medal events than men's, as well as featuring the largest integrated parasport event. We have seen the Birmingham 2022 organising committee publish the Commonwealth games' first ever social values charter, helping to ensure that the important values discussed both here and in the House of Lords remain at the forefront of games delivery. Such values are those of accessibility and a lasting games legacy.

Earlier this week, the Birmingham 2022 organising committee formally announced the new Birmingham 2022 inclusive games standard, alongside its commitment to accessibility and inclusivity. It is hoped that the BIG standard, supporting the Birmingham games to be the "Games for Everyone" will become a blueprint for future editions of the Commonwealth games.

Turning to legacy, the importance of the games as a catalyst for the economic, cultural and social renewal of the west midlands is underscored now more than ever as we look to restore livelihoods and rebuild from the current situation. In 2020 alone, £145 million of organising committee contracts will be available for tender across a broad range of services, and the organising committee will see its workforce double. In recent weeks, it has held webinars with local chambers of commerce to promote these tenders, and it will continue to do so. All these opportunities are listed on the Birmingham 2022 website.

Saqib Bhatti: I thank my hon. Friend for bringing the Bill back to the House, and for talking about the legacy and the economic positives that will come from this. Does he acknowledge the role that the Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street, has played in making sure that this Commonwealth games was brought to the west midlands, thrusting our region on to the international stage?

Nigel Huddleston: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Indeed, all stakeholders, but I have to say Andy Street in particular, have been very focused on the legacy, plus the trade, investment and tourism opportunities that could come. He played a pivotal role in securing additional money in the Budget earlier this year for those initiatives.

We must ensure and continue to ensure that the benefits brought by the games are lasting ones felt long after the 11 days of sport. A director of legacy has recently been appointed to help ensure we can meet this ambition, driving forward and embedding this work across the games partnerships. I know the organising committee has already reached out to hon. Members across the House to ensure that these benefits can be realised across the west midlands and beyond.

The Government and all games partners remain fully committed to delivering a fantastic and memorable games in 2022, building on our excellent reputation for staging major events, and showcasing the best of Birmingham, the west midlands and the entire country to the world. Although today marks the final stage of debate on this Bill, there will be many more opportunities for the House to keep up to date on the delivery of the games and its legacy, and I hope hon. Members can take advantage of those opportunities.

I thank the House once again for its support for the games and for this Bill. As we have heard, the Bill is integral to ensuring that these games are a success, and it is an important milestone in the ongoing preparation. I am very happy to have led this Bill's charge to the finish line, and I look forward to seeing it reach the statute book very soon. I commend the Bill to the House.

2.8 pm

Alison McGovern: I thank the Minister for his comments. It has been a joy to be a part of this Bill, even if only for a short time. In the main, it was ably steered through its Committee stage by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), who is no longer in her place. As the Minister said, our thanks should go to her and to all the Members who took part in the Bill Committee. I particularly thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), who have both made compelling contributions today, and I hope—and I wish—that the Minister will listen carefully to the points they have made. All Birmingham Members, and others from the west midlands, have contributed to the process of getting this Bill through, and we should be thankful to them, as well as to our colleagues in the other place who have brought significant expertise to producing it.

I am also thinking today of colleagues in local government, who have had a rough time over the past 10 years and are currently dealing with a challenge that is so great that I think that they are proving to be some of the best and finest public servants that we have anywhere in government. Local government should be much more recognised across Whitehall than it actually is. I am thinking particularly of those in Birmingham and in Sandwell and across the west midlands authorities who are working so hard to defeat the coronavirus outbreak as well as preparing for what will be a hopeful and happy event in a few years' time. I am thinking of

[Alison McGovern]

them today; they are working so very hard. We have also mentioned Coventry, which is going to be city of culture and is preparing for that. I thank the organising committee of the games, which has been kind enough to brief me in my new role, and has done so diligently and expertly.

It is easy to wonder, in the face of such events around the world, whether sport means anything. Obviously, we all know that the real answer is that it does not. In the face of people dying of a terrible virus outbreak, of course sport is highly unimportant. However, it is something that we can lose ourselves in. We can enjoy sport, and for a short time just marvel at the abilities of other human beings enjoying themselves and competing for fun against one another. It is that idea that we can lose ourselves in the enjoyment of it that I think of as we finalise this Bill's progress through the House.

I think back to moments in my own city region, when Liverpool was European capital of culture in 2008, and the joy that that brought to our city. I think of this city, London, in 2012, and the enjoyment, renewal and sense of civic pride that the London Olympics brought. I know that, as we have said, Birmingham—and the west midlands—is a place more than capable of inspiring not just our nation but countries around the world in the celebration of human endeavour. That is what sport is really about and that is the good that it does.

That much should be obvious, but there are 2.3 billion people in the Commonwealth and that means that the games are really important as a global event that will place Birmingham and the west midlands on the world stage where they belong. Birmingham is a fantastic place. Being from Merseyside, I have high standards when it comes to the friendliness of people, their sense of humour, and the enjoyment that you feel when you get off the train in a city. Birmingham meets all those tests. There is no better feeling than getting off the train at New Street—

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Like Scousers.

Alison McGovern: Yes, nearly as good as Scousers. Birmingham is a fantastic place that I am only sorry I am unable to visit at the moment. But as soon as the regulations lift and we are able to travel in a more normal way, I shall be there, with bells on. It is a diverse place. It has beautiful buildings. Its art collection, as we have mentioned, bows to no other in the quality of its works. With its theatre, and its orchestra, in every respect, it is a vital part of our cultural life in this country. I fully anticipate that in the period of the Commonwealth games people will revel in the opportunity to visit and to enjoy everything that Birmingham, Coventry and all the other places in the west midlands have to offer.

I now turn briefly back to the Bill itself. For all the sporting, civic and cultural reasons I have mentioned, this is a very important Bill and the Commonwealth games will be a truly important event. However, we must go further than that, because this is not just about the games: it is about being ambitious for people in the city region. While there are new homes being built in Perry Barr as part of the infrastructure investment that the games are bringing, and better stations and better bus routes are being created as part of them, people are

truly ambitious about how we can lift up their wages, skills, and ability to create businesses and really play a full role in the economy of the west midlands and our country.

The Bill has reporting requirements in it, but I repeat to the Minister that, if he is really to ensure that the games are a success for every single person in the west midlands who is ambitious for their future, he could voluntarily go further and do more. The reporting requirements about the values of the games, the commitments on accessibility for disabled people, the promotion of sustainability, and maximising the benefits being derived from the games are good ambitions, but they are, as I said, a bit woolly. Perhaps the Minister should work with colleagues, or voluntarily go even further than the Bill requires, because people will remember the games and the good that they did for a long time. It would be a hollow promise if we were unable to really progress the economy of the west midlands.

The Minister has heard the ferocity with which many Members from Birmingham have spoken, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill, who I thought made a serious and devastating case. The Minister has heard how people feel about food banks, and the role of low wages in creating the necessity for those food banks. I would simply say to him again that the problem is not going away, and it is on all of us, including him, to try to progress a solution. Decent though the Bill's laudable aims are, we should all want to go much further for people. Sport is one thing, but fundamentally changing people's lives in addition is what we should really aspire to.

We meet at a time, as many Members have mentioned, that is truly challenging for our country, but hopefully the Commonwealth games come at what could be a perfect moment, in that 2022 feels near enough to be truly something to look forward to, but far enough away to ensure that the dedicated team of the organising committee, and all of us, can work together to create all the infrastructure and aspects of organisation that are needed to create a successful games.

As much as anything, the Commonwealth games should be about hope—not just hope for our country, and hope that we will deal with the current situation and improve on the challenges that we face in dealing with coronavirus, but a much greater hope that the representation of the Commonwealth games, in all the diversity of the athletes who will come to participate and the varied number of people who will come to witness them, and its unity can drive forward a better standard of living and an improvement for people in the west midlands and right across our country. It is about our ability to look forward in hope.

2.18 pm

Mr Mitchell: I will start where the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) finished, but before I do I congratulate both Front Benchers on, if I may use a sporting analogy, being thrown in the deep end in order to take the Bill through. They both spoke really well about the importance of the games and of the Bill. They also both look very fit and well following the dreadful lockdown, which has affected us all. I may be stretching a point, but perhaps we will see them both training in Sutton Park, which will play such an important part in the games.

The Bill provides an optimistic and encouraging moment because, as the hon. Lady said, it gives us a chance to look beyond the acute challenges that our country is facing at the moment and is genuinely something to look forward to. Boy, are we going to need it. Quite apart from the games, the sport, the fun and the excitement, all of which mean so much to so many people around the world, for us in the west midlands it is about the boost to our local economy, which we all know we must maximise. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create thousands of jobs, new homes and a massive improvement to the public realm.

At a local level in Sutton Coldfield, we are delighted that our historic park is going to come into active use. It is the place where King Henry VIII used to hunt and where soldiers undertook their training in trench warfare before heading off to the western front in the first world war, and it was also visited by Her Majesty the Queen and 30,000 others to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the scouting movement in 1957. In Sutton Coldfield, we will proudly host the triathlon for the games.

In a virtual meeting with the leadership team of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth games, I was pleased to hear about the progress. Nearly three quarters of a billion pounds is involved, and it will leave a tremendous legacy. Locally, I was pleased to hear from the leadership of the Commonwealth games committee that co-operation with Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council under its leader Simon Ward has been going so well.

My constituents will hopefully benefit greatly from the improved infrastructure in our park, which I believe is the largest municipal park in Europe. It will improve the facilities to be used, including for future events. The gain is not just for businesses locally, but for jobs, community projects and volunteering. The games will require 10,000 local volunteers to welcome people from all over the Commonwealth, as well as to perform in the opening and closing ceremonies and to host athletes and teams at sporting facilities for training purposes. In Sutton Coldfield, we are deeply grateful for the opportunities and very excited by the prospects.

We need to ensure, as the Minister made clear, that all the different organisations involved play their part and work together from now on until the games open. I have worked extremely closely over the past three months with Birmingham City Council and, in particular, with the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne). He and I co-chair a committee that tries to bring together all the local interests in order that we can tackle some of the problems that affect us across Birmingham.

I will leave others to underline the importance of the council's role and local government, if I may. Instead, I want to refer to the role of the Mayor and the West Midlands Combined Authority, which is absolutely crucial both for the games and for the legacy. I have seen what the London Olympics have done for the east end of London. In particular, through the legacy that went on afterwards, including with the International Inspiration programme chaired by Lord Coe, I saw the huge ability of sport not only to energise children and improve education, also to help health, education and vaccination in the developing world. There is a huge importance to focusing on the legacy that will follow in all its many forms.

I salute the efforts of Andy Street, our Mayor. He was teased, I think, by the right hon. Gentleman earlier about the so-called black hole in the budget. I have said to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I have, through the miracles of modern technology, been able to elicit a response from the Mayor. He said this:

"There is no black hole. Every year, the West Midlands Combined Authority has lived within its budget—both in-year finances and also within investment ceilings. It has been well managed and for example at last week's board the annual finance review was fully accepted. Citizens of the west midlands have not paid a penny for a Tory mayor, but over £2 billion of new Government cash has been brought into the region since Andy Street was elected. Yes, we are still short of funds for some investments, but they are steadily closing as further new investment comes in."

Those are the other words of Andy Street, delivered through me to the House on this important point this afternoon.

Liam Byrne: That was a fantastic defence of the Mayor, and it only lacks the very best wishes conveyed to the Mayor of the West Midlands on the occasion of his birthday today. None the less, all I would ask by way of intervention is for the Mayor to speak to his finance director, because during the transition talks before the mayoral elections were cancelled, it was not my analysis that revealed the £1.2 billion black hole; it was the analysis of his finance director. Admittedly, it took her three weeks to crunch the numbers and produce that figure. This is a gentle ask, I suppose, that we work together to try to repair this rather large hole that the WMCA finance director herself has identified.

Mr Mitchell: It is extremely decent of the right hon. Gentleman, given his current position, to send his best wishes to the Mayor on his birthday. I am sure the Mayor will receive them, if not from one of us Conservative Members then over the airwaves. I reassure the right hon. Gentleman and the House that the Mayor of the West Midlands needs no lectures on financial success, financial ability or financial probity: he ran John Lewis, one of the most respected and most brilliant retail organisations in the country. I have no doubt whatsoever that we are all grateful for that experience, which he is sharing with the people of the west midlands through his mayoralty.

The Mayor has personally lobbied for £21.3 million to support the TTI—tourism trade and investment—programme to maximise the Commonwealth games opportunity, and that is, of course, in addition to the Mayor's pivotal role in securing for Perry Barr, in respect of the games, £165 million of housing infrastructure fund money, which will help to regenerate a swathe of north Birmingham and leave a legacy of additional housing. All that was agreed in the March Budget this year, and last week, on 5 June, the West Midlands Combined Authority signed off a further £2.6 million as a regional contribution to the programme.

Given the current economic impact of covid-19, all that will have even greater significance, as it will enable us to raise the profile of the region's businesses and to promote trade and work to secure jobs. In that respect, I particularly welcome the focus that the Mayor, the WMCA and all its partners have placed on using the opportunity of the games to accelerate and improve regional skills and employment opportunities. To help to achieve that, we have the new Commonwealth jobs

[Mr Mitchell]

and skills academy; the Mayor has put £1 million of the devolved adult education budget into funding technical skills for the development for the games.

The £100,000 skills hub in Perry Barr, in partnership with the main contractor, Lendlease, is very encouraging. We know that the construction industry in our region will need 50,000 more trained staff by 2030. The hub, funded by the WMCA, offers local people free skills training and a guaranteed job interview once a 20-day course has been completed. We hope the programme will help 4,600 young people and 2,600 unemployed people to gain skills, experience and then jobs. The games will also benefit, along with the rest of us in the region, from the wider transport investment programme that the Mayor is promoting, including the expansion of the metro network and investment in the rail network.

Having looked at severely local and regional aspects and aspirations, I wish to end by considering the international dimension, to which the hon. Member for Wirral South referred towards the end of her speech, and the Commonwealth itself. By ensuring that the world-class games succeed and bring pleasure to millions, perhaps billions, of people around the globe, Britain underlines the community of nations that is the Commonwealth. It is a north-south organisation, a family of countries co-operating in many different ways. At a time when narrow nationalism is rampant and the case for the international rules-based system is severely on the back foot, let us hope that the games will remind us all that we have much to gain from international co-operation and much to lose when the structures that sustain it breakdown.

2.28 pm

Liam Byrne: What a marvellous opportunity to follow a marvellous speech, which I felt hit almost all the right notes.

The Commonwealth games that we will host in Birmingham in the West Midlands will be the greatest Commonwealth games that the world has ever seen. It will be not only the most spectacular festival of Commonwealth sport, but a magnificent festival of our civic spirit—the civic spirit that helped to build our city in the 19th century and propelled our city to become the second city of this nation. I very much hope that the games will not be the last word in the renaissance of culture and sport in our region; they will be just a first step.

If there is one ideal that I hope we can put centre stage, it is the words that Jo Cox gave us: that we have more in common than anything which can ever divide us. I hope that will be the animating spirit of these games. As the youngest city in Europe, I hope we can use that ethos and ethic to act as an inspiration for a revolution in the youth work we have across our city. On Second Reading, I called for the creation of a young Commonwealth leaders' programme, because, as a city of 160 different nationalities, we need to look to the next generation to help lead the business of bringing a diverse city together to live and play well. I hope we will find it in ourselves to put youth workers back in every ward, with safe spaces for our young people, to connect the inspiration of "more in common" to the great, animating festival of the Commonwealth games so that

a young generation will work not only to bring our communities together but to strengthen the relationships in Birmingham and the west midlands with Commonwealth countries around the world. I am grateful to the high commissioners from around the Commonwealth who have begun to talk through that programme with me.

I hope that these games are the catalyst for a transformation of disability sports. As many people know, our city is home to the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine: a place that, frankly, works miracles. I hope that in due course we can bring that centre together with the Commonwealth games team to create, in our green heart of Britain, the great new centre for the Invictus games for the years to come. That is a practical thing that we could do quickly and well.

I hope that these games are the catalyst for an extraordinary cultural renaissance in our part of the world. We are looking forward to an extraordinary decade with not just the city of culture in Coventry, starting most likely in June next year, but the Commonwealth games and then the arrival—when it is finally built—of High Speed 2. There could be an extraordinary transformation of the cityscape in our city region. As the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) said, this is an optimistic moment and the Bill will give the decade an extraordinary kick-start.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Following on from what my right hon. Friend and the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) said, this Bill is of enormous importance not only for the future of Birmingham and the wider west midlands but for the here and now. As we face a tidal wave of redundancies, this boost to the construction sector, keeping our construction workers in work now, will be enormously important for the long term.

Liam Byrne: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is the second big point I want to make. This is a partnership. I am grateful for the investment that the Government have made, which will not just help unlock the greatest festival of Commonwealth sport that we have ever seen but bring 5,000 new homes to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood), who I know is watching us. That gain, however, would not be happening without the leadership of Ian Ward and the team at Birmingham City Council. Together, the city council is putting in about £184 million. It had the political courage to step up to the mark when Durban pulled out. Given the halving of Birmingham's budget in the last 10 years, that was a brave act, a courageous act and a wise act. We will be grateful for that political decision for decades to come.

My right hon. Friend puts his finger on something critical. In the debate we just had on new clause 2, the Minister did not betray much sense of how the world had changed. I hope he will reflect on that remark and what he has heard this afternoon. If the Bank of England is correct—you never know; it might be—we will see unemployment in our region rise by 192,000 next year, to 320,000. That will put unemployment in our region at the highest level we have seen since 1987. The fiscal maths tells us that we need a capital kick-start of about £3.5 billion to deal with unemployment of that significance. As I said in earlier debates, our cultural institutions are crying out to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport for help. The DCMS must look at the

realities of what is going on in the sector and work with the Chancellor to do whatever is necessary to de-risk our bridge from where we are now to the beginning of the city of culture next year.

The prize is significant. I agree with the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield that this Bill is an optimistic moment. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for us, but it has to lift a generation out of unemployment, out of poverty, out of hunger, and out of hopelessness. We have to make sure that, when the eyes of the world—of 1.5 billion people—are on us in 2022, we dazzle them not simply with an extraordinary spectacle of sport, but with an extraordinary society that, together, we have built.

2.36 pm

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne). I find myself agreeing with some of the points that he has made. The idea that HS2 is the right thing for the region is perhaps something that we will continue to disagree on, but I will move on from that because this debate has the potential to be an uplifting one.

I am delighted to speak in this debate and to have supported the previous stages of the Bill, including as a member of the Bill Committee. At this point, we should certainly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) on what was probably one of his first outings as Minister. Perhaps we should give him a gold medal—the first medal of the games—for ensuring that the Bill was scrutinised in, if not world record time, certainly Commonwealth record time. I will endeavour to make my remarks with the same brevity today, Mr Deputy Speaker.

What our Bill Committee demonstrated was unity and a desire across the House to ensure that Birmingham delivers in 2022 a games of which we can all be proud. I agree with both speakers on the Front Benches that this Bill has come just at the right time given the current climate. We should never underestimate the power of such events not only as a showcase for the elite of international sport but in pulling the country together. Sport has an almost unique ability to collectively raise our spirits, although as a long-suffering Newcastle United fan, I find that those spirits are often quite quickly dashed shortly after, but I am sure that that will not happen with this event. If we think back to 2012, we will remember how the mood of the country was visibly lifted as we all came together to help deliver, arguably, the best Olympic games ever hosted, and it took place here in London.

It is incredibly important to get this right. It has been great to meet with the organising committee on several occasions. Its outreach to Members across the House has been brilliant—it certainly has been very good for me. It is great to hear about its exciting plans and visions for the games ahead. I have absolute confidence that this first-class team will make a huge success of these games. I have no doubt that people across Birmingham and the wider west midlands, including my constituents in north Warwickshire and Bedworth, will be inspired and ready to pick up the baton handed over by the legacy of the London games.

The Bill will allow us fully to recognise the amazing opportunities that the games can bring to the west midlands region. They are significant opportunities,

even for areas that will not be lucky enough to host an event, including my constituency—although, if the Minister and the organising committee are listening, with a legacy of being able to deliver high-class sporting events such as national cycling, we are ready, able and willing to help if they are so inclined. There is still so much potential to be recognised across the whole region. As we have heard, around 41,000 game-time roles need filling, with important economic and employment benefits. I have been assured that those will reach out across our society, including to jobseekers and professionals of all levels, so there really is something for everybody to get involved in.

There has been a debate on the living wage, and I appreciate the assurances from the Minister. Lifting people out of unemployment and looking to people who are desperate to get into work is a really powerful aim of the games. I welcome the announcement by the West Midlands Mayor, Andy Street, of the launch of the Commonwealth jobs and skills academy, which has the aim of improving regional skills and employment opportunities. That will not just help people during the delivery phase; it will undoubtedly be the lasting legacy of these games, providing people with a platform to transfer their skills and upskill, and helping them get into work. That is incredibly powerful.

There are also great opportunities for business. Contracts worth £300 million are available to tender for. It is fantastic that around 4,000 of those contracts will have a value of up to £175,000, providing opportunities to a broad range of small and medium-sized enterprises to bid for them and secure work. Because of the central location of the midlands, we have a great tradition of exhibition, hospitality and event hire companies. I know that a number of those companies have really struggled during the current pandemic, and this gives them an opportunity to showcase their skills on an international stage. I will certainly be encouraging the businesses in my area to apply for these contracts, and I am sure colleagues across the House will do the same.

There is precedent for local businesses getting these contracts. At the Glasgow games in 2014, 76% of contracts went to local or regional businesses. At the most recent games in 2018, in the Gold Coast, that figure went up to 84%. The organising committee has the ambition to deliver as much locally as possible this time round. The bar has been set—it has been proved that it can be done, and now we all need to help deliver that.

There are not only financial and employment benefits; we should not underestimate the education and cultural ones. The games will come right off the back of Coventry being the city of culture, and my constituency falls right in the land between where the two will happen. I am particularly excited about the school engagement programmes that the organisers are looking to undertake. Those programmes will give young people across the region an opportunity to become an integral part of the games and take part in what is probably a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to welcome the world-class athletes competing on the doorstep, while learning about their countries, backgrounds and culture. As I know from speaking to schools across my constituency, they cannot wait to get involved in this.

To conclude, I am delighted that the Bill is making progress. These games have huge potential to provide a welcome boost across the region, which we arguably need now more than ever. For 11 days or so, the eyes of

[Craig Tracey]

the world will focus on the west midlands for an outstanding spectacle of sport featuring some of the finest athletes in the world. It is a once-in-a-generation—if not a lifetime—opportunity to showcase our region on this stage and make the most of the employment, investment and tourism opportunities that are on offer if we get it right. I, for one, cannot wait to see this happen and have no hesitation in supporting the Bill's passage.

2.44 pm

Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con): Like so many of my west midlands colleagues, I am incredibly proud that we have such a high-profile sporting event coming to our fantastic region; with an estimated global audience of over 1.5 million, what an opportunity we have to showcase the potential of our region.

There is something incredibly special about having 71 nations and territories from across the Commonwealth coming to the west midlands; it speaks to our values of diversity and openness. It will last for 11 days, with over 12,000 athletes competing in 18 different sports, along with 41,000 staff, volunteers and contractors, and over 1 million ticketed spectators. I know that many of my constituents are very pleased that the shooting and archery events will be going ahead in India, too.

In many ways, we are lucky to be hosting the Commonwealth games at a time when the economy will still be rebuilding itself after the impact of coronavirus, as the Minister and many others have said in this debate. We must do everything we can to make the most of this opportunity for our region, and I am very pleased that creating thousands of jobs for local people like my constituents in West Bromwich East is at the heart of the vision for the games. It is a great shame, however, that Birmingham City Council has felt it necessary to push through its plans to demolish the Perry Barr flyover. I have already made my concerns about that known in this House, but I want to focus on the many positives of the games.

I welcome many aspects of the Bill. The games transport plan is excellent, and I am excited to see the provisions for training opportunities, too. I am very pleased that the Commonwealth games jobs and skills academy will particularly focus on supporting young people and unemployed adults in the region. Andy Street is already spearheading this drive to ensure that everyone can capitalise on the current opportunities associated with the games. It has been clear that at the heart of all Andy Street has done so far in preparation for these games is ensuring that there is a lasting legacy for the communities of the west midlands. It is also clear that the visitor experience is paramount to our success, so Andy has worked hard to ensure that we have frequent and reliable transport options for athletes and spectators in time for the event. Communities such as mine will benefit for years to come, and we owe it to them to make this happen.

I have already had conversations with the local jobcentre in West Bromwich about how everybody can feel the benefits of the jobs boost to come, especially given the current issues. Not only are we lucky to be hosting the games after the economic impact of coronavirus, but it would be great to focus on healthy lifestyles and the enjoyment to be gained from sport at a time when we must be talking about health inequalities. Sport is a

fantastic leveller and unifier, but we can go beyond that: we have an amazing opportunity to use the games as a further platform to address the severe health inequalities our communities still suffer from. I want this to be a priority. In the same way as we are focused on the economic recovery from coronavirus and using the games to address those challenges, I hope that the games can promote good lifestyle choices and inspire the next generation to take up sport.

Above all, I want us to feel pride in our region. One of my main aims is to ensure we can spread the legacy and benefits of the games throughout the west midlands and make sure their positive drive for lasting change and regeneration is not confined to Birmingham. This Government were elected on a platform of levelling up our communities, and the games will be a catalyst to further that work. In many ways, our commitment to levelling up has been a continuation of the inspirational work that our mayor, Andy Street, has been doing throughout his time in office. I have always been proud of my home region, and the Bill has my full support.

2.48 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I want to begin by saying that I welcome the measures in the Bill. It has always been important that everyone gets behind these games and makes sure they are a huge success, but, as we have heard, given the economic circumstances we now face, that has taken on added significance.

I particularly welcome the investment that will result in new homes and necessary transport infrastructure, as well as huge improvements in walking and cycling routes. I greatly welcome the A34 cycleway, which will extend through Perry Barr and beyond to revitalise communities and connect new housing with the Alexander stadium and on to Walsall, opening up the west midlands, just as the canals did centuries before.

Birmingham City Council and its leader, Ian Ward, deserve our congratulations on the lead they have taken generally over these games and on the £72 million upgrade plans for Alexander stadium. During the games, the stadium will be viewed by an estimated 1.5 billion TV audience. Following the games, it will retain an 18,000 permanent seated capacity, making it the largest facility of its kind in the UK. It will also provide a teaching base for Birmingham City University's sports and exercise students. The university is already pushing new boundaries in its work in the areas of sports psychology, medicine and training—all work that has much wider potential benefits for the rest of the community.

As we have heard, it is not just Birmingham, because these are west midlands games. I want to acknowledge councils and organisations across the region, especially Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, which will be hosting the swimming and diving events. Its new £73 million state-of-the-art venue will be a jewel in the crown of the west midlands long after the games are over.

We have heard today that there are concerns about funding and issues about the economics of the games, but the Birmingham business charter for social responsibility is an example of what we might achieve. It can mean jobs for local people—new jobs and apprenticeships, work experience opportunities, programmes to target disadvantaged residents, opportunities for local suppliers and businesses, school engagement, a community fund,

and a commitment to create a carbon-neutral construction environment. These are all things we need if we are to make it a success.

This is our chance for the city of a thousand trades—a city where 46% of the population are under 30; a city which, at the last count, is host to 187 nationalities from the Commonwealth and around the world. This is our chance to make Kare Adenegan, Elise Glynn and Galal Yafai household names. This is our chance to make the games and their legacy an achievement that people will talk about and remember fondly for many years to come.

2.52 pm

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): This is a debate of many firsts. It is the first I have sat in with my friend and neighbour the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Nicola Richards) and to which here we have both contributed, and it is probably the first in which three of the four Members from Sandwell Metropolitan Borough area have been on the Government Benches at the same time. It is also the first debate in which I have found myself agreeing with the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne). His speech hit most of the points. I do not agree with him on most things, but in fairness it was a very good speech, so I thank him for that.

It is not often that I come to a Third Reading debate so excitable—and no, it is not just because you are in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, or because I get to head back to Tipton soon. It is fantastic to talk about what is at the core of this debate: opportunity. That has been highlighted by all the speakers so far. Areas and communities such as mine are crying out for this opportunity to grow and invest.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East was right when she said that nearly 1.5 million people would be visiting the west midlands during the games. This is our time to shine. That point was echoed by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), who put it very eloquently. The influx of visitors to the west midlands will put it back on the map. Our Mayor, Andy Street, has been advocating at every level to ensure that the west midlands has its voice heard during the games.

The urban west midlands is made up of some of the most diverse and unique communities in the whole country. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East and other Members who represent the West Midlands Combined Authority area would agree that what works in one part of the west midlands, particularly in our borough of Sandwell, might not work in another—go half an hour down the road and suggest it and you will get some raised eyebrows. Indeed, what works in West Brom might not get looked at the same way in Tipton, but that is the joy of our area—that diversity, that coming forward with views, that straight talking is what makes me so proud to be a west midlands and Black Country MP.

Before I turn to my main comments, I want to make a more sober point about security. As we saw last week, our police are heroes; we cannot deny that. What they put up with last week was abhorrent. It was disgusting, and I want to put it on record that all police officers in this country are unsung heroes, and they deserve our praise and support.

We need to make sure that visitors to the games feel supported and safe and that they can come here without fear of crime. I have talked a lot in this Chamber about the effect that crime has had on my communities in west Sandwell, and nowhere more so than in Tipton, which is set to lose its police station this summer. I must reiterate my utter opposition to that move. It undermines the safety of our communities and, I am sorry, but when the police and crime commissioner can spend £38 million on his ivory tower at Lloyd House but cannot save the police station in one of my most vulnerable communities, that is absolutely out of order. It shows a complete lack of priorities from the administration there.

Mr Mitchell: Is my hon. Friend aware that the police and crime commissioner is also trying to close the police station in the royal town of Sutton Coldfield?

Shaun Bailey: I am indeed, and I am very aware of the campaign that my right hon. Friend has been running to keep the police station open in the royal town.

Security will be key and we need to make sure that people feel safe. I have every confidence that our west midlands police officers will do that. They are, in my view, the best police force in the world, and I am proud of the work that they have done across our community to support cohesion and diversity and to keep our communities safe. I put on record my thanks to them.

I turn to my main point, which is about long-term opportunity, and that comes in the form of long-term investment. Many Members have made points about the crisis we find ourselves in and the economic crisis that we will go into. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill said that we need about £3.2 billion of investment to deal with the jobs crisis. These Commonwealth games go some way towards doing that, but they are not a fix-all. However, their timing could not be better. We need to ensure that we have those long-term opportunities to battle the threat of long-term and increased unemployment, which will happen. My area and the communities that I represent—Wednesbury, Oldbury and Tipton—were absolutely decimated by unemployment last time. I do not want to see that happen again and I will be fighting to make sure that it does not.

The point about community is absolutely crucial. I am very proud to represent Tipton. Many Government and Opposition Members have heard me go on and on about the town. I love Tipton, mainly because it is an underdog. Many people often call Tipton the forgotten city and that makes me angry, because nowhere in this country should be forgotten, and why should Tipton? Why should the people of Tipton feel that they do not matter? People might think that it is a joke or that it is funny, but it is not, because those communities are crying out. When I stood in a school in Tipton and spoke to those students, I took a straw poll and said, “How many of you will come back here once you have done whatever qualification it is you decide to do?”, and 80% of those kids said that they will not come back. That is the reason why we need these games and the long-term investment and opportunities that come out of them. It is for those kids in that school, because they should feel proud of the town and community they come from, and they should feel that they will come back there and live their lives in that community.

[Shaun Bailey]

The fact is that if we are going to enhance these opportunities, we need to ensure that we respect the fact that the urban west midlands in particular is a patchwork of individual socioeconomic areas. Yes, the games will be in Birmingham, but as many right hon. and hon. Members have said, we need to ensure that the benefits transfer across the urban west midlands, and I am proud of the fact that that will happen. As hon. Members have pointed out, we will have the aquatics centre in Smethwick, in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar), but if we think back to the long-term legacy, we need to look as well at encouraging innovation.

I have been really impressed by the engagement from the Commonwealth games team and the fact that it wants to secure local procurement and local jobs, but we need to tie that into ensuring that we get whatever residual investment comes out of that into Black Country innovation, because that is what makes the Black Country—things such as the Wood Green Academy in Wednesbury making personal protective equipment, and Q3 Academy in Tipton currently completely diversifying the way it teaches its students. It is about latching on to the core principle of ingenuity in the Black Country and that residual investment as it comes through over the years—not just in 2022, but in 2032 and 2042—and absolutely maximising it, so that Tipton is never forgotten again.

I will draw my remarks to a close, because I appreciate that I have been talking for some time and, as one of my predecessors said, sometimes it is better to be a bit quicker and leave them wanting more. We need to join this up; we need to ensure that the opportunity and investment that comes out of these games benefits the whole of west midlands, from Tipton to Tetterton, from Perry Barr to Princes End, from Wolverhampton to Wednesbury and from Clitheroe to Burnt Tree—

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): And Shropshire.

Shaun Bailey: And Shropshire, of course, as my hon. Friend says. These games present a fantastic opportunity. It is not a sticking plaster to the problems we are going to face, and I do not think any right hon. or hon. Members would suggest that it is, but it is a start. If we seize these opportunities, we will succeed, in the way the west midlands does. I commend this Bill to the House.

3 pm

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): It is tough to follow a barnstorming performance such as that, but it is a pleasure to speak in a debate that delivers something that voices from across the House can agree on: the desirability of delivering a successful Birmingham Commonwealth games. I must start with a personal comment, which is that I am delighted that women's cricket is in the Commonwealth games for the first time. I had the honour and privilege of playing cricket with the icon and pioneer of women's cricket Baroness Heyhoe Flint, who was a proud West Midlander—she was from Wolverhampton. So it is absolutely appropriate that these are the Commonwealth games at which cricket is introduced—it is wonderful.

This is a wonderful opportunity to focus on the positive future after covid-19. The details of delivery are still to be finalised, but the agreement that hosting

the games is a good thing is there. Let us not forget that for many potential hosts, including Durban, hosting the games has been seen as a bad financial option. As the finance of the games has been a key part of the debate about Birmingham 2022, we owe it to cities such as Durban, and others across the Commonwealth, to deliver a games with the very best of best-practice lessons to learn from. I am talking about a games that generate a legacy of economic benefits that are clear enough to make raising finance and leveraging partner and sponsor finance easier, and for a far wider, more diverse range of cities.

It used to be thought, particularly after the staggering success of the Barcelona Olympics in 1992, that hosting an international games event was a sure bet for making money, massively boosting the visitor economy and delivering long-term infrastructure assets. The sad truth is that hosting an international games is not a magic wand and that a great deal of work will have to go into delivering a legacy that gets the city of Birmingham and the wider country its money back and more. If we do not do that, we will simply be confirming to underdeveloped cities across the Commonwealth that the games are a rich city's plaything, and that would be a tragedy. That is not to say that Birmingham is a city with money to burn, because of course it is not, so I see the attraction of looking at a hotel tax, as the Opposition have suggested several times as this Bill has progressed. However, as I have said earlier, it is a superficial attraction that does not bear scrutiny.

I absolutely accept the belief that there is an intrinsic link between the games and tourism. The visitor economy needs to be one of the biggest beneficiaries of Birmingham 2022, not just for Birmingham and the west midlands authority area, but for the whole of the west midlands, from Hereford to Stoke-on-Trent, and all that is in between. The games should be about delivering a boost to our regional tourism economy, not an opportunity to impose an additional tax on it. Partners who stand to gain need to step up to the plate and actively ensure that success is delivered by the agencies charged with delivering it. They include VisitEngland and VisitBritain. Our national tourist agencies need to pull out all the stops to secure a legacy from the games across the midlands engine, and Stoke-on-Trent looks forward to working with them. Indeed, Stoke-on-Trent City Council wants me to put on record that it is extremely keen to get involved, to collaborate, to host, to work or to do whatever it takes with any of the games agencies in the interests of the entire west midlands region, but that involves reciprocation of interest from the relevant agencies in collaborating with Stoke-on-Trent. I would be interested to hear from the Minister what the great west midlands cities such as Stoke-on-Trent can expect in terms of engagement, tourism promotion and cultural and volunteering opportunities around the games.

To deliver a clear economic benefit, there needs to be promotion of how well connected Birmingham is to the wider west midlands, and how visitable the wider west midlands is and what its destinations and touristic experiences have to offer. The authentic Potteries, the world capital of ceramics, needs a platform from the Birmingham games. Its needs an opportunity to sell itself and to be sold by the tourism agencies as a must-see, must-visit experience, as a midlands city and as a cultural experience and investment opportunity like no other.

No Commonwealth games should be about money only. It should be about inspiring involvement in sports, culture, travel and coming together in something that is so much bigger than any one of us. However, if we try to pretend that it is not in any way about money, we will be condemning underdeveloped cities across the Commonwealth never to host the games. We need to prove that the games is worth the partnership funds it can leverage and the long-term socioeconomic legacy it can deliver. I support the Bill as a step towards getting that long-term benefit delivered.

3.6 pm

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friends, who are vocal champions for the west midlands, and particularly those Members who represent the Black Country. I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as a councillor on Birmingham City Council. I should also like to draw the House's attention to the fact that I believe I am one of the games' most enthusiastic supporters, not just because I am a west midlands MP but because many years ago I competed at club level in the very stadium that is to be the focal point of the games. That is, of course, the Alexander Stadium. That club, the Royal Sutton Coldfield Athletics Club, was in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell). Running for that club, I of course had my sights set on greater achievements, but hindsight is always a good thing. In fact, I had to wait until 2012—some 30 years later—to first set foot in an Olympic stadium, and then it was only as a spectator. Members can imagine my anticipation for 2022, when I will see the stadium that I first ran in become a Commonwealth games stadium.

The Bill contains important measures that I very much welcome—namely, those that touch on financial propriety rules and the proposal that the committee should report annually on the delivery of the games. These measures will give assurance to the financial rigour of the investments, particularly when the Government, the Mayor and the West Midlands Combined Authority have been so generous and supportive on the financial side, but we cannot adequately assess an organisation's financial rigour without also looking at the governance practices and its decision making. This is vital, as Birmingham City Council has its part to play in the planning, preparation and delivery of these games, and it does not have a good track record of governance or financial management. It is on its seventh chief executive in eight years, and it has had three successive section 24s issued in as many years. The power under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 is used when auditors are concerned about a council's financial sustainability.

I believe that, to make the games a success, we need to evaluate on an ongoing basis the structures and processes that involve decision making, essentially as a check to determine whether the information given to key stakeholders is reliable. We have the window of the world on these games and there should be a mechanism in place not just to challenge financial rigour but to challenge and scrutinise those who govern. In this instance, that is Birmingham City Council. An essential element of any corporate governance is to do just that, and these games are no different—indeed, the need is even greater as the investment is the hard-earned money of the taxpayer.

I would now like to touch on the fiscal legacy of the games. When the games were awarded, we knew nothing of covid-19 or that the games would play their part in a much-needed antidote to this vindictive and indiscriminate killer. The games will be vital to heal the economic scars that covid-19 has brought. We have a fantastic opportunity to capitalise on the international spotlight that the games will bring. When the games start and the visitors arrive, we will be showcasing a world class destination for trade, investment, education and tourism. The west midlands will benefit from £778 million of sport investment, the biggest since London 2012, which will include a brand new aquatic centre, a redeveloped athletics stadium and 1,400 new homes. What is not to love about these games?

I echo the sentiments of my hon. Friends and welcome with open arms the new Commonwealth jobs and skills academy, an initiative by the West Midlands Combined Authority and its partners, led magnificently by Andy Street. Some 41,000 games-time roles are set to be recruited. For businesses, there are £300 million-worth of contracts to be procured and, of course, impressive feats of engineering to make the city of Birmingham ready. My one wish is to urge the organising committee to procure local, invest local and recruit local, and to showcase all that is great about this region.

This is my shameless plug for my constituency of Stourbridge. I have some fantastic microbreweries—the Printworks brewery at the Windsor Castle Inn and Craddock's Brewery, to name but two. It would be fitting to see local beers showcased at the games as part of the hospitality. Some suggestions for beer names are “Stourbridge Sue”, “Bostin”—look it up—and “2022”. And we should not forget the awesome pies for which the Black Country is famed, perhaps served on ceramics from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon).

The games will be a celebration. I will not be donning a pair of running shorts again, but I can assure the Government, the organising committee, the fantastic west midlands Mayor, Andy Street, and all my constituents that I will be a strong and leading voice for the games. I very much welcome the Bill with the gusto it deserves.

3.12 pm

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): It gives me great pleasure to follow my Dudley borough and Black Country colleagues. I thank the Minister and his team for their efforts to bring the Bill to this stage, and all Members on both sides of the House who have contributed.

Birmingham 2022 represents a fantastic opportunity to showcase the wonderfully diverse offer of Birmingham and the wider west midlands region. The inward investment of some £778 million is also a significant economic opportunity for the region. Birmingham is so often described as the beating heart of the west midlands. I think many people will understand that characterisation, and some possibly even accept it. However, I would not be doing my job if I did not point out that a heart can only function if its arteries are working. Dudley, Walsall, Sandwell and Wolverhampton must be integral to the functionality of that heart.

Places such as Dudley and my neighbours in the Black Country have suffered disproportionately from an industrial legacy and the effects of globalisation, with so many jobs offshored to China and other places.

[Marco Longhi]

There are swathes of people who have quite simply been forgotten about over the past few decades. It is key that the games are used as a meaningful tool in a measurable way to level up, especially as we enter a post-covid-19 economic environment. We cannot allow the people of the Black Country to be forgotten any longer. The games provide an incredible opportunity to add an additional 41,000 jobs. My aspiration is that as many of those jobs as possible come to Dudley and the Black Country. That is what drives me in politics. We can stand here in this Chamber and offer platitudes and words of hope, but we have a chance to change lives and the benefits can be very real if we deliver.

The Black Country needs help, and it needed help before the onslaught of covid-19. I note with interest that Birmingham 2022 has established a legacy and benefits committee, and I very much look forward to having sight of a detailed legacy plan, which I hope will identify exactly how and by how much the whole region will benefit from this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The games cannot solve the complex generational problems I have spoken about, but it can provide a stepping stone for change, hope and recovery if opportunities are intelligently targeted to the right people. The Bill has my wholehearted support because, through the financial assistance to the organising committee, it enables the delivery of a great games—a games that could leave a transformational legacy for the rest of the region.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, with amendments.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We will now have a three-minute suspension of the House in order to allow Members to safely leave and others to safely come into the Chamber.

3.16 pm

Sitting suspended.

Zoos, Aquariums and Wildlife Sanctuaries: Reopening

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Leo Docherty.)

3.20 pm

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): It is with great pride that I rise today to speak up for all those magnificent institutions, organisations and charities throughout the United Kingdom who work tirelessly in the cause of conservation, education and research, the protection of endangered species, and animal welfare. Indeed, our great British zoos, aquariums and wildlife sanctuaries demonstrate the very best our nation has to offer to the world in looking after the amazing creatures of land, sea and air with whom we are so privileged to share this planet.

However, I do so with great sadness and fear—fear of what may be to come as our zoos, aquariums and wildlife sanctuaries now face some of the most challenging times they have ever had to deal with. That is why I call upon all Members of this House, and especially the Prime Minister and Her Majesty's Government, to take action this day to ensure that these magnificent institutions so dedicated to the survival and welfare of the animal kingdom do not face extinction themselves.

As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on zoos and aquariums, may I thank the Minister and the Government for the excellent co-operation they have shown in liaising with so many of our animal welfare organisations in recent weeks? The Prime Minister, as we all know, is someone who supports with gusto the fantastic conservation, education and research work being undertaken by zoos and aquariums across the country. It is with great pleasure that I invite the Minister here today, along with the Prime Minister, to visit London Zoo with me, as soon as it is possible to do so, to see at first hand our British conservation sector at work here in the United Kingdom, and to learn about all their tremendous achievements in protecting endangered species across the globe. I am proud to support a Government who hold animal welfare in the highest regard, along with the conservation of the natural world.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I know my hon. Friend is aware, having just mentioned London, of the very great importance in the scheme of things of Twycross Zoo, which is very well run by its chairman and chief executive but is facing significant problems of financing at the moment. What advice does he have for the Government on how an institution like Twycross could be helped?

Andrew Rosindell: I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. I have visited Twycross Zoo. It is an excellent zoo. I have met the chairman and chief executive, Geoff Hoon, a former Member of this House, on many occasions. It is an example of a great zoo that is in desperate need of additional support at this time. I hope the Minister will address that very point when she speaks at the end of this debate.

With British families looking for a safe day out from their homes, as they can now do, when we face a mass-extinction crisis that we have never seen before in our history, when the fate of our natural heritage is

reliant on the work of zoos, safari parks, aquariums and wildlife sanctuaries, and when the Government have rightly committed to improving the natural environment and supporting conservation, we must not fail to arm and equip this country's arsenal of conservationists.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I thank my great friend for allowing me to intervene. I do so because my hon. Friend, our colleague, puts a heck of a lot of effort into conservation of species. For example, he raised one hell of a lot of money to look after blue iguanas in the Cayman Islands. I know because I went there with him and they had increased from 20 and 200, largely thanks to my hon. Friend.

Andrew Rosindell: My hon. Friend is too generous. The blue iguana was on the brink of extinction in the Cayman Islands, which is a British overseas territory. I am pleased to say that that risk of extinction has now passed, with the support of many hon. Members. I pay tribute to the Government of the Cayman Islands for their work in ensuring that the wonderful blue iguana species continues to survive and thrive there.

We must support our zoos to carry on their incredible work, which is so admired around the world and supported so strongly by the British people. We are a nation of animal lovers.

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): I am glad that, wonderfully, our zoos and safari parks can open again on Monday, but we must also think of our animal welfare charities and sanctuaries. They also need enormous support. Many—80%—are in the open air and they should be included in the opening, but they also need to be looked after financially because many are suffering, and the welfare of our animals in those sanctuaries that do such good work must be considered too.

Andrew Rosindell: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. He is absolutely correct. The Government have allowed zoos and safari parks to open, but they are just the tip of the iceberg. Huge numbers of animal charities and organisations that care for animals all year round need the opportunity to open up, with social distancing, because they are in desperate straits. This is not just about zoos; it is about all animal welfare institutions across the country. Many Members have them in their constituencies and they all need guidance as soon as possible so that they can open and get back to normal.

Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con): Despite the fantastic news for zoos, particularly Chester Zoo, does my hon. Friend share my concern that there is a risk that the narrow drafting of the regulations on reopening means that the likes of Cotebrook Shire Horse Centre in my constituency will be forced to remain closed for what are, I have to say, spurious reasons: it is not a business whose main activity is keeping for exhibition animals not normally domesticated in England? If those horses were from Ireland, I suspect it would be all right, but the centre faces potential financial ruin. It can open the retail shop on Monday, but has to keep its open fields closed.

Andrew Rosindell: My hon. Friend makes exactly the point that I will make later and that many Members feel strongly about. The matter needs to be resolved for

organisations such as the shire horse centre in my hon. Friend's constituency. They need clear guidance. It is not acceptable that there has been permission only for safari parks and zoos to open, when other organisations are perfectly able to do that and are in dire financial straits at this time. They need the Government to be much faster in their reactions to allow things to reopen as soon as possible.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. I join him in welcoming the Government's decision to allow zoos and aquariums to reopen on Monday. Does he agree that, on the wider issue of regulations, we are now in the most terrible muddle? The Office for National Statistics dip-test survey of the population that was announced at the weekend mercifully revealed that only one in 1,000 people now has covid-19. That is massively to be welcomed, but in that case, should not we start lifting restrictions much more widely to allow other types of business to reopen to get the country back to work while there is still an economy left that is worth saving?

Andrew Rosindell: We probably cannot extend the debate to other types of business—I am sure you would stop us doing so, Mr Deputy Speaker. However, I sympathise strongly with my fellow Essex MP. We need to get Britain working again; we have been through a terrible trauma, but we now need to get our economy back on its feet. I am delighted that zoos and safari parks are allowed to get back to working again and to open their doors, but we need to widen things further and as fast as possible.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way—he is being exceptionally generous with his time. Like him, I welcome the fact that zoos are reopening, and Cotswold Wildlife Park and Gardens in my constituency will also be glad to hear that. However, I also have Crocodiles of the World, which is the UK's only crocodile zoo and which does essential conservation work. It will probably also be able to put in place social distancing. Should we not also look to see how we can help institutions such as that?

Andrew Rosindell: My hon. Friend is completely right. I did not know that he had Crocodiles of the World in his constituency. That is certainly one animal organisation I would love to visit. I have been to Crocodylus Park in Australia, but I did not know that Witney had such a great collection of crocodiles. However, I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. All these organisations are lacking guidance; they need clear leadership from the Government. All of them need the opportunity to open as fast as possible; otherwise, they will go bankrupt, and we will see animals euthanised. It would be a tragedy if that started to happen.

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I, too, welcome the news that zoos and wildlife parks are allowed to open from Monday. One of the most popular attractions in my constituency is Shepreth Wildlife Park, which is popular with not just my family but families across my constituency—so much so that when it had to close because of the coronavirus crisis, it was largely kept going by regular visitors coming in and giving

[Anthony Browne]

donations of money. It really has been touch and go, but the park will survive, and I am committed to making sure it does. Zoos can reopen from Monday—they cannot completely reopen, because bits such as the aquariums and the insect facilities cannot reopen—but it does not end there. My question to my hon. Friend and the Minister is, will the Government commit to giving support to zoos in the future to ensure that they are not so indebted that they cannot carry on?

Andrew Rosindell: I am sure the Minister will respond to that point at the end of the debate. Suffice it to say that I agree with everything my hon. Friend has said. There needs to be a much more widespread reopening of all these animal institutions. It is not fair to single out some but leave others. Some of them are in desperate straits, and the Government need to act as soon as possible.

This is a precarious time, but thanks to the timely work of the Government, and the tireless dedication of the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums, some zoos and safari parks, as has been mentioned, are now able to reopen from 15 June—and not before time. As members of BIAZA, our zoos and aquariums are world-leading in the care, conservation and research they carry out with their animals. They would normally be inspiring over 35 million visitors a year. That is clearly not going to happen this year, but now our zoos and aquariums will at last be allowed to welcome some people through their doors to inspire them with the wonders of the natural world, while supporting the protection and advancement of nature that we are all so passionate about in this House.

Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend for this debate. Seeing so many Members in the House during an Adjournment debate is a reflection of the importance of this issue. My hon. Friend correctly pointed out that the number of visitors to zoos and aquariums is markedly lower than normal, but a lot of us have spent a lot more time during this global pandemic reaching out to nature. However, our children and schoolchildren are not yet able to benefit from going to zoos and aquariums. If anything, that makes it even more urgent for these establishments to be reopened.

Andrew Rosindell: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Many children will not be returning to school, so this would be an ideal time to allow them and their parents to visit zoos and animal welfare organisations, given the educational benefits involved. That is another good reason why the Minister needs to hurry up and allow all these organisations to open as quickly as possible.

The limited reopening on 15 June will mean that visitors can once more hear the roar of the lions at Longleat, be inspired by the monkeys at Banham Zoo and—my personal favourite—look up upon the astonishing beauty of the giraffes at such places as Twycross Zoo, which was mentioned earlier. Of course, Twycross is one of Britain's leading zoos, doing magnificent work, and is well represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans). He cannot be present, but I pay tribute to him. He has been a great champion in working with me to highlight the plight faced by the zoo community.

In 2019, BIAZA members contributed more than £31 million directly to conservation, supported field conservation projects in 105 different countries around the world and protected many native species that would otherwise be on the precipice of extinction, including our own Scottish wildcat and pine hoverflies. I pay tribute to Edinburgh Zoo, which I visited two years ago. The new director, David Field, used to be the director of London Zoo. I pay tribute to the work that Edinburgh Zoo is doing, particularly with the pandas. I do not know whether any Members have had the chance, but I recommend a visit to Edinburgh Zoo to see the wonderful pandas. That is one import from China that we do not mind, isn't it, Mr Deputy Speaker?

Zoos, aquariums and all animal welfare organisations will be essential if our Government are to meet their international obligations towards biodiversity, including the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, as well as the commitments that they made to the British people during the election in the 25-year environment plan. I am sure the Minister will refer to those in her closing remarks.

The reopening is something to be truly celebrated. However, we are not out of the woods by a long way. Many zoos, aquariums and tropical houses are still unable to open, as has been mentioned already. Being predominantly indoors, I freely accept that there is a higher risk from visiting those places, although I know that the Government have been listening to the sector very closely and so will understand that there is a pathway forward for those places that needs to be addressed sooner rather than later.

The species survival commission of the world's leading authority in conservation, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, recognises the burden to zoos and aquariums resulting from covid-19 closures. It is urging local and national authorities in the UK and devolved Administrations to reach out and prioritise those facilities for reopening and financial relief.

Jersey Zoo is a splendid example of a British zoo that is not under the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom, being within a Crown dependency. This zoo does not have to obey UK Government guidelines, as Jersey has its own laws, and it has been a great example of a zoo that has opened much earlier than ours, and done so safely and with much success. Is it not wonderful that one of our Crown dependencies is leading the way? Perhaps we should follow that example.

In its letter to the Prime Minister, the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria highlights the fact that 25% of its European endangered species breeding programmes are managed by UK zoos and aquariums. It is therefore vital that, as one of the leaders in the field, we ensure that things are moved forward much faster than at present. Such facilities include Hull's fantastic The Deep aquarium, a linchpin of the local tourism economy, the National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth, London's own Sea Life aquarium and Somerset's Tropicquaria zoo. Without visitors, their incomes have dropped to zero. That is despite the exceptionally high costs of continuing to provide excellent welfare to some of the world's most endangered species.

As a closed building with staff furloughed, The Deep—one of the UK's best aquariums—still has operating costs of £200,000 a month, and lockdown is expected to set back its business by £2.5 million by the end of this year.

Sea Life London Aquarium has vet bills, utility bills, food bills and wages to pay, adding up to £100,000 per month to operate over the River Thames, just a few yards from this House. The National Marine Aquarium—the largest aquarium in the UK—which cares for creatures as diverse as barracudas, sharks and sea turtles, says that it costs £10,000 a day to run. The National Marine Aquarium and others need help now. They need help as soon as possible, Minister, or the real fear is that they will be lost.

All these organisations maintain very high standards of animal welfare and conduct vital conservation work. At the aquariums, the costly life-support systems are constantly running, and the operating costs are depleting any financial reserves that they had. Wildlife sanctuaries up and down the country are also caring for thousands of neglected animals. They need clarity and support, as organisations dedicated to animal conservation.

I am proud to be a member of the Wellgate Community Farm, which is located on the boundary of my constituency, in Collier Row, and promotes the care of farm animals in Romford and the surrounding area. I am also honoured to serve as a patron of the Remus Memorial Horse Sanctuary in Essex, which cares for many abandoned horses and farm animals. Those types of organisation need to be allowed to reopen too, and I hope that the Minister will feel able to clarify that point in her remarks.

Reopening is welcome, but it does not fully address the problem that our zoos, aquariums and wildlife sanctuaries are facing. Lockdown has left zoos, safari parks and aquariums reeling from its financial impact. Normally, these institutions receive 80% of their visitor income between the spring and the end of the summer—so we are right in the middle of the season—and they have lost a considerable proportion of that, putting their future in a deeply precarious position. The chief executive of the Yorkshire Wildlife Park recently revealed that lockdown had led to a £5 million loss in revenue for it. Chester Zoo has announced that it will likely see a staggering £24 million of debt by the end of the year. The hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) will hopefully say a few words later, and I thank him for all his support as a vice-chairman of the all-party group for zoos and aquariums. We work so well together because we are passionate about this issue, as I know so many Members are.

While safety restrictions limiting the numbers of visitors are required to maintain public safety, for some zoos that further reduces their ability to recuperate from the financial blow of lockdown. Normally, Chester Zoo would be receiving 20,000 visitors through its gates per day at its peak, whereas it is now reopening with restricted entry to only 3,000 visitors.

Already, these organisations have undergone drastic changes in a bid to survive. The Zoological Society of East Anglia, a charity that looks after Banham Zoo and Africa Alive!, is undergoing enormous restructuring, which has included job cuts, as the pandemic has left it with a £1.5 million deficit. Weather conditions in the preceding winter have further rocked the financial starting point. It is fair to say that, in many ways, these fantastic conservation organisations now face back-to-back winters, with not much of a break in between.

I am grateful to the Government for the support they have offered thus far, such as the zoos support fund and the guidance on job retention. But I have to tell the

Minister that, while I appreciate it, that support just will not be sufficient—a lot more needs to be done. The time is right for the Government to introduce new, expansive and comprehensive financial aid for the sector, which can then continue its fight for the nature that we all cherish and must not take for granted.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Does he share my concern that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs turned down the zoo-fund application by the Isle of Wight Zoo in Sandown because it had more than six weeks of operating income? The qualifying period was far too short and has left many zoos under extreme financial pressure.

Andrew Rosindell: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point. There are a lot of anomalies in the whole system: some zoos seem to be getting support while others are not, for various reasons, technical or whatever. The reality is that some of these organisations will close permanently if the Government do not rethink the extra support that they need at this time. I thank my hon. Friend for that extremely valid point. I had a great time when I visited the Isle of Wight, including the donkey sanctuary there; I know that my hon. Friend wants me to visit the sanctuary again, which I would be pleased to do.

BIAZA has helpfully suggested a number of ways that the Government could support this essential sector. I know the Minister will carefully consider the proposals, and I am sure she would be willing to meet me and BIAZA to discuss them in greater detail as soon as possible. Grant-based solutions will be the most effective for the sector, but there are a number of other suggestions, too. First, loans with longer repayment periods and more favourable terms would be welcomed, as the repayment plans for coronavirus business interruption loans and other loans are currently unachievable at a time when zoos and aquariums cannot predict how many visitors they will be able to welcome over the coming months.

Secondly, flexibility in the furlough scheme would also allow zoos and aquariums to adapt the scheme to their needs. As it stands, 60% of staff are estimated to have been furloughed across BIAZA zoos and aquariums. That is significantly less than other sectors, as keeping staff are essential to the maintenance of high standards of animal welfare. I can understand the Chancellor's reticence in not allowing furloughed staff to volunteer their time, but given that we cannot put a lion on furlough, and therefore neither can we furlough its keeper, I wonder if an exception might be made for those hard-working keepers to support critical animal welfare at this time. Why can they not come back as volunteers to help in the zoos and care for the animals that they are used to? The animals are familiar with their keepers. To say that they are furloughed and therefore banned from entering the zoo, even as volunteers, is absolutely wrong. The policy has been wrong right the way through and needs to be changed as a matter of urgency.

Charities are liable to pay 20% of the business rates chargeable, and local authorities have the ability to waive those rates. I ask that across the nation we see that discretion removed and charities given the lifeline of having the charges waved at this time of crisis. The system enabling the deferment of VAT has to be welcomed; however, zoos and aquariums are unlikely to be able to make the deferred payments on the current timetable.

[Andrew Rosindell]

Extending the timetable would be most welcomed by conservation organisations. Allowing zoos and aquariums to claim gift aid on 2019 visitor levels would provide a substantial boost to the financial viability of the charities and trusts that run zoos, aquariums and wildlife sanctuaries. There are more suggestions and I could go on for a lot longer, but I know the Minister will explore them all in depth, and I hope we will come back to the matter very soon.

Thanks to the Government's decisive action and the fortitude of the great British people, we are today meeting the challenges of coronavirus. That means that we can carefully open garden centres, markets and gardens, and, now, some of our essential wildlife organisations. Zoos throughout the country have followed the most up-to-date guidance and shared best practice between themselves. I implore Members of this House to support their local zoos at this time and arrange a visit as soon as they can to see for themselves the amazing work happening, which deserves our enthusiastic support.

I am pleased to be able to extend BIAZA's invitation not only to the Minister but to the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister to visit one of its member zoos to see for themselves the transformative adaptations of these places to fight against coronavirus and the amazing conservation work they do, and to witness how visitors can enjoy acres of open outdoors without putting themselves or their loved ones at risk. I am sure you will be pleased to hear, Mr Deputy Speaker, that when visiting these zoos, different households will be maintaining a social distance of the length of roughly one average zebra, or the wingspan of a golden eagle, or two thirds of a common hippopotamus from one another. It is possible to visit, and I hope that Members will take that opportunity.

The Government have taken steps to address what was quickly becoming an emergency in our animal sanctuaries, but this is not the end of the story. Financial support must be forthcoming for all zoos and aquariums, because whether they care for big cats or coral reefs, whether they are a sanctuary for native wildlife or reintroducing endangered species, they are still in trouble, and they need our help. We must not let coronavirus make the United Kingdom's proud record on conservation become endangered itself.

3.52 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): May I start by thanking the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) for allowing me to speak in the debate? I pay tribute to his outstanding opening contribution, which set the tone. I go beyond that and thank and congratulate him on the leadership he has consistently shown on this issue over many years. It is inclusive leadership, which takes in the detail of the case so very often. As we saw from his contribution, the work that he does is detailed and well informed, which makes it so much easier for the rest of us, because he does the hard miles. He is a fantastic leader of the all-party parliamentary group on zoos and aquariums, and I for one am extremely grateful to him.

Growing up in Cheshire, a visit to the zoo, whether with my family or with the school, was always a highlight. A visit with my family to Chester Zoo, which lies within

my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), is always a great highlight, as it is for so many other families around my neck of the woods.

It has been a difficult couple of weeks for the zoo, for the reasons that my friend, the hon. Member for Romford, talked about. It ran a high-profile public campaign, which I must inform the House it did not want to run. For a couple of weeks beforehand, it was briefing me and other interested parties on the difficulty of the situation, for all the reasons outlined by the hon. Gentleman: its responsibilities to maintain animal welfare; its responsibilities to maintain the scientific basis for which it is renowned; and its inability to do so because money was, quite frankly, running out. It made the very difficult decision to go public just over a week ago, when the Government made it clear that zoos were not allowed to reopen.

If I have a criticism of the Government at that point, it is that no reason was given for why zoos could not reopen. We know, for example, that IKEA was allowed to reopen, and I am pleased for it. We know that Kew Gardens was allowed to reopen, and it is a beautiful place to visit. Chester Zoo lies in 128 acres of parkland and gardens. The inconsistency was not easy to understand.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the leadership he has shown in the campaign and the excellent result we have got. Obviously, there are further things we need to do to secure the future of all the zoos in the country, but it is a good start. On the point of consistency, part of the zoo is in my constituency, as he has rightly pointed out, but also in my constituency is the Blue Planet aquarium. Unfortunately, as we have heard, it is not going to be able to reopen. Can he understand the confusion we have, where Cheshire Oaks, which has hundreds of shops with confined spaces, is basically next door to the aquarium and is able to reopen next week, but the Blue Planet aquarium will not?

Christian Matheson: My hon. Friend gives the perfect illustration of the confusion that the organisations feel and that members of the public will feel. I say to Ministers, to the Government and to Government Members who are speaking to Ministers that they should try to treat the public with a bit of respect. If there is a reason for the closures, they should explain it to us. They should tell us why some things can open and others cannot, but should not be inconsistent or illogical, for the very reason that my hon. Friend has talked about.

Chester Zoo is a huge expanse of parkland and gardens. It is not like some small private animal collection somewhere. It is a big outdoor event, and it is not opening any of its indoor attractions. My personal favourite, the bat house, as well as the camel house and the chimpanzee viewing area—all will be closed. Only the outdoor viewing areas will be open. The zoo has put in place very careful visitor management procedures regulating the flows within the zoo, but limiting, as my good friend the hon. Member for Romford talked about, the number of visitors outside the zoo, including by managing the car parks correctly, so that all visitors will be covid-safe.

Those procedures have been given the seal of approval by safety officers from the local authority, so Chester Zoo is akin to so many others in the work that it has done to ensure that it is safe for visitors. The Government,

I hope, will take that into account when they are considering further regulations or the relaxation of further regulations right across the patch.

Bob Stewart: I rise as someone who has contributed to Chester Zoo—two Barbary apes, Iggy and Flossie. They were married. Well, she was a rather reluctant bride, but they were married. We, the Cheshire Regiment, sent them all the way back from the middle east to Chester Zoo. I do not suppose they will still be alive, but there was a little plaque there that stated, “Iggy and Flossie: a gift of the Cheshire Regiment.” The hon. Gentleman knows the story. I say no more.

Christian Matheson: Ah, yes, the story of Iggy and Flossie from the hon. and gallant Member for Beckenham and the contribution of the Cheshire Regiment, as was then. His reputation is very sound in Chester, and it is well known in this House. Mr Deputy Speaker, would the House mind if I did not recount the story of Iggy and Flossie? It is perhaps best left for the bar when it reopens, knowing him, as we all do.

The work of the zoo is not simply as a visitor attraction. The hon. Member for Romford has talked about that. Chester Zoo was founded by George Mottershead as a zoo without bars, but it has become a world conservation centre. In particular, I am always proud to talk about the work that it is doing on sustainable palm oil. Chester Zoo is itself leading on the campaign to take palm oil produced in mass plantations in south-east Asia out of the food production chain and the consumer products production chain, and instead to use palm oil produced in plantations that do not completely destroy the rainforest in those areas, thereby conserving the habitats of many magnificent creatures, such as orangutans.

Let us be clear: as soon as budgets start to dwindle—the hon. Member for Romford is right that Chester Zoo is losing hundreds of thousands of pounds every month and will make a loss this year—those conservation programmes are the first to go. The work that is being led in the United Kingdom and is being undertaken to maintain habitats across the world will therefore be very badly damaged. It is absolutely essential, therefore, that zoos are able to continue to bring in the income, which is providing not just jobs and tourism revenue, but a real difference across the world in terms of ecology.

In paying tribute to the work of the zoo, I have to say that the zoo’s management team has been absolutely outstanding in ensuring that the zoo is ready to open, and that the public will be protected, and I thank it for that.

Justin Madders *rose*—

Christian Matheson: I was just about to turn to my hon. Friend and next door neighbour, so I will give way.

Justin Madders: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. One of the most important aspects of the zoo’s work is with the schools in my constituency, which is, no doubt, the case in his constituency. Does he agree that that kind of important ecological work needs to carry on, and that, given the difficulty we have with schools going back, we need to make sure that that work is given some extra focus in the months ahead?

Christian Matheson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I visited Chester Zoo many times as a child, as I am sure he and other hon. Members did. That link with

the natural world ties in with our responsibilities as a human race not to destroy the planet, but to leave it in a better condition than we found it in. That can be done in practical ways, as I have talked about with palm oil and as the hon. Member for Romford has also mentioned. Talking to our youngsters and giving them an appreciation of the wider world is important. Of course, it is about the animals, but it is also about the biodiversity and the habitats in which the animals live.

I want to thank the public for their massive support for Chester Zoo. I had so many hon. Members asking me, “What’s happening with the zoo?” That was because they had received so many emails. In one of numerous conversations that I have had with the zoo management last week, they said, “Chris, we are going to set up an email campaign so that people can email their MPs to tell them that they want to keep the zoo open.” I thanked them very much, but I did not mean it. Hon. Members from right across the House have been touched by this campaign. I will not be begrudging with the Minister at this stage. The hon. Member for Romford was right on that. I am pleased that the decision was reversed. Much more needs to be done, but I am grateful that Ministers did listen finally and took the decision. I thank the public for their support for Chester Zoo and their support for the work that Chester Zoo has undertaken and will continue to undertake, and I commend the hon. Gentleman for his leadership, which does have an effect in the United Kingdom and right across the globe.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): As hon. Members can see, there is quite a bit of interest in this debate, so please be mindful of that when you are making contributions, particularly of the length of the contribution.

4.2 pm

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I congratulate both my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) and the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on their fantastic speeches. It is a testament to how important this issue is that the Chamber is this full on a Thursday afternoon.

When people ask me where I am the Member of Parliament for, I normally say Whipsnade Zoo, because it is by far the best known part of my constituency. It occupies 600 stunningly beautiful acres of the south Bedfordshire countryside and it is a part of the Zoological Society of London, which is joined with Whipsnade Zoo, so London Zoo and Whipsnade Zoo are both part ZSL, the same organisation.

I wish to start with a big thank you to the Minister. I have said on a number of occasions that her Department, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, has been—if I can put it this way—on the side of the angels in this debate. It has been standing up for zoos and doing the right thing, so I would like to pass on my thanks to her and the Department for what they have done. Monday will be a great day. At 10 o’clock on Monday morning, Whipsnade Zoo will open. There is a morning session and an afternoon session. I urge people to please go on the website and book. If they are going in the morning, they should go early so that they can make the most of it—they should not turn up in the late morning as they will not get full enjoyment from the experience. They should go on the website and book

[Andrew Selous]

because normally in the Easter and May bank holiday periods Whipsnade will take in just under £8 million of income, so that is £8 million of income that it has lost. It costs the zoo £2.3 million a month to run London and Whipsnade Zoos and do all the vital global conservation research work. They are in a £25 million black hole.

As the hon. Member for City of Chester said absolutely rightly, it is the vital conservation work that will be first to go. Of course London and Whipsnade Zoos will put the animals—their 20,000 animals—first, as they should, but no one here wants to see that vital conservation work go, because it is so important. The ZSL research provides the Living Planet Index, which tells us of our indescribably awful biodiversity loss. Members will know from the United Nations report last year that 1 million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction, many of those within decades. Since the 16th century, we have already lost 680 vertebrate species, and I do not want us to lose any more on our watch. It is too important: we must stick up for nature and the glorious animal kingdom.

Whipsnade does so much. It has reintroduced tigers to Nepal, Kenya and Indonesia, and rhinos to Nepal and Kenya. It has helped restore coral reefs in the Philippines, and it has helped get angel sharks back off the coast of Wales and even seals and eels in the Thames right next to this building. And these zoos mean so much. I spoke to a lady in my constituency last week who has given all her holiday money to the zoo; it meant that much to her. People really do care about this in this country.

However, the costs are huge and ongoing, and the income has been eliminated. That is why I say to the Minister that the first part—the reopening—is excellent and fantastic, and thank you so much, but we need a multimillion pound package so that we do not lose the vital global conservation work. The research by Whipsnade led to the Dasgupta review, which played quite a significant part in helping to bring COP26 to the United Kingdom.

Not to put too fine a point on it, it is a little irritating to Whipsnade and London Zoos that they see institutions such as Kew and the Natural History Museum regularly getting significant amounts of Government money, whereas I do not think any of the zoos we have talked about today are in receipt of Government funding. These are institutions that are normally financially self-sustainable and do not come cap in hand to the Government, but they have had their income taken away and their costs have continued. That is why I have one more request, please Minister, for one more final shove: let us get this multimillion-pound package to help all our zoos survive and not lose that vital conservation work.

4.7 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) gets a result before he has even opened his mouth. That is certainly an example to other parliamentarians of how to do things, and I pay tribute to him for his great work in this field.

Just like my hon. Friend, I am an animal lover. In fact, we have been all over the world, and hon. Members can be reassured that whenever I travel with him there is always a visit to a zoo. We have been to Shanghai Zoo

to see the pandas and to Madagascar to see the lemurs, and all over the world we have seen these marvellous animals. Before I forget, my hon. Friend mentioned Edinburgh Zoo and the pandas there—I have been there—and I think we should get our money back. These two pandas were leased from China on the basis that there would be the pitter-patter of tiny feet, and for a long while now the Scottish people have waited for something to happen but it is not happening. However, as my hon. Friend said, it is good that China is at least prepared to lease these animals.

My long-suffering mother had a small child who was animal mad. Every time I wanted to be taken out I wanted to go to a zoo, so we went to a zoo. I wanted to ride on an animal, and there I would be in the queue with the ice-cream—a 99—melting as we eventually got to the animal at the front. In those days, of course, we could ride on practically anything, although I do not think I ever rode on a lion or a tiger. However, I did see Guy the Gorilla.

My hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) spoke about Whipsnade, which is an absolutely fantastic place, and I love the giraffes there. Zoos are very controversial, but I will not have a word said against them.

Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): Can my hon. Friend update me on the fate of Basildon Zoo, a gem of my childhood? It was in a disadvantaged area, and we needed a zoo; it gave me a chance to go somewhere, and we did not have to pay a lot of money to get there. What is the fate of Basildon Zoo?

Sir David Amess: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I think she was a small child at the time and lived around the corner from the zoo. When I was the Member for Basildon Zoo, the zoo gave a great deal of pleasure to people and the animals were well looked after, but of course there was a campaign to close the zoo, and sadly it no longer exists.

In this modern day and age, in the zoos I have seen the keepers love the animals, which are very well looked after. We do not keep polar bears in zoos, and the big cats are not pacing up and down anymore, so I think, by and large that our animals in zoos are well looked after, alongside those in safari parks.

I am going to say something that will upset—

Bob Stewart *rose*—

Sir David Amess: Well, it will not upset my hon. and gallant Friend.

Bob Stewart: It certainly will upset me.

I am grateful for the opportunity to intervene on my good friend the Member for Southend Zoo. I think zoos have a hugely important task in saving animals, and I speak from personal experience. I found a European brown bear in a cage in no-man's land. It had existed there with nothing for three weeks. My soldiers and I lifted the bear up—it was called MacKenzie and it was big, 7 feet—took it away and managed to get it into Amsterdam Zoo, where it had a glorious rest of life, rather than being stuck in a cage in the middle of Bosnia with no food and no water. Zoos do a great job in preserving bears like MacKenzie.

Sir David Amess: My hon. Friend has a big heart, and has just very much proved that by what he has said; that was a wonderful thing to do.

I am going to say something slightly controversial, however: I am not a fan of safaris. In fact, I wish safaris were not advertised as much as they are now, because, frankly, on a number of these safari expeditions the animals which just happen to appear are not kept terribly well.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): The hon. Gentleman mentions safaris. One of the things that strikes me about our zoos and wildlife parks in this country is that they afford the opportunity for families and children to become acquainted with animals, many of them endangered species, or the pandas that I have in the zoo in Edinburgh West—not just in my constituency but almost well within earshot of the lions. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that our zoos are a wonderful educational facility for people who will perhaps never have the opportunity to visit South Africa, or any other part of Africa, and take part in a safari?

Sir David Amess: I absolutely do agree with the hon. Lady, and I must say I think the Isle of Wight Zoo is also a superb—I have visited it a number of times.

I am very keen on safari parks. I have been on a number of safaris: we get in all the gear, get in a boneshaker of a vehicle, get bitten by mosquitoes, and then we are told we are going to see all the wild animals, but half the time we cannot see them, but then I do not particularly want to see lions eating other animals.

To get back to zoos, a number of them have rescued animals from circuses. Those animals live a lot longer than they otherwise would, and are very well cared for indeed.

I want to say something to my parliamentary colleagues on this side of the House. This is the best attended Adjournment debate on an animal welfare measure since my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight) had an Adjournment debate about 30 years ago, when the now noble Lord Waldegrave responded, about the little monkeys we used to see sitting on top of pianos and so forth. It is wonderful that so many colleagues on the Government side have become so enthusiastic about animal welfare again.

I want to praise Lorraine Platt, the founder of the Conservative animal welfare group. Given that I have been here a little while, I have observed my party on an interesting journey in animal welfare. I do not wish to upset some of my colleagues, but let me say that we are not going to bring back foxhunting, we are not going to have badger-baiting again and we are not going to be snaring animals. I am proud that my party's record on animal welfare is first-class, and I congratulate the Minister on that.

I very much agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Romford that this announcement is extremely good. I do not want to be churlish about it, but I just wish to point out the situation of the Sea Life Adventure aquarium in Southend; my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) has left now, but he is right to say that this is another reason why Southend should become a city. We will have a city status contest and it will be to coincide with the Duke of Edinburgh's 100th birthday next year. The following year, Her Majesty

will have been on the Throne for 75 years. This city contest will happen and Southend will become a city. This wonderful aquarium in Southend, which my hon. Friend the Member for Romford has been to, has celebrated its 27th year. It closed on 23 March and is in need of financial support to care for its 2,000 animals. They need a high level of maintenance; the cost is at least £30,000 a month, although this is relatively small in comparison with zoos mentioned by other colleagues. Frustratingly, the aquarium has not been given the green light to reopen, although it could practise social distancing, and when it applied for a grant it was turned down. I hope that she will send messages to her officials and give the aquarium good news.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romford on his success in securing this Adjournment debate. Given the success he has had before even opening his mouth on the matter, I am sure he will continue to achieve so much more for animals. I say to him: well done.

4.17 pm

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) on securing this brilliant debate, to which I am delighted to contribute. I hope Members will not mind if I return to the theme of Chester Zoo, because it is just down the M56 from my constituency. The hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) mentioned the email campaign that the zoo launched. I can tell him that I was inundated with emails and telephone calls. I have even had some letters and Zoom calls. Constituents have used every method to contact me over the past few weeks to tell me about the desperate plight of Chester Zoo, and I am pleased to be here today to speak on behalf of those constituents who have raised the issue with me. Many constituents work at the zoo and the situation has been a great concern to them. The past few weeks have shown to me, as a proud Cheshire MP, how deeply people rightly care about the conservation work undertaken by Chester Zoo. That support extends not just through Cheshire and the north-west of England, but right across the UK, because of the fantastic television programme that regularly airs, showing the detailed work the zoo does to preserve animals and the environmental work it undertakes.

I was therefore pleased to speak last weekend to Lord Goldsmith, who gave us some reassurances on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Government that they would commit to any measures necessary to ensure that our zoos would be preserved. I say to the Minister today, following a very positive and reassuring message from the Prime Minister, that it is not just about opening zoos; it is about ensuring that our zoos are resourced properly for the future. I am keen to share with her some more detail about Chester Zoo, because it has been particularly badly hit over the past few weeks.

Aside from its environmental work, Chester Zoo's contribution to the economy of the north-west of England is of great importance. It really is an integral part of our visitor economy. If we had lost it, it would have had such a wide economic impact. The zoo alone contributes £47 million to the regional economy. It supports 1,700 jobs, protects wildlife in more than 30 countries around the world, and engages, as the hon. Member for City of

[Andy Carter]

Chester (Christian Matheson) said, 150,000 young people every year on the future of our planet. I have to say that one of the highlights of every year for my family is to go to Chester Zoo and see what it has done differently each year. It really is a treat to go there. Two million visitors regularly go to Chester Zoo. This year it is likely to be half that and that will have a detrimental effect on its ability to work.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): I am not sure whether I need to declare an interest as the adoptive stepfather of a number of the animals at Dudley Zoo and even, apparently, a step-grandfather now. Does my hon. Friend agree that whether it is Chester Zoo, Whipsnade Zoo or Dudley Zoo, reopening is a fantastic first step, but it is not enough? For zoos to survive and thrive, they will all need the support of their local communities visiting and supporting them to keep them going and helping them to rebuild.

Andy Carter: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. It is vital that members of the community get behind our zoos, visit when they can and join the charitable foundations that underpin so many of them around the country.

I am confident, from having conversations with the executive team at Chester Zoo, that when it does reopen on Monday that can take place very safely. I urge my constituents to go online to book and visit in the coming weeks, so that people in Cheshire can really be a part of that.

Edward Timpson: My hon. Friend will know that Chester Zoo has, I think, about 125,000 members, but of course in order to get as much revenue as quickly as possible through visitors, it would be helpful if it allowed others who are not members to go there first, despite the fact that the members are probably champing at the bit to do so. Is that a message that he would also like to send, so that it can get money in as quickly as possible?

Andy Carter: Absolutely. I thank my hon. Friend for that important contribution. Chester Zoo already has a programme in place to welcome members in the evening, but it wants non-members to go in the daytime. That is really important. The revenue that comes from welcoming non-members to Chester Zoo for the first time is really important to ensure the viability of the zoo.

The zoo has developed some of the most detailed covid-secure plans of any in the sector: carefully regulated numbers, ticketing, and enforcement of social distancing. I was really interested to hear about its programme to make sure children stay in the right place. It has markings on the ground with crocodiles—I am sure they are not real crocodiles—to make sure children know that if they cross the line the consequences will not be good.

No corners have been cut at Chester Zoo during the closedown: it has continued to feed the animals and it has not stopped doing its incredible work to prevent animal extinction. What has stopped is the money rolling in and that is where we really need to put our efforts now. Will the Minister look carefully at how her Department can offer continued support to the sector? I am aware of the incredible public fundraising that has gone on for Chester Zoo, with in excess of £1 million

raised by membership donations. May I ask the Minister to have a discussion with colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to allow the local authority to use some of its unused business support grant to matchfund that £1 million? That would really give the support that Chester Zoo needs to continue to be a jewel in the Cheshire crown.

4.24 pm

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) on securing the debate and on making one of the best Adjournment speeches I have heard here. I thought it was thoroughly excellent. Indeed, there were also very feisty and passionate speeches from my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter) and the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson). I did not realise that Chester Zoo had so many friends. I wonder what I am missing out on.

The Isle of Wight is fortunate to have several zoos, animal sanctuaries and animal collections. We have the Isle of Wight Zoo, Amazon World, Monkey Haven and the donkey sanctuary, which I know my hon. Friend the Member for Romford has visited. Also, my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) says that he has visited Isle of Wight Zoo. Prior to covid, it was going from strength to strength. We are a nation of animal lovers, but on the Island, we are an island of animal lovers as well.

I am glad that the Government have responded, and I congratulate the Minister because I know that she is on side and does her job well and diligently. To open non-essential retail but not zoos or animal sanctuaries would rightly be seen to be contrary and wrong. It is also true to say that this is a complex picture. Some of those animal collections that I mentioned are keen to open as soon as possible, but some cannot do so because they are largely indoors. Some are wary of opening because of the potential lack of visitors, which I will come to in a second. However, where they can reopen, they should be given the freedom to act responsibly. Indeed, that is an important motif for going forward in general. It is also important for the Minister to understand that Isle of Wight Zoo, the donkey sanctuary and Monkey Haven are not just visitor attractions, important though that is to our economy; they are also last-refuge sanctuaries for endangered animals and animals such as the tigers in the Isle of Wight Zoo, which have been poorly treated and faced cruelty in the past. They now have a happy home where they are.

Zoos and animal sanctuaries cannot restrict their outgoings in the way that other sectors, such as non-essential retail, can do. In looking after its animal collection, the Isle of Wight Zoo incurs running costs of approximately £50,000 a month in order to do what is morally right, and also to stay within the terms of the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 and the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which I am sure the Minister is very knowledgeable of. I am concerned that, like other zoos, Isle of Wight Zoo was turned down for the DEFRA funding package because of its financial responsibility in having more than six weeks of operating income at the time of applying. I will come on to that in a minute. Clearly, the permanent closure of zoos and animal attractions is a significant issue for our communities and our visitor economies, but it is also a moral issue, because the animals could face being put

down. The zoo and the other animal attractions have told me that they have tried and tested safety measures in place, should they be allowed to reopen.

I know that others want to speak, so I shall be brief and wrap up now, but may I suggest some measures that may possibly have wider support from here and also from our communities? On the DEFRA support package, can we please look beyond a six-week financial qualifying period in order to work out how we can enable our animal collections and zoos to survive effectively three winters: this winter; the financial winter they are having at the moment, even if they can reopen from next week onwards; and next winter? We need to look at keeping as many of them as possible as viable entities through to next year, when they can start to pick up again.

I want to turn to the proposal for a 1-metre rule. Clearly, for the crocodiles mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts), one would need significantly more social distancing than even 2 metres, but apart from that, I believe that the 2-metre rule is going to have a significant impact on so much that is happening in this country. I would much rather we all agreed to wear masks and had a 1-metre rule, so that we could start to get back to some kind of normality. My zoos and animal attractions would very much welcome a review of the 2-metre rule and the adoption of a 1-metre rule.

Most importantly, zoos and animal attractions not only need the animals and the keepers who look after them; they also need people to visit them, in order to regain an income and to have a purpose. We need to look at the wider visitor economy, in order to extend the payback period for the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme—CBILS—and to establish a regeneration fund for zoos and other visitor attractions to help make them more robust so that they can survive financial traumas like this in future. We need more flexibility for council support, so that my council can step in with some of the leftover funds from the grants, which it is not currently allowed to do. We need to look at reducing VAT on tourism for the next year or two, so that people will want to go to places where there are likely to be zoos and visitor attractions. We also need, as has rightly been said, to look at gift aid.

My destination marketing organisation—my tourism board—has effectively led the country, along with Cornwall, in developing best practice to get visitors back, so that we can again get kids and grannies and people of all ages back to enjoy the zoos and the animal attractions. They include Isle of Wight Zoo, which my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West would be welcome to come back to, and the wonderful donkey sanctuary, which my hon. Friend the Member for Romford would be welcome to revisit, as well as Monkey Haven and Amazon World.

4.29 pm

Matt Vickers (Stockton South) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) for the opportunity to speak in this very important debate. I want to talk about a place that could be far, far away: a tropical rainforest where people can mingle with a meerkat, tickle a tarantula, sit with a snake or mix with a marmoset, while seeing butterflies of all shapes, sorts, varieties and colours. This tropical rainforest is not the Amazon, but up north, on the banks of the Tees.

Butterfly World is a beyond-unique place; an independent, family-owned business, which has educated and entertained families from across the north-east for years—and it enjoys a solid 4.5 on Tripadvisor.

I am sure that all will appreciate and agree—even Joe Exotic and Carole Baskin—the important role that our zoos and aquariums play, from helping with the conservation of some of our most endangered species to educating children on breeds and behaviours. I welcome the measures that the Government have put in place to support zoos and aquariums, as well as the decision to reopen outdoor zoos on 15 June.

However sunny Stockton might get, it would be a stretch for me to describe it as tropical, so unfortunately, this amazing venue is indoors. Despite the greenhouse-like building maintaining its own ecosystem, it is understood to fall in the indoor zoo category, so it will not be able to open. Like many zoos, Butterfly World is reliant on seasonal income and it is open only eight months of the year, so such a long period of closure threatens the future of this regional treasure. While to us this pandemic seems like it has gone on for ever, to some breeds of butterfly, it has gone on a lifetime.

The owners of Butterfly World remain ready with a comprehensive plan to open safely under a series of social distancing measures. The public are ready to visit, and such is the appetite and feeling of support that they have donated to a fund to try to secure the future of this regional gem. Other non-essential venues will open their doors to the public on 15 June. I ask the Minister, my honourable butterfly brooch-wearing friend, whether she might consider the case of Butterfly World—and, should she visit the north-east when things change a little, I would be delighted to welcome her and her brooch to Butterfly World to meet Barry the blue-tongued skink.

4.32 pm

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) not only for securing the debate, but for such a wonderful, detailed and passionate contribution. We have heard so much about Chester Zoo in particular today, but there are, of course, many other zoos in the country. If people have already been to Chester Zoo and would like to visit a different one that has a castle on its grounds, a living museum within a stone's throw, a nature reserve and a site of special scientific interest, come to Dudley. I was going to be delivering a slightly different speech, so I cannot overstate just how pleased I am that the Government have given the go-ahead for zoos to reopen on Monday.

Christine Jardine: Does the hon. Gentleman share my disappointment, and, I assume, the disappointment of many hon. Members from Scotland, that the Scottish Government have not extended the same opportunity to zoos and wildlife parks in Scotland, which are not reopening on Monday? Edinburgh Zoo in my constituency, in particular, has spoken about how it will not last the summer if it does not get the same sort of support as English facilities have had from the UK Government.

Marco Longhi: Indeed I do, and I was not aware of that—perhaps that is a question for the Minister though.

Dudley Zoo in my constituency will be gladly throwing open its doors to ticketed visitors once more. If the number of emails and social media messages that I have received are anything to go by, I have no doubt that my

[Marco Longhi]

constituents are as excited as I am that they will be able to visit this treasured attraction again next week. I would really like to pay tribute to the zoo's staff, who have admirably gone above and beyond their remit to ensure that the animals have continued to be cared for despite the uncertainty and anxiety caused by lockdown.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): I agree with my hon. Friend on the role that staff play in these institutions. I am another Member of the House who must speak up warmly for Chester Zoo—a great inspiration to me as a child—and the staff who took the extra time to support me and many of the people who have written in from South Ribble to advocate for the cause, saying how delighted we all are to see that they can start to welcome visitors again.

Other Members have made the point about the importance of inspiring the next generation and the role that the staff play in that. I am not sure how many Members are aware of this, but I am a qualified field guide—a safari ranger—out in Africa. [Interruption.] Yes, I have been charged by a rhino, and yes, politics can be more scary. The staff at Dudley Zoo, and certainly at Chester Zoo, in the '80s helped to kindle that spirit and allowed me to understand the importance of the environment, the importance of viewing this as a whole, and the importance of zoos as part of the conservation effort. I very much look forward to them continuing in that work from Monday.

Marco Longhi: I thank my hon. Friend for that.

Places like Dudley Zoo, as we have heard, are more than just visitor attractions. They carry out vital conservation work, ensuring that future generations can enjoy our natural world and the incredible species that live within it. But this is made possible only by paying visitors and vital donations. Some visitor attractions have been able to close their doors and retain business viability because the generous furlough scheme and other financial help has covered most of their overheads while operational costs have effectively reduced to zero, but zoos have still needed to retain many operational functions to keep their animals alive. My own zoo in Dudley has already lost £1.2 million since the start of lockdown and was unable to apply for funding packages for zoos because it, like others, had to retain, through prudence but through necessity as well, more than six weeks' reserves.

Being able to reopen to paying visitors again will, of course, bring comfort to our zoos, but this is a crucial time for them, as the summer months would normally generate surpluses and build up sufficient reserves to survive through the winter and spring when takings are much lower and costs often higher. However, we all know that this summer's income will be seriously curtailed, with reserves already depleted. This means that several zoos such as mine in Dudley may face very real difficulties in pulling through the winter months to come. So while I am of course deeply grateful for the £14 million support scheme, my plea to Ministers, on behalf of my constituency zoo and other zoos, as I have heard today from across the country, is to revisit the support package and the eligibility criteria, as many jobs could be lost and animals destroyed if the current six-week model is retained.

4.38 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I start by paying special thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), who is such a champion for zoos in chairing the all-party parliamentary group, as he was in his inspirational speech. He set the scene so well and provided the framework within which we are all now talking.

I want to speak for a few minutes about Africa Alive! in Kessingland, just south of Lowestoft in my constituency, which is run by the Zoological Society of East Anglia, which also has Banham Zoo in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss). This organisation does great work in so many aspects, as I shall explain.

The best part of my job—this tremendous job we all have—is that each summer, I spend half a day at Africa Alive! It is a wonderful experience and probably the thing I look forward to most. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) referred to zoos being controversial. I sense that, in many ways, we have moved on from that; we have moved on from the cages. Zoos used to be very inward-looking, and they are not now. Africa Alive! is outward-looking, and that is what so special about it and why it is a linchpin of the local community and the local economy. I want to highlight five points about it.

Africa Alive! does great conservation work, looking after and supporting species from that wonderful continent of Africa. I have never been on a safari, and I do not think I ever will, but Africa is there on the doorstep of places like Lowestoft, Beccles and Bungay for people who will never have the opportunity to go and see those animals.

Africa Alive! also provides employment opportunities, with highly specialist jobs as keepers. For so many people in the area I represent, it is their first rung on the employment ladder—that first job that can lead on to others. So many people I have met say, "I did my first job at Africa Alive!" There is also the education and outreach work. Schools come to it, but it also goes to the schools. The Zoological Society of East Anglia gets out across East Anglia into 1,000 schools.

It is a tremendous tourism attraction. Tourism is very important on the Suffolk and the Norfolk coast, reaching out into the Norfolk and Suffolk broads. As part of someone's week in our area, they want things to do, and they go to Africa Alive!, which is one of the biggest tourist attractions in East Anglia.

I will make one final point about what Africa Alive! does. I got a number of emails over the last week. One of them was from someone I had not heard from or seen for over 40 years and who is now working in Thailand, saying, "Come on! Pull your finger out! We need to save this wonderful treasure." The email that struck me most was one that said, "Me and my mother have had tremendous mental health anguish. Going to Africa Alive! and walking round that 70-acre wildlife park gives us the comfort, the rest and the assurance that we need to get away from some very difficult challenges for us."

The announcement this week was extremely welcome, and it is very good news. I think Africa Alive! would say that it gives it a fighting chance of survival, and that is wonderful. But as my hon. Friend the Member for

Romford said, more needs to be done. Animals are not like rides—you cannot turn them off, and flexible furloughing is therefore very important. The zoos support fund is welcome, but as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely), there is an issue with the conditions of it. A lot of zoos are charities, and they have requirements for the amount of money they have in the bank, which automatically precludes them from being able to access that fund. We need to look at that again, and I urge the Minister to do that. As I said, the best part of my job is going to Africa Alive! every summer. I want to be able to do that for the next few summers as well.

4.43 pm

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): I thank the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) for allowing me to speak in this debate. Like many of my colleagues across the House, this issue is particularly important to me, as the Yorkshire wildlife park is located in my constituency. Since March this year, the gates of the Yorkshire wildlife park and many other zoos have been closed, and the park has had to spend hundreds of thousands of pounds a month while generating no income.

I fully understand the reason for lockdown, and I thank the good people of Don Valley for playing their part in saving lives and protecting the NHS. That said, as we are now coming out of lockdown I am delighted that the Government are finally allowing zoos and wildlife parks to reopen.

The park will open on Monday 15 June, and with the help of its wonderful staff it has managed to get everything in place for a safe opening. It has also been able to invite environmental health officers to carry out an inspection. They attended the site on Tuesday and confirmed that the park has everything in place. I am grateful that the Government have recognised the steps that wildlife parks and zoos across the country have taken, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that such venues are fully prepared to operate in a way that keeps the public safe.

As my hon. Friend is all too aware, children have spent a huge amount of time away from the classroom as a result of the pandemic. They are our future scientists, teachers and zoologists. It is therefore only right that educational institutions such as Yorkshire wildlife park are reopened. After all, such zoos and parks allow children to learn and develop, as well as to appreciate the importance of nature. The reopening of wildlife parks will therefore offer a great opportunity for children to catch up on the learning that they have missed, and to improve their wellbeing simply by being in a wonderful, safe outdoor environment.

As we come out of lockdown, the Government must begin to take urgent action to save businesses. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that, as it was essential that we locked down to save lives, it is now essential that the Government act quickly so that people have jobs and recreational sites to go back to at the end of this. I therefore welcome the recent announcements and I am less anxious about the loss of jobs and educational sites in my constituency.

That said, I will conclude by asking the Minister the following questions. First, can she assure the owners of zoos and wildlife parks that any additional measures introduced for the safe reopening of those facilities will

be reasonable and will not overburden such businesses? Secondly, will the Government continue to engage in dialogue with zoos and wildlife parks, and provide them with the extra financial support that they will need beyond the immediate crisis? It will no doubt be in the forthcoming winter months that zoos and wildlife parks will be at their most vulnerable.

4.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): What a tremendous afternoon! It takes me back to what I think was the most exciting debate in the Chamber since I have been here, which was about hedgehogs. The House was full, wasn't it, Madam Deputy Speaker? It shows what a nation of animal lovers we are. This is what gets us out. Our constituents are great animal lovers too, and they galvanise us into action. I think it shows that things can work through Government and we are listening.

I thank everybody for taking part, and in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) for raising the matter. As chair of the zoos and aquariums all-party parliamentary group, which I was a member of as a Back Bencher, he has long promoted the cause of well-run zoos, and I know that he has been actively promoting their cause during the pandemic when they have had to close. I thank him for his passion and determination.

What a wonderful story that was about the blue iguana. I do not know if you were in the Chair for it, Madam Deputy Speaker, but what a great tale that was, and congratulations. I thank all Members from across the House who have taken part and mentioned so many zoos, wildlife sanctuaries and aquariums. Just out of interest, there are 269 licensed zoos in England and 338 if exemptions are included, so it is a lot of enterprises.

I will touch first on some of my own experience. Chester Zoo has been mentioned so much in the debate. I was fortunate to go there when I was the Tourism Minister briefly. Although it was a brilliant huge open space, with so much education, the thing that I was so impressed with was the conservation work and how, like many of our zoos, it plays such an important role on the global stage. The zoo does incredible work on black rhinos and the greater one-horned rhinos, on Andean bears and, as mentioned by the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), on sustainable palm oil. It is about not just the animals but food products, too. That is so important.

I want to thank the other Members who mentioned Chester Zoo: my hon. Friends the Members for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson) and for Warrington South (Andy Carter), as well as the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), who is no longer in the Chamber. I also thank all the other Members who mentioned other zoos: my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) mentioned Twycross Zoo; my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) made such a strong case for Whipsnade Zoo; we heard about Yorkshire Wildlife Park from my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher); and my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) mentioned Shepreth Wildlife Park.

[Rebecca Pow]

The contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) was more of a waxing lyrical about all animals, but we finally got to the aquarium. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) mentioned the enterprises on the Isle of Wight; my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (Matt Vickers) mentioned Butterfly World, which does sound rather captivating; the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) mentioned Edinburgh Zoo; and my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Marco Longhi) mentioned Dudley Zoo. So many places were mentioned.

I wish to voice the Government's appreciation of zoos—among which I include aquariums and wildlife sanctuaries if they are licensed as a zoo under the Zoo Licensing Act 1981—and all the work that they do. The Government recognise that as well as providing such high welfare standards for animals—which my hon. Friend the Member for Romford voiced so well—many zoos in the UK contribute to so many other things: the conservation work that is so important on the global stage, with so many species under threat because of the pressures on the environment; the education work; and, of course, getting people out into open spaces and engaging with nature, which has a big health and wellbeing impact. On that note, the Government recognise that zoos are excellent for engaging people with nature—a zoo often might be somebody's first engagement with wider nature, so plays such a vital role.

I am delighted to support the Prime Minister's announcement yesterday that safari parks and the outdoor parts of zoos will be allowed to reopen from 15 June. It has been necessary, for public health reasons, for the Government to proceed with caution, but we have listened to the many arguments about the benefits of zoos and the access to controlled outdoor spaces that they can provide, which is why we believe now is the appropriate time to allow safari parks and the outdoor parts of zoos to reopen. For the moment, indoor attractions—such as reptile houses and aquariums—at zoos will remain closed for public health reasons. The Government are aware of the work that zoos and aquariums have been doing to prepare for reopening while adhering to the strict social guidance. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is working with the main industry body, BIAZA, on the reopening guidance.

I wish briefly to set out the Government's rationale for requiring zoos to close from 1 June, as set out in the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2020, because colleagues did talk about this. Previously, zoos were not required to close, but given the fact that visiting a zoo was not a reasonable excuse to leave home, zoos took the inevitable decision to shut their doors. Most zoos closed at the end of March, as a result of lockdown. Rather than adding to the number of reasons that people had to leave home, from 1 June the Government switched the focus of the regulations to allow people to leave their homes unless there was a specific reason why they could not. The Government's primary concern was that we should not open up too many activities at the same time, because the cumulative effect of opening everything up at once would see the number of cases of coronavirus start to

increase again. While each zoo can be made safer, it was vital that we did not move too quickly in reopening to ensure that public health is protected. I am sure that all hon. Members understand that step-by-step process. As a result of progress, the announcement on zoos and safari parks was made yesterday. I hope that that reassures the House.

The Government recognise that visitor numbers may not bounce back to the levels zoos would have expected for this time of year. I therefore reassure hon. Members that Government support schemes, which zoos can continue to access, remain in place. Zoos are eligible to apply for VAT deferral, business rates relief, the business interruption loan schemes, the option to reclaim the costs of statutory sick pay, and hospitality and leisure grant funding of up to £25,000. In addition, on 4 May, the Government introduced the £14 million zoo support fund for licensed zoos in England, specifically for zoos in severe financial distress. The fund is open for another five weeks and DEFRA has already awarded grants to many zoos and aquariums.

Some hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Romford, mentioned the rules for the zoo support fund. It has been suggested that they need to be changed so that zoos can access the fund before being at the point of closure. The fund was specifically set up to avoid unnecessary additional euthanasia of zoo animals and capped payments at £100,000. It can be accessed only when a zoo is in severe financial difficulties. However, we are monitoring its operation. Clearly, we are listening to the comments that have been made today. We are keeping the scheme under review in relation to how soon we can provide support when a zoo is running out of funds.

Bob Seely: The Minister is talking about the DEFRA fund. It is not necessarily needed now, but it may be needed in a few months, when zoos and charitable entities start to run into worse financial problems.

Rebecca Pow: I hear what my hon. Friend says and that has been noted. I also get the message loud and clear that there are calls for a wide range of other wildlife enterprises, including farm parks, and places such as the Cotebrook Shire Horse Centre and Crocodiles of the World near Witney, to open.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I am grateful for my hon. Friend's commitment to looking at the matter again. I double underline the urgency for the Green Dragon rare breeds farm in my constituency, where the animals are now getting fed only as a result of the local community's generosity in making food donations. If the animals do not get that food urgently, I fear that they will be put down.

Rebecca Pow: That is noted. The exact scope of easing restrictions is being discussed as we speak. We will consider whether other outdoor animal attractions can open safely in future and at the same time. Clearly, many larger zoos face real long-term issues. Discussion about that is also ongoing.

I thank all the zoos and aquariums that played such a key role in the discussions with DEFRA, particularly in highlighting the crucial animal welfare implications. Thanks must go to BIAZA and our hard-working DEFRA team. I also thank my colleague Lord Goldsmith for all his work. He has kept me fully informed of what is happening.

I want to assure colleagues that weekly meetings will continue with the chief executive officers of the largest charitable zoos and aquariums, so that we are fully aware of the situation. I am also happy to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Romford to discuss his further thoughts and ideas, which he has clearly been thinking on very much.

In closing, I want to reiterate—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Let me just say to the Minister that, although I will have to put the Adjournment again at five o'clock, she can go on speaking after that. It is all right.

Rebecca Pow: Oh, I am terribly sorry. I was informed that I had to stop at five. Anyway, I have almost finished, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I just want to end by thanking absolutely everybody involved and to recognise the role that zoos, wildlife sanctuaries and aquariums play in this nation—the huge conservation role, the animal welfare, the getting people out into green spaces, the health and wellbeing impacts, the jobs, the impact on the economy and all of that. I assure Members that we will continue to assess the situation. I would like once again to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Romford for his terrific work. We will all be the better for it.

Question put and agreed to.

5 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 11 June 2020

TREASURY

UK Debt management Office

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): The United Kingdom Debt Management Office (DMO) has today published its business plan for the financial year 2020-21. Copies have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and are available on the DMO's website, www.dmo.gov.uk.

[HCWS289]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

British Council

The Minister for Asia (Nigel Adams): The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has sought an advance of £60 million from the Contingencies Fund in order to provide a loan of up to £60 million to the British Council, which is a key driver of UK soft power overseas. The British Council's commercial income has been heavily hit by covid-19, leading to significant losses and the risk of insolvency. The British Council has taken measures to reduce its deficit and cut costs, and the FCO has supported the British Council in accessing the coronavirus job retention scheme in line with the scheme's eligibility criteria for public sector employers, as well as similar schemes in other countries. This has helped it support many of its workforce, and those employed through its partners, funded through the commercial side of its business. The FCO is also working closely with the British Council on its future strategy, operations and long-term sustainable funding models.

However, without additional support from Government the British Council will shortly become insolvent. The FCO is therefore seeking a Contingencies Fund advance to provide an initial loan of up to £60 million to the British Council, drawn down in tranches depending upon need and contingent on the approval of FCO and HM Treasury, to stabilise its financial situation until mid-August 2020. The terms of the loan will be agreed with HM Treasury.

Parliamentary approval for additional capital of £60,000,000 will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £60,000,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

[HCWS285]

Hong Kong

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab): The latest six-monthly report on the implementation of the Sino-British joint declaration on Hong Kong was

published today, and is attached. It covers the period from 1 July to 31 December 2019. The report has been placed in the Library of the House. A copy is also available on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office). I commend the report to the House.

The attachment can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2020-06-11/HCWS284/>.

[HCWS284]

NATO Parliamentary Assembly

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab): The following will represent the United Kingdom at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly:

Lord Anderson of Swansea
Stuart Anderson MP
Harriett Baldwin MP
Alun Cairns MP
Lord Campbell of Pittenweem
Douglas Chapman MP
Feryal Clark MP
Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP
Nusrat Ghani MP
Lord Hamilton
Kevan Jones MP
Lord Jopling
Baroness Kingsmill
Abena Oppong-Asare MP
Alec Shelbrooke MP (Leader)
John Spellar MP
Bob Stewart MP
Heather Wheeler MP

[HCWS282]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Offensive Weapons

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): As part of the Government's continuing action to tackle serious violence and keep dangerous weapons off the streets, we have on 9 June laid draft regulations—Surrender of Offensive Weapons (Compensation) Regulations 2020—before Parliament.

These regulations are required as part of our plans to bring in the weapons prohibitions that are provided for by the Offensive Weapons Act 2019. These prohibitions will apply to specified rapid-firing rifles and certain other offensive weapons—for example, zombie knives.

The Offensive Weapons Act provides for the Government to put in place arrangements for the surrender of those items that will become prohibited under the Act and requires that regulations be made to provide for the payment of compensation to those who surrender items.

The regulations which have been laid set out a scheme for compensation, in particular making provision as to eligibility for compensation and the making and determination of claims. The regulations are subject to the affirmative resolution procedure in both Houses. It

is our intention to bring the regulations into force at a time when it is safe and reasonable to expect the owners of these weapons to be able to travel to designated police stations in their areas in order to surrender the items.

We will finalise and publicise full details on the surrender and compensation arrangements before they commence. This will include the details on when the scheme will go live and information on how to surrender and make a claim. This will help to ensure that all those who possess the items in question are well informed and are given sufficient opportunity to surrender their lawfully held items to the police and claim compensation for them.

[HCWS286]

PRIME MINISTER

Machinery of Government

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): I am making this statement to bring to the House's attention the following machinery of government change.

Policy responsibility for the Official Secrets Acts 1911, 1920, 1939 and 1989 has transferred from the Ministry of Justice to the Home Office, to align with wider Home Office work on counter hostile state activity legislation. This change is effective immediately.

[HCWS287]

Change in Machinery of Government

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): I am making this statement to bring to the House's attention the following machinery of government change.

Responsibility for the border delivery group, henceforth known as the border and protocol delivery group, has transferred from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to the Cabinet Office. This change is effective immediately and will help to ensure readiness of the border for the end of the transition period and lay the foundations for the best border in the world by 2025. Existing ministerial responsibilities remain unchanged.

[HCWS288]

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): The United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe is as follows:

(Gareth Johnson MP—Leader)

<i>Full Representatives</i>	<i>Substitute Members</i>
Lord Bowness	Tahir Ali MP
Deidre Brock MP	Baroness Blower
Lord Dubs	Sara Britcliffe MP
Marcus Fysh MP	Martin Docherty-Hughes MP
Andrew Gwynne MP	Katherine Fletcher MP
Rupa Huq MP	Peter Grant MP
Brendan O'Hara MP	Lia Nici MP
Nigel Mills MP	Kate Osborne MP
Royston Smith MP	Lord Robathan
Craig Tracey MP	Selaine Saxby MP
Mike Wood MP	Bob Stewart MP
Nick Smith MP	Claudia Webbe MP
	James Wild MP

[HCWS283]

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 11 June 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
CABINET OFFICE	381	CABINET OFFICE—continued	
Boundary Review.....	386	Lockdown Easing: Public Confidence.....	388
Covid-19: Government Contracts	394	Personal Protective Equipment	395
Covid-19 Services: Private Provision	393	Public Sector Frontline: PPE.....	386
Critical Infrastructure: Resilience.....	392	Special Advisers: Code of Conduct.....	389
Digital Technology.....	385	Test and Trace Application	391
EU Trade Negotiations	382	Topical Questions	396
Future Relationship with the EU	395	Voter Identification	394
Leaving the EU: Transition Period.....	381	Weddings: Covid-19 Restrictions.....	390

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 11 June 2020

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE	21WS	PRIME MINISTER	23WS
British Council.....	21WS	Change in Machinery of Government	23WS
Hong Kong	21WS	Machinery of Government	23WS
NATO Parliamentary Assembly.....	22WS	OSCE Parliamentary Assembly	24WS
HOME DEPARTMENT	22WS	TREASURY	21WS
Offensive Weapons.....	22WS	UK Debt management Office	21WS

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than
Thursday 18 June 2020**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Thursday 11 June 2020

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 381] [see index inside back page]

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office

Planning Process: Probity [Col. 401]

Answer to urgent question—(Christopher Pincher)

Business of the House [Col. 410]

Statement—(Mr Rees-Mogg)

Probation Services [Col. 425]

Statement—(Robert Buckland)

Birmingham Commonwealth Games Bill [Lords] [Col. 439]

As amended, considered

Read the Third time and passed

Zoos, Aquariums and Wildlife Sanctuaries: Reopening [Col. 476]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Statements [Col. 21WS]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
