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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Monday 29 June 2020

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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

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OFFICIAL REPORT

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

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

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 678

TENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2019-2021

House of Commons

Monday 29 June 2020

The House met at half-past Two 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

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Covid-19: Meeting Increased Demand for Services

Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): What steps she is taking to support local jobcentres (a) during and (b) following the covid-19 outbreak. [903874]

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): What steps she has taken to meet the increased demand on her Department's services resulting from the covid-19 outbreak. [903907]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey): I want to praise our excellent jobcentre staff and all Department for Work and Pensions staff and contractors for their tireless work through this emergency in supporting an unprecedented level of new claimants as well as existing claimants. To assist this effort, we redeployed

thousands of staff and streamlined our processes where possible. Looking forward, we are now working with local managers to start fully reopening jobcentres in July to help get Britain back into work. Over 1,700 people are now working remotely, and we have already recruited new people into the DWP to help with the increased demand.

Stuart Anderson: Unemployment in Wolverhampton is above the country average, and covid-19 will have an impact on these figures. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the local jobcentre staff, who have been working tirelessly through this pandemic, will play an integral part in making sure our great city is not left behind?

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend is right to pay tribute to staff at his local jobcentre. Without the success of the furlough scheme introduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, this could have been far worse. We are working hard across Government to help people in these challenging times to get back into work as soon as possible and to support an economic recovery that levels up all parts of the country, including Wolverhampton. I am sure my hon. Friend can refer people to the two new websites, job help and employer help, to signpost people to live vacancies and online support.

Daniel Kawczynski: I would like the Secretary of State to pass on our thanks to her team for the tremendous work that her officials have been doing at this very difficult time, but does she agree that the digital nature of universal credit has enabled it to respond effectively in recent months?

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend is spot on. The Department has acted at incredible pace to bring in measures as quickly as possible to help those most financially disadvantaged as a result of c-19. Through the digital universal credit system, we have enabled those changes to take place while meeting that unprecedented demand. The legacy system, which was heavily paper-based, would simply have been unable to cope.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I also pay tribute to all the frontline staff at the DWP for the way they have processed so many claims for support since the beginning of the crisis. It is important to recognise, however, that the universal credit they have been processing so far in this crisis is a significantly different product from usual. In particular, all sanctions and conditionality have been temporarily suspended. That suspension is due to end tomorrow. At a time when unemployment has risen sharply, the number of vacancies has dropped, people are shielding and schools have not yet gone back, threatening people with reducing their financial support if they do not look for jobs is surely untenable, so will the Secretary of State announce an immediate extension?

Dr Coffey: It is important that as the jobcentres fully reopen this week we reinstate the need for a claimant commitment. It is an essential part of the contract to help people start to reconsider what vacancies there are, but I know that I can trust the work coaches and jobcentre managers, who are empowered to act proactively with people. There will be some people right now who have not had to look for a job for the last 20 to 30 years, and they will need careful support, tailored to make sure they can start to look for the jobs that are available and those which I hope will soon become available.

Covid-19: Universal Credit Applications

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What recent estimate her Department has made of the number of universal credit applicants awaiting a decision on applications made since the start of the covid-19 outbreak. [903875]

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What recent estimate her Department has made of the number of universal credit applicants awaiting a decision on applications made since the start of the covid-19 outbreak. [903898]

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): What recent estimate her Department has made of the number of universal credit applicants awaiting a decision on applications made since the start of the covid-19 outbreak. [903902]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): Since mid-March, we have processed about 3.2 million individual universal credit claims. Despite that surge, the system is standing up to the challenge and demonstrating the resilience and scalability that is a fundamental part of its design. From the peak of claims made, fewer than 1% of claimants have outstanding verification preventing payment. There is no way that the legacy benefit system could have coped with such pressure.

Jeff Smith: Citizens Advice found recently that more than half the people claiming universal credit for the first time during the crisis had experienced hardship and that many did not want to take out a loan because they were afraid of taking on more debt. A system where more than half of people are experiencing hardship is surely a system that is not working, so will the Minister reconsider proposals to end the five-week wait and replace loans with a cash grant?

Will Quince: I do not recognise the picture the hon. Gentleman paints. Universal credit advances are available for those who need them. They are interest free for 12 months and as of next year that will increase to 24 months. We get support to people as quickly as they need it. That is why the payment advance is available, usually within a couple of days.

Dame Diana Johnson [V]: When the job retention scheme is wound down, we will see, I am sure, a second wave of universal credit applications, on top of the 70% increase we have already seen in Hull. With unemployment in Hull forecast to get to about 16%, is it not time now to prepare to remove the five-week wait for universal credit and to make the £20 increase a permanent feature?

Will Quince: The Department has processed an unprecedented number of claims during this period. We have put over £6.5 billion into our welfare system to support those who need it quickly. As for what the hon. Lady defines as the five-week wait, nobody has to wait five weeks for a payment. An advance is available, usually within a couple of days, for those who need it.

Sarah Champion [V]: Covid-19 has had a huge impact on manufacturing, particularly the automotive and aviation industries. In Rotherham, McLaren and Rolls-Royce face redundancies. As well as universal credit, what package of support can the Minister put in place to help these highly skilled workers if job losses do come their way?

Will Quince: Any job loss is regrettable, and the Department stands ready to support people who find themselves in that position. The £6.5 billion package included an increase in universal credit of over £1,000, a similar increase in the standard allowance for tax credits and an increase in the local housing allowance. That is over and above measures such as the job retention scheme, the self-employment income support scheme, the £500 million hardship fund via local councils and the £63 million local welfare assistance fund. As the Chancellor said, we will do whatever it takes to support people through covid-19.

Transition from Universal Credit to State Pension

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to ensure an effective transition between universal credit and the state pension. [903876]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): The Government announced in March that anyone reaching state pension age while claiming universal credit will be eligible for a run-on until the end of the assessment period in which they reach state pension age. An estimated 200,000 people will benefit from this measure over the next five years, receiving on average an additional £350 each. I am pleased to confirm that regulations are being laid today to put this measure on a statutory footing.

Mark Pawsey: In November 2017, my constituent Carol Nash visited my advice surgery and told me about a shortfall of £530 as a consequence of transitioning from universal credit to the state pension. Her claim ended on 17 October in anticipation of her receipt of

the state pension from 6 November. At that time, no facility for a part-payment was available, although we did manage to resolve the issue. Can the Minister confirm that, as a consequence of the test-and-learn approach that his Department has taken in respect of universal credit, that claimant's circumstances today would result in a seamless transition?

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He is right, and I am pleased to confirm that everyone who reaches state pension age while on universal credit will be eligible for the new run-on payment. That will mean no gap in benefit provision as people transition from universal credit to the pension-age benefit system.

Universal Credit (Reducing Poverty)

John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): What recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of universal credit in reducing poverty. [903877]

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): What recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of universal credit in reducing poverty. [903880]

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): What recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of universal credit in reducing poverty. [903884]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): There are now over 200,000 fewer people in absolute poverty compared with 2010, and universal credit is a fundamental part of this Government's strategy to support people. As a result of the covid-19 pandemic, we have increased the UC standard allowance by around £1,000. An estimated 2.5 million households on UC will benefit from that straight away, as well as new claimants who will become unemployed or those whose earnings or work hours decrease because of the outbreak.

John Nicolson [V]: I would like to begin by saying that my party's thoughts are with the victims of the terrible knife attack in Glasgow, and we want to thank the emergency services for their incredible bravery.

According to the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, the DWP last published a full impact assessment of universal credit in 2012, and no formal impact assessment has ever been produced on advance payments. How can we have any idea of the effectiveness or otherwise of universal credit unless assessments are available for scrutiny?

Will Quince: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and I would like to echo his comments; we are certainly thinking of the people of Glasgow at this incredibly difficult time.

We keep all policy under review, but I think Members across the House recognise yet another attack on universal credit and the system. We know that the legacy benefit system simply would not have coped with the unprecedented demand we have seen during covid-19. Universal credit has done a superb job. I hope that when the hon. Gentleman reflects on the role that universal credit has played in ensuring that over 3.2 million people have got the support they need as quickly as possible, he will take a different view about its success.

Stephen Flynn: The Social Mobility Commission has highlighted that, in the last seven years, there has been "little or no action" by the UK Government on a third of its recommendations, including ensuring that child poverty is not exacerbated by universal credit. Indeed, its damning report criticised the DWP for failing to provide a detailed assessment of how benefit changes are tied to these poverty rates. On that basis, how can the Minister possibly know whether universal credit is increasing or decreasing poverty?

Will Quince: The statistics show that full-time work substantially reduces the chances of poverty. The absolute rate of poverty for a child when both parents work full time is 4% compared with 44% when one or more parents are in part-time work. We are supporting people into full-time work wherever possible, for example through our childcare offer, and universal credit, where work always pays, is a fundamental part of that offer.

Richard Thomson: Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies has found that, despite the DWP's temporary increase in universal credit, out-of-work households with children are, on average, £2,900 a year worse off than they would have been without cuts since 2011. Does the Minister understand that, far from doing a superb job, as he says, universal credit is leaving some families in serious difficulty and poverty, and will he commit to looking at the IFS findings?

Will Quince: Our focus today is rightly on what the Government can do to support people financially through these unprecedented times. However, our broader ambition remains to build an economy that ensures that everyone, no matter what their background, has opportunities to enter and progress in work where possible, while being supported by the welfare system in their time of need. I just gently remind the hon. Gentleman that, in this financial year, we have spent more than £120 billion on benefits for working-age people.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I welcomed the Minister's confirmation last week of no appeal in the universal credit court case that the Department lost, but has he yet grasped the full scale of the problem that that issue has raised? He said in the House last week that, at most, 1,500 people were affected and suggested that 85,000 was a figure that had come from the Opposition. I wonder whether he has now had the chance to see that that 85,000 figure comes from the decision of Lady Justice Rose in the Court of Appeal last week. Did he also see that Lord Justice Underhill said:

"It is not simply a matter of uneven cash-flow...affected claimants will receive substantially lower payments?"

Will Quince: I answered an urgent question on this matter on Thursday for some 45 minutes, as the right hon. Gentleman has mentioned. I confirmed that we would not be appealing against the decision of the court. As I made clear to him, I am now considering options to address the issue and will keep the House updated on progress. The 85,000 figure, which he references, from the judgment, came, in my understanding, from the Opposition. It is referenced in the judgment, but it came from the Opposition and we do not recognise those figures.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP) [V]: My hon. Friends have highlighted the range of expert reports out over the past couple of weeks showing that the DWP has no idea how universal credit impacts child poverty. It has done precious little to address it and could have made it worse through systematic cuts, leaving families and children worse off since 2011. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Save the Children say that families need an extra £20 a week in the child element of universal credit and child tax credits. Will the Minister ask the Chancellor to make that happen?

Will Quince: As I just said, in 2020-21 we will spend more than £120 billion on benefits for working-age people. We spend more on family benefits than any other country in the G7, at 3.5% of GDP. The measure that the hon. Gentleman raises would alone add another several billion to that bill. We will continue to reform the welfare system so that it encourages work while supporting those who need help. It is an approach that is based on the clear evidence that work offers families the best opportunity to get out of poverty.

Neil Gray: I note that the Minister did not answer my question. There is growing pressure on the UK Government to act here. The former DWP Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), has called on the Minister and his colleagues to accept the recommendations of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Save the Children and to uprate legacy benefits, too. The Poverty Alliance's report today shows that UC is pulling people into poverty rather than acting as a lifeline, so will he agree to convene a cross-party meeting, including the former Secretary of State and a Treasury Minister, to look at ways to make that recommendation happen?

Will Quince: For a start, the hon. Gentleman knows that that is well above my pay grade, but I gently remind him that universal credit will be over £2 billion a year more generous when fully rolled out compared with the legacy benefits system that it replaces. He also fails to recognise the £6.5 billion to £7 billion that this Government have put in place to support people through covid-19. As the Chancellor has said, we will do "whatever it takes", and this Government are doing that: we are supporting people, and this Department is getting that support to those who need it quickly.

Supporting Employment After Covid-19

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What steps she plans to take with Cabinet colleagues to support employment after the covid-19 outbreak. [903878]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey): I am already actively working with a number of my Cabinet colleagues, particularly the Chancellor and the Secretaries of State for Education, for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, for Transport, and for Housing, Communities and Local Government—and, of course, the Prime Minister. This is a joined-up Government who are working hard to help people, in these challenging times, to get back into work as soon as possible.

Huw Merriman: Many of us are concerned about jobs in the aviation sector, particularly British Airways, which is not only making up to 12,500 redundancies but firing and rehiring virtually the remainder of the workforce, despite its group putting €1 billion into a new airline and BA staff putting 66% of profits into that group. What can the Government do to ensure that our employers do the right thing by the workforce who have previously delivered those profits?

Dr Coffey: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has previously said to my hon. Friend, we are concerned about the way that some companies are treating their workforce and we are actively looking into the issue. The furlough scheme has been a huge success in keeping over 9 million employees connected to their jobs, but companies should not be using it cynically to keep people on their books just to then get rid of them. The whole point of the furlough scheme is to help people to get back into their jobs and the country back on its feet.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: New analysis suggests that up to 1 million people could be added to the current jobless total unless more support is provided from August, with sectors such as aviation being harder hit. We have learned from covid to plan early and to work together. However, last week's DWP Committee report said that the Secretary of State had not provided any persuasive reason for her refusal to share her economic downturn plans. Why is a plan that is the basis of how we get millions of people back into work such a secret? Will she now work with her colleagues for a back-to-work budget so that local partnerships can plan together for what is coming?

Dr Coffey: I think the hon. Lady is confusing the element in the Select Committee report with the emergency contingency plan, which is an operational document that is prepared by all Departments in the event of the sort of emergency that requires, for example, redeployment within the Department. In terms of her broader question on what I think she was really referring to, I assure her that, as I pointed out, I am actively working with Ministers across the Government to make sure that we will be there to help people get into the new jobs that we rely on the private sector to create, but will be working across the public sector too.

Covid-19: Processing Work Capability Assessments

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): What estimate she has made of the average time taken to process work capability assessments during the covid-19 outbreak. [903879]

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): We have temporarily suspended face-to-face work capability assessments so that we do not place people at unnecessary risk. Healthcare professionals continue to make recommendations based on paper-based evidence where possible, and we have introduced telephone assessments. We are in the early phases of delivering telephone assessments and are closely monitoring the processing times.

Bambos Charalambous: One of my constituents who has progressive multiple sclerosis and is partially paralysed on his left side had to undergo a work capability assessment by phone. This resulted in his personal independence

payment being cancelled, and then reviewed and reinstated at a lower rate. The decision is now being appealed so that he can get the higher level of PIP that he was previously on. Does the Minister agree that stringent safeguards need to be in place when such telephone assessments are made to ensure that poor decisions are avoided?

Justin Tomlinson: I absolutely agree. We have independent audits looking at this. We are in the early stages of using telephone assessments, and there is a mix of the benefits because the WCA is separate from PIP. PIP is a few weeks further on in terms of telephone assessments. Stakeholders welcome the opportunity and it is something we will explore in the Green Paper. However, I am happy to look at the individual case.

Employment Support (Local Labour Market Conditions)

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tailor employment support to local labour market conditions. [903881]

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tailor employment support to local labour market conditions. [903900]

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to ensure employment support is tailored to local labour market conditions. [903904]

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to promote employment opportunities in rural constituencies as the economy reopens and the covid-19 lockdown restrictions are eased. [903905]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): As the Minister responsible for this evolving labour market, I can say that the DWP is working hard to identify the most effective ways to support people back into work. We are clear that we are taking a targeted, place-based approach. I have attended regional stocktakes with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government economic recovery working group, which brings together mayors, local enterprise partnerships and other vital partners to share local knowledge.

Dehenna Davison: I welcome not only the Government's strong, effective measures on supporting employment through the job retention scheme but the extensive range of employment and support benefits. With that in mind, does the Minister agree that we need to support our next generation of agricultural workers, such as our farmers across Teesdale, whom we rely on not just to feed ourselves but for the future of our food security?

Mims Davies: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend: we should recognise the areas that have a proud history of agriculture, such as Teesdale. Our farmers have done and continue to do a fantastic job feeding the nation during this challenging time. Alongside the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the DWP has used our "job help" campaign to encourage farmers and employment agencies to use the Pick for Britain website to help them fill their vacancies.

Marco Longhi: One does not need to look much further than my own constituency of Dudley North—and those of my hon. Friends the Members for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey), for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson) and, indeed, for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes)—to see the terrible effects over a couple of decades of globalisation. Will the Minister reassure me and the House, despite the challenges posed by this pandemic, of her commitment and her Department's commitment to the levelling-up agenda?

Mims Davies: Our network of jobcentres is local and regional by design, and I mentioned earlier the place-based approach. We are ensuring that work coaches are ready to provide individualised support for claimants. The levelling-up agenda is a priority for this Government, and we have been building this into our discussions and plans when meeting Mayors, such as Andy Street, to get Britain back into work.

Shaun Bailey: For my communities in Wednesbury, Oldbury and Tipton, jobs are going to be at the centre of this recovery. Can I ask my hon. Friend to elaborate a bit more on the work that she has been undertaking across Government and locally with local partners, and will she agree to meet me to discuss a Black Country jobs strategy as we move out of this pandemic?

Mims Davies: Of course, I am very happy to meet my hon. Friend and continue to engage with him on developing these local, place-based recovery plans. As I have said, we have been working closely with the West Midlands Combined Authority, building, importantly, on our learning from the employment and skills framework, which underpins the current joint approach to supporting people locally back into work in the Black Country.

Duncan Baker: My constituency of North Norfolk is rural, and it faces many challenges. It is heavily reliant on the tourism sector, and without the fat of a full summer season, it could struggle to get through the winter. What steps can the Minister take to see a wider compulsory offering of apprenticeship schemes to enable younger people to stay in a good job, and to stay in the area where they grew up—a longing that all of us recognise?

Mims Davies: Supporting our young people is a priority for me in this job. Apprenticeships are a great way for young people to start their careers, giving them that crucial opportunity to earn while they learn. Alongside the Department for Education, we at the DWP are supporting employers, especially small businesses, to take on new apprentices this year, and we will provide further detail in due course. We will also ensure that there is sufficient funding this year to support small businesses wanting to take this up.

Covid-19: Support for People Self-isolating

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): What support her Department provides for people required to self-isolate as a result of exposure to covid-19 who are not eligible for statutory sick pay. [903901]

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): We have made changes so that statutory sick pay and employment and support allowance are

payable to people who are self-isolating, including those who are shielding and who satisfy the conditions of entitlement. We have removed the waiting days, so these are paid from day one, and households may also be able to claim universal credit.

Andrew Gwynne [V]: But the lowest-paid in this country and about 3 million self-employed and others are excluded from what is already one of the lowest rates of statutory sick pay in Europe. As test and trace is stepped up, many of those will be told to self-isolate, potentially multiple times, so how does the Minister propose that we can emerge safely from lockdown if people are not supported in these circumstances? What is he going to do about this group?

Justin Tomlinson: In addition to providing support through statutory sick pay, we are expecting employers to do the right thing, and we will be working with employers to make sure employees can transition back to work safely. That is underpinned by the Equality Act 2010, and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Health and Safety Executive will continue to provide proactive guidance to employers.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab) [V]: At DWP questions on 11 May, I asked the Minister whether his Department would increase legacy benefits, such as employment and support allowance, to help shielding and disabled people cover the increasing costs of basic items such as food, toiletries and personal protective equipment for themselves and their carers. Seven weeks on, can the Minister update us on how much progress his Department has made? As we move towards planning for a potential second wave, it is vital that we get this right.

Justin Tomlinson: As a Department, we have rightly put an additional £6.5 billion into welfare support, on top of the £500 million hardship fund provided to local authorities. I welcome the further additional £63 million to boost council welfare support so that no one goes without food and other basic necessities in the coming months.

Covid-19: Promotion of Employment Opportunities

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to promote employment opportunities as the economy reopens and the covid-19 lockdown restrictions are eased. [903894]

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to promote employment opportunities as the economy reopens and the covid-19 lockdown restrictions are eased. [903903]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): We have launched A Good Place to Start, a new labour market campaign that includes two key websites—job help and employer help—which provide additional information, tools and links to other sites, including DWP's Find a job service, for current vacancies, and the Department for Education's Skills Toolkit.

Scott Benton: My constituency currently has the highest claimant count in the whole UK, as the crisis has exposed the dependence of my local economy on tourism and

insecure seasonal work. What steps is my hon. Friend taking to support those in communities such as Blackpool who are currently out of work to retrain and acquire the skills needed to find future employment?

Mims Davies: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important issue. I highlight the work that our staff in jobcentres are doing tirelessly to support people with their claims throughout the pandemic, and that work continues. Indeed, our work coaches have made more than a quarter of a million outbound customer support calls each week, and they are also organising virtual job fairs. In Blackpool, they are working with the local authority on a virtual adult learning and education programme, hosted online and through Google Classroom. Upcoming from 4 July is a sector-based work academy for recruitment around the pleasure beach, and we are also training people through our mentoring circles. I encourage every Member in the House to contact their local jobcentre to find out about what we are already doing to support their local community.

Andrew Jones: As the economy reopens, it will look different. One sector that has grown fast and will continue to grow is the digital sector. The Federation of Small Businesses in North Yorkshire has told me that a key need of its members is increased digital skills—it wants to see more training. How will my hon. Friend ensure that as they work to match people with vacancies, jobcentres are handling the changing needs of employers in the digital economy?

Mims Davies: I regularly meet Ministers from the DFE and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to ensure that we are doing exactly that. Work includes figuring out how claimants can be supported to gain those key skills and to pivot into those sectors where there are vacancies as the economy recovers. Jobcentres work with their local training providers to ensure that a range of courses is available to help claimants to find that new opportunity or some better-paid work.

Support for the Terminally Ill

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): When she plans to publish the findings of the Government's review announced in July 2019 of how the welfare system supports people who are terminally ill. [903885]

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): When she plans to publish the findings of the Government's review announced in July 2019 of how the welfare system supports people who are terminally ill. [903893]

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): The evaluation remains a priority for the Department. We have made good progress and expect to be able to provide an update on the outcome of the evaluation shortly.

Chris Evans: Motor neurone disease is an utterly wicked, terrible disease. Those who have it are locked in and see their bodies waste away, while their families watch their loved ones slowly slide away. However, only 50% of people diagnosed with motor neurone disease can

claim under the personal independence payment special rules—about which the Minister knows—because of the six-month life expectancy rule; the others have to go through the standard procedures, which can lead to delays. The Department launched a terminal illness review more than a year ago. The Minister has it in his gift to change the rules and ensure that all people with motor neurone disease are allowed to claim under the PIP special rules. On behalf of all those families who are suffering—it is only a small number—I ask him: will he make that change today?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank the hon. Member for setting out powerfully the torment and challenges that MND sufferers face; he has been a champion of their cause in Parliament. I am grateful for the part that the Motor Neurone Disease Association, Hospice UK, Macmillan, Marie Curie, Sue Ryder, the national nurse consultant group and others have played in the evaluation. The Secretary of State and I are passionate about making changes: it will not be the status quo. Covid-19 caused a delay to the final part of the consultation with the medical professionals, but we will bring forward a change shortly.

John Lamont: I know that the Minister will be aware that the benefits awarded under the special rules for terminal illness last for three years, but on behalf of my constituent Doddie Weir, the former Scotland rugby player, who has been campaigning on the issue, will my hon. Friend consider scrapping the three-year limit on awards under the special rules to avoid distressing situations for those suffering with MND and other terminal illnesses?

Justin Tomlinson: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this. I know that he has campaigned hard on the matter. We are reviewing all areas. The key three themes are the six months and not having the status quo; improving consistency; and raising awareness to ensure that all those who will benefit from the special rules know what is available.

Covid-19: Food Insecurity

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): If she will hold discussions with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on trends in the level of food insecurity among the poorest communities since the start of the covid-19 outbreak. [903887]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): I regularly engage with my counterpart in DEFRA, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), on this issue, and participate in the ministerial Food and Supplies to the Vulnerable Task Force. In addition to welfare changes worth more than £6.5 billion, Departments have worked together throughout this period to ensure support for the most vulnerable. Funding of up to £16 million, including the £3.5 million food charities grant fund, is available so that charities can continue to provide food for those in need.

Geraint Davies [V]: The Food Foundation has found that 5 million adults and 2 million children suffer from food insecurity, which the United Nations defines as insufficient nutritious food each day to avoid hunger.

The 2019 national food strategy was shelved because of coronavirus. What plans has the Minister to introduce more money for those most in need so that we do not have growing numbers of people relying on food banks, and to prevent millions more from being plunged into hunger in the event of a second wave of coronavirus and a bad or no deal Brexit?

Will Quince: Over and above the £6.5 billion we have pumped into our welfare system, there is the more than £16 million for food redistribution charities, the £3.5 million for the food charities fund, which offers grants of up to £100,000 to support those charities, the £63 million local welfare assistance fund through local authorities that the Prime Minister announced two weeks ago and, of course, the free school meals voucher scheme. However, the hon. Gentleman raises a good point. We want to better understand food insecurity in this country. That is why we commissioned extra questions for the family resources survey. I look forward to looking at the results of that in great detail.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) on her promotion to the shadow Cabinet.

The Government say that the aim of the benefit cap is to make people work more hours or move to cheaper accommodation. Neither of those options has been possible during the covid crisis, so what possible justification have the Government for persisting with that policy, which prevents families from receiving what the Department for Work and Pensions itself believes to be necessary?

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey): The benefit cap does play an important part, but the hon. Gentleman may not be aware of the exemptions to it. New and existing claimants can benefit from a nine-month grace period when their benefit will not be capped if they have a sustained work history. Since 2013, nearly 220,000 households which were subject to the benefit cap are now no longer capped.

Benefits for People with Severe Disabilities

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the adequacy of benefits for people with severe disabilities. [903889]

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): As a Government, we are currently spending £55 billion supporting disabled people and those with long-term health conditions. The level of financial support will reflect the level of disability or condition of the claimant.

Neil O'Brien [V]: I thank the Minister for his advice the other day regarding my disabled constituent Tom Hipgrave. Although the support provided by PIP is vital, what more is my hon. Friend doing to help those with severe disabilities, like Tom?

Justin Tomlinson: My hon. Friend is a very diligent representative of his constituents, as I saw with the casework he raised. Our forthcoming Green Paper is key, as is our national strategy for disabled people,

in which we will explore other ways to offer greater support, such as advocacy, signposting and removing barriers across Government and in wider society.

Women: State Pension Uplift

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): What recent estimate she has made of the number of women who have been underpaid their state pension uplift as a result of an administrative error. [903891]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman) [V]: We are aware of a number of cases where individuals have been underpaid category BL basic state pension. The Department has already taken action to correct our records, and we reimbursed those affected as soon as any errors were identified.

Nick Smith: Informed commentators say that more than 100,000 women will be impacted by this error. Many will be older women and more likely to be living in poverty. To put this right, will the Minister agree to an investigation of this issue? Will he look again at the rules on backdating to ensure that those women are treated fairly in the future?

Guy Opperman [V]: I note the hon. Gentleman's comments, and we invite anyone who thinks that they have failed to claim a state pension increase for which they are eligible to contact the Department through the Pension Service helpline. Alternatively, Pension Wise can assist.¹

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab) [V]: Case after case is being uncovered of retired women being underpaid their pensions. To this day, many do not know about the Department's mistake, and some have tragically died before learning of it. This must be properly investigated. Crucially, those women deserve justice. When will the Department work out how many women have been affected, and who they are? Will it bring forward a plan to contact them so that the women who built Britain get the justice in retirement that they deserve?

Guy Opperman [V]: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, this dates from March 2008, when married women receiving a low-level state pension based on their national insurance record should have had their entitlement reviewed when their husband reached state pension age. The Department for Work and Pensions is looking into the matter, and we invite any individual who feels that they are affected to claim a state pension increase by contacting the Pension Service helpline or Pension Wise.²

Extended Income Support: Seasonal Industries

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on the potential merits of providing extended income support for people in seasonal industries. [903892]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey): I have regular conversations with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, who is responsible for the coronavirus job retention scheme and the self-employment income

support scheme, which have supported 9.2 million and 2.6 million people respectively—nearly 12 million people in total. He has set out how the schemes will be phased out during the autumn. The furlough scheme continues until the end of October.

Mr Carmichael: The position for people in the visitor economy in my constituency is particularly acute because of the highly seasonal nature of the trade. It has been described to me as being like three winters in a row. Does the Secretary of State accept, and will she prosecute the case within Government, that if some industries in some areas are to have a viable future, there will need to be special consideration?

Dr Coffey: I too have a coastal constituency with a significant tourism economy. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport said, we are looking to get the tourist sector up and running as strong as possible, and extending it for as long as we can. That is a key part of the campaign. When it is back, we will invest heavily and ensure that we have a major campaign to encourage British people to take British staycations.

Covid-19: Support for Pensioners

Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support pensioners affected by the covid-19 outbreak. [903897]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman) [V]: I congratulate my hon. and gallant Friend on his outstanding maiden speech last week, for which credit is due. The Government are committed to ensuring that older people are able to live with the dignity—[*Inaudible.*]

Mr Speaker: Would somebody step in, please, and answer the question?

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey): To echo my hon. Friend, the Government are committed to ensuring that older people are able to live with the dignity and respect that they deserve. The state pension is a foundation of state support. In April, full amounts of the basic and new state pensions increased by 3.9% to £134.25 and £175.20 per week respectively. We continue to work with the Post Office to ensure that vulnerable customers have access to cash when shielding.

Darren Henry: People in Broxtowe affected by the closure of Equitable Life are increasingly worried as they approach retirement age. Can my right hon. Friend tell me what measures the Government will take to ensure that soon-to-be pensioners get the compensation they deserve and are supported in their old age?

Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend raises a long-standing issue. I am aware that during the 2010 Administration, extra money was put in after the original proposal in order to support those on Equitable Life, but this is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I would encourage my hon. Friend to follow it up with him directly.

1.[*Official Report, 8 July 2020, Vol. 678, c. 4MC.*]

2.[*Official Report, 8 July 2020, Vol. 678, c. 4MC.*]

Topical Questions

[903934] **Joy Morrissey** (Beaconsfield) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Dr Thérèse Coffey): As I outlined to the House earlier, I am really pleased with the massive efforts that have been undertaken by members of the Department for Work and Pensions in responding to public needs during this important emergency. We are starting to return to normal and I look forward to jobcentres fully reopening so that they can help people to get ready again for the world of work.

Joy Morrissey: Does my right hon. Friend agree on the importance of jobcentres and businesses working closely together to support employment and economic recovery, and will she join me in praising Pinewood studios in my constituency, which is a shining example of such practices?

Dr Coffey: As I outlined earlier, we want to ensure that we have that ongoing local support between jobcentres and businesses. I know that in Beaconsfield the local jobcentre staff are working with the local enterprise partnership to explore how they can collaboratively support people back into work. I am sure that the company to which my hon. Friend refers will also be looking at the Employer Help website, which provides a range of guidance and advice, including on identifying transferable skills, promoting opportunities to work in different sectors of the economy, and supporting staff.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Last week, the Pensions Regulator introduced an interim regime to cover so-called superfunds, which are funds that aim to bring together several corporate pension schemes to be run collectively. This is a sensitive area, because breaking the link between an employer and their pension scheme means that the employer cannot in future be called upon to fill any deficits. Given that sensitivity, will the Secretary of State explain, first, why the Government have not legislated for this area in the current Pension Schemes Bill; secondly, why the regulatory requirements for these superfunds are so much lower than they are for a buy-out from an insurance company; and, thirdly, whether the Governor of the Bank of England is right to say that this lack of action by the Government is a potential risk to the UK's financial stability?

Dr Coffey: The independent Pensions Regulator published guidance on an interim regime for pensions superfunds. I want to stress that this is an interim regime, and that the Government will continue to develop the permanent regime before legislating with full and proper parliamentary scrutiny in the usual way. Market participants are well aware that they should not assume that the interim regime will automatically transfer into the permanent regime.

[903941] **Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): Not-for-profit organisations such as RCS Wales in Rhyl have provided critical employment support throughout the outbreak. Will my right hon. Friend do what she can to support such organisations and ensure that people with mental health difficulties are not left behind as they look for sustainable employment?

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Justin Tomlinson): When it is safe to do so, I would love to visit and see the work of RCS. I pay tribute to the great work it is doing in its community. We understand the role of good mental wellbeing and helping individuals into the job market, and in Wales we have provided £1.3 million to test the new individual placement and support. We also provide contracted employment support programmes specifically tailored to disabled people and people with long-term health conditions, as well as administering the Access to Work scheme and the Disability Confident campaign.

[903936] **Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm that senior management in the Department for Work and Pensions are suggesting that an additional 31,000 staff are needed to cope with increased universal credit claims? We have heard from Ministers that this week they are reopening jobcentres and reintroducing conditionality and sanctions, at a time when the Department has nowhere near the required number of staff available. Surely this action will heap stress and suffering on claimants and staff alike, so what measures will the Minister introduce to avoid this chaos?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): I thank everyone who works in our jobcentres. Our Secretary of State has committed to doubling the number of work coaches. We put an individual focus on our claimants, and we will take a place-based approach to helping people into work. We are actively working with our operations to ensure that this is done safely so that people can get back into work.

[903945] **Stuart Anderson** (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): Will my hon. Friend assure me that experiences of disabled people will be front and centre of the disability Green Paper?

Justin Tomlinson: I can absolutely reassure my hon. Friend that disabled people will be at the very heart of the consultation on both the Green Paper and the national strategy for disabled people. As soon as it is safe to do so, we will begin the roadshow of consultation across the whole country, making sure that all voices are heard and shape our future priorities.

[903939] **Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): The Child Poverty Action Group and the Church of England estimate that by April 2020, around 230,000 families had been hit by the two-child limit, causing huge distress to children and their families in the middle of the pandemic, and that 1.3 million children will be forced into poverty—or, if they already face poverty, into deeper poverty. When will Ministers scrap this cruel and vicious policy that is punishing children?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Will Quince): We keep all policy under review. The particular policy change the hon. Lady references would not only cost around £2 billion a year but could not be operationalised now even if we wanted to, because all the focus is rightly on the Department's response to covid-19. I say to her gently, though, that it is a policy

based on fairness; those in receipt of benefits are faced with the same choices in life as those not in receipt of benefits.

[903954] **Tom Hunt** (Ipswich) (Con): I have recently been contacted by a number of beauty salons, such as the Beauty Academy in Ipswich, that have serious concerns about not being able to reopen their doors as expected on 4 July alongside hairdressers. Many beauty salons under pressure have already shut their doors for good, causing a number of job losses. What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with the Business Secretary about preventing further job losses, including by allowing beauty salons to reopen on 4 July and giving them the certainty they need so that they can plan over the coming weeks?

Mims Davies: We are actively working with colleagues across Government, including the Business Secretary, with whom I have had several roundtable discussions, to get people back into work and business opening up as soon as possible. The Government are committed to reopening businesses in a phased approach, guided by the science, when it is safe to do so; I confess to an absolute personal need for these sectors to reopen. However, where there are job losses, DWP staff are on hand to work with claimants to support them to get back into work.

[903956] **Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): Schemes such as Access to Work are vital in helping many disabled people start and remain in work. Will my hon. Friend outline how the Department is flexing existing support to help those disabled people, many of whom are now required to work from home?

Justin Tomlinson: That is a very important point. We are looking at additional ways we can support people, through Access to Work, to travel to and from their home to work and to have ability to work from home. There are opportunities for us to make some of those changes more permanent as we start to return to normality.

[903942] **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Minister talks of fairness with regard to the two-child limit, but how can it be fair that the 60,000 families who have made a claim since lockdown began, who could not have anticipated having to claim universal credit, are now struggling to feed their third or subsequent children? They could not have planned for this; how is that fair?

Will Quince: We recognise that people face unprecedented financial pressure as a result of covid-19. That is exactly why the Government have invested £6.5 billion in our welfare system, increasing universal credit by £20 per week, increasing tax credits and increasing the local housing allowance.

[903959] **Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): Many people in my constituency rely on their summer earnings as a contribution towards their annual budget to make ends meet. Tourism is very seasonal, but what it brings has a knock-on effect across all sectors in Cornwall. Will my hon. Friend look at what more can be done if the summer does not produce the savings people need for the lean months?

Mims Davies: I absolutely understand the importance of tourism to very many areas of the country; it is vital to jobs in my hon. Friend's constituency and many others. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has said that we are looking to get the tourism sector up and running as strongly as we can and to extend it for as long as we can for visitors and tourists. Meanwhile, our welfare safety net, the UC standard allowance rate, has been increased by £20 a week for this year to support people.

[903952] **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State clarify whether the Government intend to keep their manifesto commitment to maintaining the pensions triple lock?

Dr Coffey: The Government are absolutely committed to fulfilling their manifesto commitments. It is fair to say that we have some situations ahead of us, but it is something I am in discussions about. This is not about abandoning the triple lock in any way, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that there are some consequences—of which he may not be aware—if average earnings fall during this year. We may need to rectify things to make sure that aspects of the law that are already in place cannot be set aside.

[903961] **Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Con): Universal credit has supported millions of new claimants since March, many of whom will now be looking for new job opportunities as the economy reopens. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the inherent strengths of universal credit is its flexibility in incentivising and rewarding employment?

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for that question, and he is absolutely right. The amount paid in UC reflects as closely as possible the actual circumstances of a household during each monthly assessment period. This allows UC awards to be adjusted on a monthly basis, ensuring that if a claimant's income falls, they do not have to wait several months for a rise in their UC. UC pays up to 85% of childcare costs to support working parents, compared with 70% in the legacy benefits system.

[903958] **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab) [V]: ExcludedUK estimates that around 3 million taxpayers are ineligible for the furlough and self-employed income support schemes. Among the left behind are thousands of freelancers on short-term PAYE contracts, particularly in the creative industries. What is the Minister doing to ensure that support is reaching those who make such a vital economic and cultural contribution to this country?

Mims Davies: The Treasury has put forward an unprecedented package to support people as widely as possible through this pandemic. The labour market sits with me, and I am working with the Department to make sure that we understand the challenges of self-employment, as we have jobcentres reopening, and that we support claimants who perhaps need to look at the next stage of their work journey, moving on from self-employment, or coming back into it.

[903962] **Paul Holmes** (Eastleigh) (Con): With the possible increased uncertainty over employment in these times, many of my constituents will be relying on the good work of the jobcentre to secure future opportunities. Will the

Minister outline how jobcentres are using technology to help with employment and to help find opportunities faster for my constituents in Eastleigh?

Mims Davies: I confess that I know my hon. Friend's jobcentre extremely well; I thank it for its response to the pandemic, and all those who have been on the frontline in this emergency. From the start of June, our work coaches have made over a quarter of a million outbound customer support calls each week. Understanding the digital needs as well, we will be using technology to host virtual job fairs—they have already started—working

with employers to deliver online mentoring circles and facilitating sector-based work academies, which I am sure will come to Eastleigh.

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 suspend the House for three minutes.

3.28 pm

Sitting suspended.

Covid-19: Support and Accommodation for Asylum Seekers

3.34 pm

Mr Speaker: Before we move on, I would like to say that my thoughts and, I am sure, those of the House are with those injured in Glasgow at the weekend.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Home Secretary if she will make a statement on support and accommodation for asylum seekers during the covid-19 pandemic.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, for those kind words; they will mean an awful lot to my constituents.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): My thoughts and those of the Home Secretary and, I am sure, the entire House are with the victims of the appalling knife attack that happened in Glasgow on Friday afternoon. I would like to pay tribute to the brave first responders who, as always, ran towards danger to protect the public. They include Police Scotland hero David Whyte, who was very sadly seriously wounded. The suspect has been named as Badreddin Abadlla Adam, a 28-year-old asylum seeker originally from Sudan. The House will appreciate that I am able to provide only limited information on this case while the investigation is under way, but I can talk about the United Kingdom's proud history of supporting asylum seekers.

Last year, the United Kingdom made 20,000 grants of protection or asylum, one of the highest numbers of any country in Europe. We welcomed more than 3,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, the highest number of any country in Europe. Indeed, it made up 20% of Europe's UASC intake.

The UK has a statutory obligation to provide destitute asylum seekers with support while their case is being considered. While asylum cases are being considered, asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute are provided with free accommodation. The utilities are paid for, council tax is paid for, and free healthcare on the NHS is available. Free education is available for those with children, and there is a cash allowance to cover other essential living needs, which recently increased by 5%, considerably more than inflation. The package needs to be viewed as a whole.

During the coronavirus pandemic, we have stepped up the help available to go beyond the statutory requirements that I have just laid out. We have paused the usual practice of asking people to move on from supported accommodation when their asylum claim is decided either positively or negatively, so that they can remain in supported asylum accommodation. As a consequence of that decision, which was implemented on 27 March, around 4,000 more people are in supported accommodation than was the case at the end of March, because people are still coming into the system, but nobody is moving on. We have therefore been frantically procuring additional accommodation around the country to meet that additional need. The circumstances in Glasgow are slightly different, but I suspect we will come on to the specifics of Glasgow, so I will answer those questions in due course. That is the principal

measure we have taken to ensure that people seeking asylum have been looked after and protected during the coronavirus epidemic.

Where we have procured additional hotels, we provide full-board accommodation, including laundry services, personal hygiene products and feminine hygiene products. Wraparound services are also provided, including welfare support, healthcare and access to mental health services. Asylum seekers also have 24-hour-a-day access to assistance via Migrant Help through a freephone number.

We are working at pace to increase the available accommodation so that we can move asylum seekers from hotels into more permanent accommodation as quickly as possible, which I think we would all agree is more suitable. Efforts are currently under way to do exactly that. Over time and in due course, we will be returning to a business-as-usual approach in a phased, proportionate and careful way.

We are committed to ensuring that vulnerable asylum seekers are provided with all the support they require. As our nation has been battling coronavirus, we have continued and will continue to look after asylum seekers. We will continue to drive forward the reforms required to support those asylum seekers who are in genuine need. I commend this statement to the House.

Alison Thewliss: There have been two deaths in hotel accommodation in Glasgow Central since the start of lockdown: Adnan Elbi in McLays Guest House at the start of May, and Badreddin Abadlla Adam, who was shot dead on Friday after carrying out a shocking knife attack, which left three asylum seekers, two Park Inn hotel staff and Police Constable David Whyte in hospital. My thoughts are with them and their loved ones, and my thanks go to the emergency services who so bravely and swiftly dealt with a terrifying situation.

The Minister came to the House less than two weeks ago to hear the concerns raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens). Our concerns persist. At the start of lockdown, the Home Office contractor Mears moved 321 people from initial accommodation in serviced flats across Glasgow into city centre hotels. It did not consult, as it is obliged to do, with Glasgow City Council or anyone else. Contrary to the oral and written evidence given to the Home Affairs Committee by Mears boss John Taylor, those people included pregnant women, trafficked women, torture victims, family groups and vulnerable people, young people included, two of whom ended up in hospital on Friday. They were given little notice: according to the Scottish Refugee Council, one family with food on the hob and clothes in the washing machine were given half an hour to gather their belongings.

One of my constituents was a friend of Adnan, who died in McLay's Guest House. He has faced extreme trauma because of that and has asked to be moved, but is still in that guest house two months later.

I have some questions for the Minister. First, which Whitehall source led the BBC to report that three people had been found dead, which was not true and caused a great deal of distress in my constituency? Mears has misled Committee members—elected Members—and has now admitted that no vulnerability assessments were carried out. When did the Minister find out that Mears had lied to everybody about this, and will he

suspend its contract? Will he immediately reinstate the meagre £5.37 a day to allow asylum seekers a small but important degree of dignity? Will he halt any evictions while this outbreak is going on? Will he work with Glasgow City Council, organisations in Glasgow, the Scottish Government and asylum seekers themselves to return them to appropriate accommodation as soon as possible? Will he authorise an independent inquiry into asylum accommodation, which is very urgently needed? Lastly, will he take responsibility and apologise for a saga that has heaped trauma on to already vulnerable people in Glasgow and across the UK?

Chris Philp: I thank the hon. Lady for those questions. She started by asking about the move of 321 people in Glasgow from serviced apartments into hotel accommodation, which occurred around the end of March. That was a separate process from the one I described earlier, involving the extra 4,000 places. The contractor, Mears, moved those 321 people from the serviced apartments into hotels because it was judged that, as the coronavirus epidemic took hold, the serviced apartments were not appropriate and not safe. It was done for safety reasons, and that has been entirely borne out by the subsequent statistics. Glasgow accommodates slightly over 5,000 asylum seekers, as the hon. Lady will know—many of them are in her constituency—and during the coronavirus epidemic over the last three months or so, of those over 5,000 service users, only two have tested positive for coronavirus, and both, I am pleased to say, have fully recovered. Among those people accommodated in hotels there has not been a single confirmed case of coronavirus. So the steps being taken to safeguard the public, and to safeguard the asylum seekers in particular, have been successful.

The hon. Lady asked about the plans for the future, and I can confirm that it is our plan to move people out of those hotels into more regular mainstream accommodation as quickly as possible. That was always the intention; it was only ever a temporary measure, and that applies to hotel accommodation, of course, in the rest of the United Kingdom as well as in Scotland. But I would say that these hotels are of good quality. The one involved on Friday was a three-star Radisson hotel; it was a good hotel with substantial facilities, including en suite showers for every single room.

The hon. Lady asked about evictions and whether people are being asked to move on, as would ordinarily be the case. That is currently not happening, as she knows, following the announcement on 27 March, but in due course, as life returns a little bit more to normal and now that the ban on moving home has ended, we will be returning to normal over time, but it will be done in a very careful and phased way. Nothing will be done in a rush, and I would point out that those who have successful asylum grants will actually be better off with universal credit when they move on, so it is in their interests as well.

There are a number of questions that the hon. Lady and her colleagues from Glasgow asked me in a letter dated a week ago today, 22 June. I do now have detailed answers to all those questions. I will be sending them in writing, to the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) in the first instance, in the next 24 to 48 hours, and then meeting all Glasgow MPs who wish to meet the hon. Lady to go through those in detail either later this week or at the latest early next week.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): May I start, Mr Speaker, by associating myself with the sympathies you offered to the people of Glasgow on this horrible attack?

I agree with my hon. Friend the Minister that we have a proud history of helping those most in need. Does he agree that those who abuse asylum make it harder for those who are genuinely vulnerable, and can he confirm that the Home Office is committed to reforming the system, so that it can make swifter judgments and truly work for those most in need?

Chris Philp: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, and he is right. Some asylum claims are meritorious—obviously, many are—and we should work quickly and humanely to grant those applications and offer help on integrating into UK society. But where there are meritless asylum claims, we need to make sure those are equally identified and rejected quickly, because it is unfair on the British public as a whole and on genuine asylum claimants if unmeritorious claims take up too much time in our system.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): Let me start by thanking the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) for securing this important urgent question and the Minister for his initial response. Once again, I wish to pay tribute to the extraordinary bravery and dedication of our emergency service workers. I know that the whole House is united in sending our gratitude to PC David Whyte and our best wishes for his recovery, just as we send our best wishes for the recovery of all those injured in this tragic attack. PC Whyte was part of a policing team who responded quickly and skilfully to keep people from danger, and he and his colleagues will have our heartfelt admiration and respect. Working alongside our magnificent NHS, they were able to save lives on Friday, but this worrying incident clearly poses a number of serious questions.

We are sympathetic to the speed with which additional accommodation has had to be sought for asylum seekers, at different stages of the asylum process, in the interests of public health when we were going into lockdown. However, this tragic attack is an important reminder of why it is vital to deliver the correct, balanced approach to housing and related support services for asylum seekers, as well as supporting the wider community. As a result, there are a number of questions I would like to ask the Minister.

At the weekend, the Home Secretary suggested that this type of accommodation had been allocated because of the covid-19 crisis. However, we know that there is an ongoing problem, which predates the crisis, of people having been housed in what is deemed to be “initial accommodation” for prolonged periods before being moved into more appropriate dispersal accommodation. Can the Minister clarify how many asylum seekers are in initial accommodation compared with the number in dispersal accommodation across the country? Will he update the House about the duration of stays for asylum seekers at the Park Inn hotel in Glasgow? Will he share with the House what vulnerability and risk assessments the Home Office and service providers are currently conducting when placing people in asylum support accommodation, in order to ensure that people have the support they need, including access to mental

[Holly Lynch]

health support? Finally, what work is being undertaken to identify the risk factors that could have been spotted in this attacker, and how will that change future practice?

Chris Philp: I thank the shadow Minister for her question. I should take this opportunity to welcome her to her place, and I look forward to many exchanges across the Dispatch Box in the months and perhaps, if we are lucky, years ahead. She asked about the numbers of people being supported in asylum accommodation. We currently have 44,000 people being supported under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and some 4,000 people being supported under section 4; pre-coronavirus, we had about 48,000 people supported. The number has increased dramatically in the past four or five years—it has almost doubled in that period—so we are growing our asylum accommodation estate in order to cater for that increase. Of course, we are trying to get people into dispersed accommodation—the more stable accommodation—as much as we can. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell) pointed out, the more we can make sure we can look after meritorious claims quickly but dismiss unmeritorious claims, the less pressure there will be on asylum accommodation in the first place.

Every asylum seeker is subjected to a risk assessment, on health and on other grounds, at the point of receipt into the system. I do not want to comment too much on this individual's case, but when he first made one of his asylum claims—he made two—he flagged a health vulnerability, but it was a minor physical vulnerability, not anything that could have had anything to do with what happened on Friday. I assure the hon. Lady that those assessments do take place and there are round-the-clock facilities for asylum seekers to report any health or other issues that they may have.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Clearly, he is right to extol the virtues, which we in this country hold dear, of extending our hands and arms to those who are fleeing and who are extremely vulnerable. Many of them will have come from war-torn areas of the globe. Some of them will be dangerous to other asylum seekers and the British public, so what measures will he look at to assess those individuals' risk of violence towards the British public and other asylum seekers?

Chris Philp: My hon. Friend, as always, makes a very good point. As I said in response to the shadow Minister a moment ago, risk assessments take place at the point of arrival and on an ongoing basis. I assure him that with asylum seekers, whenever UK Visas and Immigration identifies risk to others, appropriate action will always be taken. Everybody's vigilance will be elevated to even higher levels after the incident on Friday.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): This was a devastating incident, and we, too, wish all six who are in hospital a full recovery. We pay tribute to Constable Whyte and his colleagues in the emergency services for their bravery. Our thoughts are also with the wider asylum community in Glasgow.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) is absolutely right; there must be an independent inquiry, because huge questions persist as to why there was a mass move to hotels, how it was implemented and the extent to which vulnerabilities were or were not assessed. A huge gap has grown between the system that the Minister describes and reality as it has been described to us by people working on the ground.

For now, our focus must be on supporting people, so will the Home Office contribute funding for vital counselling and other support? Will the Minister reinstate even the pitiful cash support for individuals who are still in hotels? Will he ensure that the exit strategy is shared and consulted on with Glasgow City Council and other key partners? Will he maintain the pause in evictions? Will he speak to the leader of Glasgow City Council—a vital partner—as well as the Scottish Government? Finally, will he acknowledge that people are angry about what has happened, and that there are concerns that the Home Office's approach to the asylum system has become so hands-off that it risks becoming a Cinderella service?

Chris Philp: The hon. Gentleman asked whether we would have discussions with Glasgow City Council about the ongoing asylum accommodation estate in that fine city, and of course we will. I believe that discussions took place this afternoon—in the last two or three hours—between Home Office officials and Glasgow City Council on the very topic of moving people out of hotels and into more stable accommodation.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned healthcare. Healthcare for asylum seekers, wherever they may be in the country, is taken care of by the local NHS or, in the case of Glasgow, by the Bridge Project, which is co-ordinated by Glasgow City Council. I have every confidence in the service that Glasgow City Council and the NHS in Scotland provide.

The hon. Gentleman asked about meeting Glasgow City Council, and I would be very happy to meet its leader at any time. As I mentioned, I will be meeting Glasgow MPs, if not later this week, certainly next week. On the question of restarting move-ons, I have been very clear that as the country returns to normal, so we would expect the asylum system to return to normal. In a measured, phased and careful way, we will return to the system as it was before, which worked extremely well, but we will be extremely thoughtful in the way we do that.

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): What marks a society out is how we treat our most vulnerable. I believe that the UK has a strong track record and should be proud of being one of the few countries during the covid lockdown still to take in unaccompanied minors. However, I am concerned about what will happen next year if we do not have replacement schemes in place. Can my hon. Friend give me assurances that those schemes will continue next year, especially for unaccompanied minors and for family reunion?

Chris Philp: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to our extremely proud record. I have already referred to the fact that we took in more unaccompanied asylum-seeking children last year than any other European country. We also took in some Dublin children during the coronavirus epidemic. About six or eight weeks ago,

we took in a number from Greece who had been accommodated in the camps. We were pretty much the only European country allowing Dublin returns of that kind during coronavirus, which says a great deal about this country's proud track record.

In terms of the future, clearly we are in the process of negotiation at the moment. An amendment to the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill, on Report tomorrow, has been tabled but, as required by statute, the Government are negotiating with the European Union in good faith to secure a replacement agreement for Dublin, to allow the reciprocal reunification of unaccompanied children—in both directions. A few weeks ago, we tabled a detailed legal case to facilitate that, and more negotiations are happening this week, I believe. I am sure that all of us in this House hope that those negotiations on a reciprocal basis are successful.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): We will debate those issues tomorrow. It is important that there are guarantees that young people can join family who are here and who can care for them, whatever reciprocal arrangements are in place.

May I ask the Minister specifically about support for asylum accommodation? I join you, Mr Speaker, and Members across the House in sending our best wishes to those affected by the awful incident in Glasgow. The Home Affairs Committee has been told repeatedly of serious concerns about asylum seekers being left in hotel accommodation for long periods and about the rushed move of so many people into hotel accommodation in Glasgow during the crisis. Given that the Minister must have been asked about and consulted on those moves of people into hotel accommodation, why did he not consider providing additional financial support—otherwise it is withdrawn from people in hotel accommodation—that they could have used for things such as hand sanitation, additional food needs or basic provisions that they could not get?

Chris Philp: The reason for the rapid move, which we discussed earlier, around the end of March, was the unsuitable conditions in the serviced apartments. That is why those 321 people were moved. As I said, it has been successful in that not a single one of the people moved into hotels in Glasgow has tested positive for coronavirus.

The right hon. Lady asked about the financial element. When someone is in dispersed accommodation or a serviced department, they get the allowance, which is principally to cover food and some other essentials. When they move into a hotel, all those things like food, the hand sanitiser she referred to, hygiene products, laundry services and so on are provided by the hotel, removing the need for the cash grant.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): I, too, associate myself with your remarks at the start of the debate, Mr Speaker, to the people of Glasgow and the victims of last week's atrocious act. This Government have been committed to supporting asylum seekers and children. What steps will the Minister's Department take to assure councils of future support mechanisms for children?

Chris Philp: Looking after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is extremely important. As a Member of Parliament representing Croydon, which has either the highest or second highest number of UASC, I have seen at first hand how much care and support they often need. My hon. Friend asked about support for councils doing that. He may be aware that a few weeks ago, earlier in June, we announced a substantial increase in the funding for councils looking after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and care leavers. Councils with the largest number of UASC will get a 25% increase in their funding this year. All councils with care leavers will get increases of between 20% and 60% in their funding, which is a powerful demonstration of this Government's commitment to ensuring that children are properly looked after.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I, too, associate myself with your remarks earlier, Mr Speaker, about our sympathy being with the people of Glasgow and in particular our admiration for Constable Whyte. I also associate myself with the remarks made by the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), particularly about the concerns—the mental health concerns—that had already been expressed by the Scottish Refugee Council and others about the conditions in which asylum seekers are being asked to live. Will the Minister consider a full public inquiry into what happened in Glasgow, so that, as we move away from what are, as he acknowledges, abnormal conditions at the moment—including the dreadful conditions we have seen in Glasgow—we can start to treat and look after asylum seekers in a much more acceptable manner that allows them their dignity and to be regarded as people who can contribute to society?

Chris Philp: There is currently a police investigation under way, so the right thing is to wait for the outcome of that investigation by Police Scotland before making any further comment. On the conditions that asylum seekers live in, as I have said, this country has an extremely proud history of looking after asylum seekers. We look after them much better than many, if not most, other European countries, with free accommodation, council tax paid for, utilities paid for, NHS treatment provided free, education provided for those with children, and a cash allowance in addition. I am proud of our record and am very happy to defend it.

Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): I also echo your comments, Mr Speaker, and my thoughts are with everyone in Glasgow impacted by the incident.

Wolverhampton City of Sanctuary has been doing great with asylum seekers throughout the covid-19 pandemic and has been brilliant at making sure everyone is connected with each other during this difficult time. At the end of the pandemic, will my hon. Friend come and meet its members to see the great work they are doing in Wolverhampton?

Chris Philp: I congratulate my hon. Friend and the fine city of Wolverhampton on their work. It sounds as though they are setting an example to the rest of the country in how to manage this matter with compassion and sensitivity. I would of course be delighted to learn more about the work that my hon. Friend and his colleagues on Wolverhampton City Council are doing.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): On behalf of the DUP, I associate my hon. Friends and myself with the comments about the events in Glasgow. All the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is united in support of those who need help.

I have highlighted in the past to the Minister the discrepancy whereby those who are reliant on the welfare system have seen just a temporary rise of 26p. They do not understand, and to be truthful neither do I. I know he wants to help, which is very important, but what additional help and support is available at this time of fear, especially for those who do not understand the system, so that they can source all the financial assistance they need to survive?

Chris Philp: I say again that the cash amount, which went up by 5%, is only one small part of the support package, which includes free accommodation, council tax paid for, utilities paid for, free healthcare and free education. One has to look at the package in the round. The hon. Gentleman asked, rightly, about the advice and assistance available to migrants. There are helplines available through Migrant Help and other organisations via free phones available in these hotels and other places of accommodation, so that when they need assistance and advice they can access it. Of course, asylum seekers are also eligible for the more general support available to the whole of society via local authorities, which have received £3.2 billion to assist those in need at this time of national difficulty.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): Through our aid spending, the British people play a leading role in supporting millions of refugees all over the world, including through the £2.8 billion we have committed in response to the Syria crisis. Does my hon. Friend agree that aid spending in conflict zones goes an enormous way towards stopping people needing to seek asylum and reducing the trade of people traffickers?

Chris Philp: My hon. Friend is right. Every pound that we spend helping vulnerable people in a conflict zone can help far more people, and often those people are more vulnerable than those who come to the UK. Our money is most effectively spent in those conflict zones, which is why we are the only G7 economy to spend 0.7% of GNI on overseas aid, why we are the second biggest donor in the Syria region, and why we help so many people. I think our aid budget is the biggest or the second biggest in any European country. That is a measure of this country's passion. It is through that programme that we can help the largest number of people in need.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): Can my hon. Friend confirm that maintaining law and order and keeping the British public safe remain this Government's top priorities? Can he confirm that our asylum policy will always be in keeping with that ethos?

Chris Philp: Yes, I can categorically confirm that. The safety of our citizens is this Government's highest priority. When people, including asylum seekers, commit very serious offences, we will take appropriate action through the criminal justice system. But if someone who has been granted asylum commits a very serious offence, we are able, consistent with the refugee convention, to seek

to remove that person. If somebody comes here and accepts our welcome and our hospitality but then commits a very serious criminal offence, endangering the public, it is right that that person should be eligible for removal, as allowed by the law.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your kind words to the people of Glasgow. It was a tragic and horrific scene, and it was a traumatic experience for those injured and those caught up in it who were living in the hotel, many of whom have had traumatic experiences in their lives, coming from war-torn countries or as trafficked women. I thank the Minister for committing himself to a meeting—the quicker the better, as far as I am concerned. I ask this question in general terms, not about the incident on Friday. Can he confirm what Mears confirmed in a press conference on Thursday morning: that those who were placed in hotel accommodation did not have a vulnerability risk assessment? Does he think it is right that trafficked women have been in hotels for 12 months?

Chris Philp: The 321 people moved into hotel accommodation in Glasgow have been there for around three months. As I said, work is under way, including this afternoon, between Home Office officials and Glasgow City Council to get them moved back into more regular accommodation as soon as is logistically possible. In terms of risk assessments, I mentioned before that all asylum seekers are interviewed at great length, including about various vulnerabilities, at the point when their asylum claim is made. In terms of ongoing vulnerability assessments, perhaps when people are being moved from A to B, I will have to look into that and get back to the hon. Gentleman.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): People make Glasgow, and our city remains united in wanting to give the warmest of welcomes to those who choose to make their home among us, but what asylum seekers have experienced during this pandemic is the hostile environment at its absolute worst. The Minister speaks of welcome and hospitality, but the 5% increase he talks of is 26p a day, and that has been withdrawn from the people who have been moved into hotel accommodation. Surely the way to respect their dignity and extend a welcome to asylum seekers is to extend the right to work to them, so that they can contribute to our society in the way that they want to.

Chris Philp: I do not for one moment accept the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that there has been anything hostile in the environment extended to asylum seekers. As I have said several times, but I will say it again, in case he did not hear it, those who come here are given free accommodation, with council tax paid for and utilities paid for, free healthcare, free education and a cash allowance. During the coronavirus crisis, the ordinary operation of the asylum system, where people get asked to move on when their case is decided, has been suspended for the time being. That, in my view, is a compassionate and generous response, and I do not see any reasonable basis for criticising it.

Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con) [V]: Every loss of life is a tragedy, and any crime perpetrated by people coming to these shores is a disaster, but does my hon. Friend agree

that we must not allow a few bad experiences to turn us into a mean-spirited country and that we should be doing more to support those who come to these shores? To echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson), the work of my local Flintshire City of Sanctuary in creating a culture of welcome and inclusion is exactly the approach we should be taking. Will my hon. Friend look further at what can be done in that area?

Chris Philp: The sound was a little intermittent, but I think I got the gist of my hon. Friend's question. I can confirm that we will always seek to extend a welcome to those who are genuinely in need of protection. That is why last year we gave around 20,000 grants of asylum or protection, and of course we want to welcome those people and help them integrate into our society and make a meaningful contribution, as all of us want to. Where there are risks to public safety, we will naturally seek to take robust action to defend the safety of the British public.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP) [V]: My constituent fled Syria. He is fragile but he felt safe until the Mears Group told him that he had 30 minutes to be moved to an unknown location because of lockdown. Far from offering the health support that the Minister has described in this utopia he keeps on about, that approach took my constituent right back to the traumatic state he was in when he first fled. We in Glasgow are sick of people being treated like this. What is the Minister going to do, not say, about it, because it is happening on his watch?

Chris Philp: The hon. Lady asked about moves at the beginning of the coronavirus epidemic and, as I have explained, that was done for reasons of public health and public safety. I will not apologise for taking steps at the beginning of this very serious health epidemic to protect the health of all the public and of asylum seekers in particular. As I have said, there have been no confirmed coronavirus cases among people living in Glasgow hotels, so that approach has worked.

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): I am delighted to say that my constituency of Stoke-on-Trent Central has welcomed many asylum seekers in the past, but does the Minister recognise that areas such as Stoke-on-Trent face huge and increasingly straining demands on our local support networks and that the capacity is not unlimited?

Chris Philp: Yes, I do accept what my hon. Friend says. I know that Stoke-on-Trent does a great deal already, for which all of us, I am sure, are very grateful. There are, of course, natural constraints to how much any given city can do, and one of the reasons that I will speed up the whole asylum process is to alleviate exactly those pressures.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) [V]: Refugees and asylum seekers in the UK are here because their lives are at risk elsewhere and they need a temporary safe haven. Most live here peacefully and without issues for a period of time, but can the Minister clarify how information on those asylum seekers who may pose a

threat to themselves and others is shared between the Home Office, councils, and health, police and security services?

Chris Philp: As the hon. Gentleman will understand, whenever a risk is identified, it is rapidly shared between all relevant organisations, including those that he listed. He mentioned providing sanctuary. Of course, many asylum seekers who reach here have travelled through safe countries first, particularly France, and it is appropriate for people seeking asylum to do so in the first safe country they get to.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): I associate myself with your comments earlier, Mr Speaker, and pass on my best wishes to those who have been sadly affected.

Does my hon. Friend agree that this appalling attack underlines the importance of reforming our asylum policy so that we can stop it being abused with false claims and ensure that those who pose a significant threat to our way of life have their claims rejected and are swiftly deported?

Chris Philp: My hon. Friend is right. The system is too slow. It is too slow to grant meritorious claims, but it is also, I am afraid to say, open to abuse with repeated unmeritorious appeals, which often drag the process out over many years. Reform is needed along the lines that he describes and it is something on which we are working.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP) [V]: Those of us who represent Glasgow are utterly horrified at the Minister's tone-deaf remarks about how lovely these hotel rooms are. I ask him whether he could stay in one hotel room for several weeks during lockdown. I am afraid to say that the Government have been posted missing on the issue of asylum accommodation in Glasgow, which many of us in the city have been jumping up and down about for several months. What is needed from the Government is an intensive engagement strategy with public bodies such as the council, the health service and the third sector. Given that no Minister has even met the leader of our city council since the Government came to office, will he implement an intensive engagement strategy now?

Chris Philp: I look forward to meeting Glasgow MPs next week and the leader of Glasgow City Council shortly.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): I am generally reassured that asylum seekers receive the necessary support, but it is clear that the process of coming illegally to the UK is fraught with danger. Are we doing enough to disincentivise migrants from making the perilous journey and to bring people traffickers to justice?

Chris Philp: My hon. Friend is right. As I said a few moments ago, people should claim asylum in the first safe country that they reach, which very often is not the United Kingdom. Many of the arrivals here have travelled through Italy, Germany, France or many other manifestly safe European countries. They should claim asylum in one of those countries first. They should claim asylum in the first safe country they arrive in. Many of the

[Chris Philp]

people who cross the channel in small boats, for example, are facilitated by ruthless and dangerous criminals. We are cracking down on those, prosecuting them and arresting them. We are determined to stop dangerous illegal entry to the country.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP) [V]: Glasgow is a city that prides itself on welcoming asylum seekers and refugees. Since the shocking events on Friday, Glaswegians have, in typical fashion, voiced their support for the vulnerable people, including families, who were dumped in hotels at the start of lockdown. The Minister has talked about the generosity of the support package, but he must acknowledge that human beings need other things: they need human interactions and the love of their community. They need to feel whole. In May, a Syrian refugee was found dead in a hotel room after reporting that he was struggling with his mental health. The Home Office must have warning systems in place. What are they, and why are they not working like they should?

Chris Philp: The case that the hon. Lady refers to is the subject of an ongoing investigation, so we will see what the result of that investigation is in due course. I mentioned earlier that there are 24-hour mechanisms for anyone in asylum accommodation who feels that they are experiencing difficulties to report them, and there are health interventions that can then be followed up.

On the hon. Lady's more general point about support, many people—asylum seekers and members of the general public—have experienced feelings of distress and isolation during the coronavirus lockdown. That is one of the burdens that we have had to bear collectively as a society in the past few months, but we are thankfully now moving beyond that.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): To follow up the question posed by my good friend the Member for Blackpool Tower and the Winter Gardens—my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton)—how long after someone's application to remain has been rejected is it, on average, before that person leaves our shores?

Chris Philp: That varies a great deal, depending on the circumstances of the individual and the circumstances in their home country. I think it is fair to say, however, that the majority, as matters stand, do not end up leaving. If somebody's asylum claim is rejected, and once the relevant appeal processes have been exhausted, it is only fair to the British public generally, and indeed to people who claim asylum successfully, that we ultimately ensure removal; otherwise, it makes a mockery of our immigration system.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP) [V]: My thoughts are with those injured in the horrendous attack in Glasgow. I commend the bravery of PC Whyte and the officers who moved towards danger in order to protect the public.

Research shows that asylum seekers are five times more likely to experience mental health problems than the rest of the population. I feel that the Home Office's use of hotels and temporary accommodation is making those problems much worse. Will the Minister commit

himself to an urgent funding package of mental health support for asylum seekers in Glasgow and further afield to ensure that they can recover from this traumatic incident? Does he recognise that they should be treated with dignity and respect?

Chris Philp: of course I agree that everybody should be treated with dignity and respect, including asylum seekers. On the health support package, I said earlier that it is provided by the local NHS and, in this case, also by Glasgow City Council, and I know that it is doing its job effectively.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I associate myself with your kind works of support for everyone affected by this incident, Mr Speaker. I want to ask specifically about the number of asylum seekers in supported accommodation who are from Sudan. Will the Minister convey to his colleagues in Government the welcome for the announced pledge to support the Government of Sudan in their transition to democracy, which came through last week?

Chris Philp: I know that my hon. Friend has done a great deal of work in this area. The best way to make sure that people are safe and secure is to ensure that the situation in their home countries is stable and safe—that there are democratic Governments and the economies prosper. That is ultimately the way to make sure that people are safe and secure, and this Government are committed to doing that.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab) [V]: Hull is a city of sanctuary. For a number of years, I have convened a roundtable of voluntary and statutory agencies to look at issues around asylum and refugees in the city, including, before covid-19, the use of hotels. One of the issues raised about housing asylum seekers in hotels with no financial support is that if they need an aspirin or a plaster, they end up going to A&E at the local hospital because they do not have the money to buy these everyday essentials. Surely that cannot be right and it is not in the interests of anybody to have those asylum seekers in our A&Es. Will the Minister look into this?

Chris Philp: Hotel accommodation is obviously not the preferred way to accommodate asylum seekers. I am speaking from memory, but I think that, prior to coronavirus, fewer than 1,000 people were accommodated in hotels, so less than 2% of the total. As I said, we are looking to unwind the hotel accommodation as quickly as logistics allow. In relation to the provision of basic things like plasters, there are typically welfare officers on hand in these hotels. I will investigate whether they have those sorts of supplies available, because the hon. Lady is certainly right that those things should be available in the hotels.

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.

4.21 pm

Sitting suspended.

Xinjiang: Uyghurs

4.29 pm

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Prime Minister whether his Government will make a statement on the mistreatment by the Chinese Government of Uyghurs in Xinjiang province.

The Minister for Asia (Nigel Adams): We are aware of reports issued today by the Associated Press and the Jamestown Foundation alleging that the Chinese Government are using pregnancy checks and forced intra-uterine devices, sterilisation and abortion to minimise Uyghur birth rates. These reports add to our concern about the human rights situation in Xinjiang and of course we will be considering the report carefully.

The broader human rights situation in Xinjiang is of ongoing and serious concern to the Government. This includes the extrajudicial detention of over a million Uyghur Muslims and other minorities in political re-education camps, systematic restrictions on Uyghur culture and the practice of Islam, and extensive and invasive surveillance targeting minorities. Further reports indicating that forced labour is being used and that children are being forcibly separated from their parents add to the growing body of evidence about the disturbing situation that Uyghurs and other minorities are facing in Xinjiang.

We have expressed our serious concerns about these issues on many occasions. The Foreign Secretary raised them directly with his Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister and State Councillor Wang Yi in March. I also raised the situation in Xinjiang with the Chinese ambassador to London in March. Since 2018, we have played a leading role in raising these concerns at the UN. For example, at the UN Third Committee in October, the UK read out a statement on behalf of 22 other countries drawing attention to the human rights violations and abuses in Xinjiang and calling on China to uphold its obligations to respect human rights. We have consistently raised the issue at the UN Human Rights Council, including at the most recent session in March, when Lord Ahmad, the Minister for human rights, raised the issue in the UK's opening address. In addition, we advise all businesses involved in investing in Xinjiang or with parts of their supply chains in Xinjiang to consider conducting appropriate due diligence to satisfy themselves that their activities do not support, or risk being seen to support, any human rights violations or abuses. The UK will continue to exercise leadership on this important issue, raising it directly with the Chinese Government and working with partners to do so at the UN.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith: The Inter-parliamentary Alliance on China—IPAC—which is made up of 30 other lawmakers from 16 global legislatures, has today published research by Professor Adrian Zenz, the world's leading expert on the treatment of minorities in Xinjiang province. The report shows that birth rates in the two mostly Uyghur regions plummeted by more than 60% from 2015 to 2018. Across the Xinjiang region, birth rates fell by nearly 24% in a single year, compared with just 4.2% nationwide. Worse, it is now clear that this is a direct result of Government actions. Unearthed Government documents mandate that birth control violations that come about

“due to the influence of extreme religious thinking”

should be “dealt with severely”, and that those unable to pay fines should be

“dealt with through coercive measures”,

including internment. Mr Zenz's paper concludes that these measures are part of a state-wide crackdown that includes the mass sterilisation of women.

This report corroborates the many horrific personal testimonies that many of us have heard. The genocide convention maintains that birth prevention targeted at minority groups is indicative of genocide, and the convention binds individual states to act, not just to rely on the international judicial system. Does my hon. Friend therefore agree that the Uyghur people have been, and are, the victims of mass atrocity crimes?

I ask the Foreign Secretary to go to the UN and call for an independent inquiry, but, sadly, I also recognise that the ways to deal with this through the UN will almost certainly be blocked by China. Given that likelihood, will my hon. Friend at least get the UK to make its own legal determination after weighing up this new evidence? Of course the world wants to deal with China, but we cannot continue with business as usual while this sort of blatant activity continues. Furthermore, given the Chinese Government's appalling record on human rights, their attack on freedoms in Hong Kong, their bullying behaviour in border disputes from the South China seas to India, their blatant breaching of the rules-based order governing the free market and their delayed declaration on covid-19, will the Government now initiate an internal review of the UK's dependence on China, with a view to significantly reducing that dependence, and call on the free world to come together to ensure that this growing threat from China is dealt with together before, as history teaches us, it is too late?

Nigel Adams: My right hon. Friend speaks with great passion and knowledge on these subjects. He refers to legal determination. As I said in my opening statement, these reports add to our concern about the situation in Xinjiang, and we will of course consider them extremely carefully. Any legal determination would be a matter for a competent court. I reiterate that we have raised concerns about the situation in Xinjiang at the UN General Assembly Third Committee and UN Human Rights Council, alongside our international partners. We will continue to make our concerns known directly to China and bilaterally, as well as through the relevant bodies.

On a full Government review, our approach to China remains clear-eyed and is rooted in our values and interests. It has always been the case that when we have concerns we raise them, and that where we need to intervene we will. We have consistently led international efforts to highlight concern about the worsening human rights situation in Xinjiang, and I assure my right hon. Friend that the United Kingdom will continue to do so.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The Chinese Communist party's brutal campaign of oppression against the Uyghur people is a scar on the conscience of the world. The Labour party stands with the people of China, including the Uyghur people in Xinjiang, and we condemn any actions by the CCP that infringe their human rights. We know that 1.5 million Uyghurs are incarcerated in re-education camps and subjected to ideological indoctrination courses, where they must learn Mandarin Chinese, recite laws banning unapproved religious practices and sing songs praising the Chinese

[Stephen Kinnock]

Communist party, and we know that beatings and solitary confinement are routinely used to punish those who fail to comply.

The accounts that have emerged today about the CCP's draconian measures to suppress birth rates are utterly horrific—women subjected to forced IUD insertions, pregnancy prevention injections, sterilisation. The CCP appears to be engaged in what some experts are calling a campaign of demographic genocide. Will the Minister therefore confirm that the Government will call for an impartial international investigation into what is happening in Xinjiang? Will he confirm that the imposition of measures intended to prevent births within an ethnic or religious group is expressly forbidden under article II(d) of the UN convention on genocide? Will he confirm that any country that is a contracting party to the UN convention on genocide may call upon the UN to take appropriate action under articles IV, V and VI of the convention, and that the UK Government will therefore now make the necessary representations?

Does the Minister recognise that the CCP's actions in Xinjiang reflect a wider pattern of behaviour of increasingly authoritarian policies at home and aggressive expansionism abroad, including in Hong Kong, Ladakh and the South China sea? Will he set out how the Government intend to defend human rights and the rule of law? Will the Government now engage proactively with the European Union, the US and Governments in the Asia-Pacific region who share our democratic values to lead the international response in building consensus against the CCP's increasingly belligerent behaviour towards its own people?

Nigel Adams: I thank the hon. Gentleman for putting so concisely his concern on this matter. I can tell him that we have been very active on this issue. We have played a leading role in raising these concerns bilaterally and at the United Nations.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We have concerns about the detention and human rights abuses, with more than a million Uyghur Muslims and other minorities detained in political re-education camps—some people may refer to them as other things—and we deplore the systematic restrictions on their culture and practice of Islam, alongside the targeted surveillance of minorities.

On 10 March, at the 43rd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, we raised our concerns specifically about the violations and with regard to forced labour in Xinjiang, under our item 4 statement. On 9 March, the Foreign Secretary raised the same concerns about Xinjiang with his Chinese counterpart. As I said in my statement, I have spoken directly to the Chinese ambassador to raise our concerns about human rights in Xinjiang. On 25 February, at the 43rd session of the UN Human Rights Council, the Minister responsible for human rights, Lord Ahmad, directly raised his concerns about Xinjiang during his opening address at the conference. We call on China to allow the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights unfettered access to the region.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) and associate myself, somewhat surprisingly, with the

words of the Labour Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock)—that is a welcome change.

I have heard the various comments made by my right hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman, and I have heard the Minister's answers, which I support. Will the Minister perhaps look at the companies operating here in the United Kingdom that may have benefited from some of the labour in Xinjiang that he described and explain why they are able to operate here in the UK? Why are they able to use labour from these camps for re-education, at best, and very often for worse? Why are these companies seemingly able to operate around the world as though they were ordinary companies?

Nigel Adams: The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee is right to raise that point. He will be aware that bidders for any central Government contracts above certain thresholds are required to confirm that they are compliant with the transparency requirements in the Modern Slavery Act 2015. However, the decision on high-risk vendors did not involve the award of a contract to the telecommunications firm to which I assume he may have been referring. We take this issue very seriously, and, as I said in my statement, all British companies involved in the region must consider carrying out proper due diligence to ensure that human rights violations have not been taking place in their supply chains.

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP) [V]: I am glad to see such an element of consensus across the House today; I find it difficult to disagree with any of the previous contributions to this discussion. The challenge for us is to decide what we are actually going to do about it. Warm words and sympathy come easily to politicians, but Beijing would be entitled to feel that it is getting somewhat mixed messages. I concur that the UN mechanisms are pretty stymied. This is not a new problem—it has been going on for a number of years—and the UK is becoming increasingly involved in strategic developments with, in effect, emanations of the Chinese state. Huawei is one example, but there are others. Will the Minister undertake at least to promise to promote investigations by UN observers of the camps and, indeed, the reports of forced sterilisation, which is a degree of ethnic cleansing under the Rome statute? This is serious stuff on which we must take action. Will the Minister also come back to the House with an audit of all Government procurement contracts with Chinese companies and an assessment of these concerns?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise those issues. He will be aware that access to Xinjiang is not particularly easy to procure. We would very much welcome United Nations personnel being allowed into the region and have pressed China on that. It has not been the most easy thing to deal with—I have raised the matter personally with the Chinese ambassador. I reiterate what I said earlier: we need to ensure that British firms really do consider due diligence in their supply chains.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con) [V]: Forced sterilisation of women; children ripped from their families; detention centres to treat the so-called pathology of religious and cultural beliefs; forced labour; rape; and DNA databases. In our history, we have learned that we

must all take a stand against systematic and industrialised efforts to eradicate religious and ethnic minorities, so will my hon. Friend commit to using Magnitsky-style sanctions to bring to justice Chinese Communist party officials who perpetrate and profit from this cultural genocide of the Uyghur people?

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend speaks with a great deal of experience in this area. Of course, she will be aware that the Foreign Secretary has committed himself to making a statement about our sanctions regime. That will be done before the summer recess. We have made clear our deep concern about this report and the human rights situation in Xinjiang. My hon. Friend will forgive me: of course we will not speculate on who will be sanctioned under the new regime, particularly as the legislation is not yet in force, but she should not have too long to wait.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I have constituents who have repeatedly raised concerns with me about China's human rights record, whether on Buddhists in Tibet or Falun Gong practitioners, and now we are faced with allegations of human rights violations of the highest order. The Minister keeps saying that companies should conduct due diligence in their supply chains. What is he doing to ensure that they actually conduct that due diligence, and what is his advice to companies that find that there are human rights abuses in their supply chains?

Nigel Adams: Certainly, if I were a company and had found that there were human rights abuses in my supply chain, I would be looking at a different supply chain, quite frankly. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise the issues of Tibet and Falun Gong. Clearly, these are very concerning issues. We will continue to work with private sector companies; we provide advice through our posts for those that wish to conduct business in China, and we will continue to do so. The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): Reports of forced sterilisation and forced abortion are just further appalling reminders of the human rights record in China and the oppression of the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang province. As well as confirming that he will continue to raise this issue in the international forum, will the Minister redouble his efforts to raise it—not just this specific issue, but China's broader human rights record—directly with his Chinese counterparts?

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend is right; we consistently do that. As I said, we have been leading the way in this regard in the international community since 2018. As well as the human rights issues, we have serious concerns about the use of extensive and invasive surveillance methods to target minorities in Xinjiang. We raise this on a bilateral basis with our Chinese counterparts and, as I have said on several occasions, at the United Nations.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab) [V]: It is clear that the situation in Xinjiang has deteriorated over the past years. The systematic oppression of a whole ethnic minority group, who are physically abused and psychologically indoctrinated, must be condemned. I am certain that this pandemic has only worsened the conditions

in the internment camps and has created a double emergency for the Uyghur community. Will the Minister condemn the persecution of Uyghur Muslims to the fullest? Has he considered using Magnitsky powers for personal sanctions?

Nigel Adams: Again, the hon. Gentleman is right to raise that. I refer him to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) on Magnitsky-style sanctions. The legislation will be cleared before the summer recess, so I am afraid the hon. Gentleman will have to wait a little longer in that regard. However, I can assure him of how seriously the United Kingdom takes these human rights violations and abuses in Xinjiang—demonstrated not least by the statement at the UN Third Committee in October drawing attention to these violations, which was signed by 22 international partners. We will continue to call on China—we do so from here today—to uphold its obligations to respect human rights.

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): Reports of forced sterilisation by the Chinese authorities are leading many to fear something approaching genocide of the Uyghur Muslims. This is reminiscent of the worst totalitarian regimes. Does my hon. Friend agree that it cannot be business as usual with China while it treats its Muslim citizens and other minorities in this appalling way?

Nigel Adams: Clearly, as I have said previously, the reports we have seen in the last 24 hours or so add considerably to our serious concern about the situation in Xinjiang. We have had a short period of time to digest those reports. We will continue to stress our concern about the situation in Xinjiang and the way the Uyghur Muslim community in particular is having its human rights violated.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) on securing this welcome opportunity, and thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting it.

These reports would be horrific even if they were of stand-alone incidents, but of course we know they are not; they are part of a course of conduct that we have seen in recent years—the re-education camps, the forced repatriation of workers within China, and the reports of organ harvesting. As we have heard from others, this is a systematic operation, reminiscent of genocide, which is being visited upon the Uyghur population.

In January of last year I led a Westminster Hall debate calling for the Government to take this to the Security Council, with a motion demanding access for a working party to Xinjiang province. We all know the obvious difficulties with that, but with everything else having failed, why have the Government not done that yet?

Nigel Adams: I remind the right hon. Gentleman that I said earlier in my statement that we are constantly raising this issue with the UN. He is right to mention organ harvesting, and I know how concerned hon. and right hon. Members are about this alleged practice. We take these allegations very seriously. We have consulted our international partners and the WHO, and the evidence provides disturbing details about the mistreatment of Falun Gong practitioners in particular, and raises worrying questions about China's transplant system.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): As well as oppressing the Uyghurs, the Communist Government of the People's Republic of China discriminate against almost 100 million Christians. Last year alone, over 5,500 churches were destroyed, closed down or confiscated. Does my hon. Friend agree that freedom of religion and belief should remain a major global campaign for the Government, and what is he doing to ensure this is maintained?

Nigel Adams: It is absolutely the case that the Government remain committed to defending freedom of religion and belief for all people—for people of all faiths or none. The Prime Minister has his own special envoy, my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti), working on this issue, and through our extensive diplomatic network we continue to lobby Governments for changes in laws and practices, and raise individual cases of persecution. We also continue to use our influence to speak up for persecuted Christians, and individuals of other faiths, in multilateral institutions, including the UN and the OSCE.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): For more than 60 years, the Chinese regime has sought to snuff out the culture, religion, heritage and liberty of the Tibetan people, and more than a million Tibetans have lost their lives. Now we hear of even more sinister tactics to suppress the Uyghurs, beyond even the outrageous concentration camps we already know about: sterilisation and eugenics. What is the Minister doing to enable UK officials to gain access to Uyghur areas, where they might find evidence of surveillance technology from Huawei aiding and abetting that suppression? Will he specifically take on the point made from the Opposition Front Bench about whether he, on behalf of the British Government, thinks that the measures meet the genocide criteria under article II(d) of the UN convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide?

Nigel Adams: British diplomats visit the region periodically. Although access is not particularly easy, we do require to observe the situation first hand. British diplomats visited most recently in November 2019. Their observations supported much of the most recent open source reporting about the restrictions that have been targeted at specific ethnic groups. My hon. Friend mentioned Tibet, which our diplomats visited from 15 to 19 July 2019. We continue to press for further access for our diplomats as well as urging the Chinese authorities to lift the visit restrictions that are imposed on all foreigners.

Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab) [V]: The Uyghurs have been systematically persecuted for decades. Concentration camps have been built for millions and we now have clear evidence that the Uyghur population is being reduced through the forced sterilisation of women: so many early warning signs of genocide. I do not want to use any company that enables that and I would support any public body that felt exactly the same, but the Government intend to ban public bodies from expressing their condemnation through boycotts. Will they now reconsider?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to be angry about those violations in the region. We referenced trade earlier, and of course we want to secure growth

and investment for the UK, but upholding human rights and British values is not a zero-sum choice. Our experience is that political freedom and the rule of law are vital underpinnings for long-running prosperity and stability, and that by having a strong relationship with China, we can have open and sometimes difficult discussions on a range of issues, including human rights. We have had very open and difficult discussions directly with our counterparts in China.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): Like many in the House, I am appalled by the treatment that the Uyghur people face at the hands of the Chinese Communist party, and I welcome the Minister's strong statement and the Government's opposition to that. Will the Government stand in solidarity with those people facing that dreadful treatment by considering giving additional asylum support to any who seek asylum in the UK?

Nigel Adams: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. Of course, any asylum issue is a matter for the Home Office. I understand that advice has been put out to take into consideration across our network the situation that Uyghur Muslims find themselves in.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that if China is to play a leading role in the international community, it must quite simply abide by international laws and human rights?

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend puts it absolutely correctly. As I said earlier, our approach to China should be clear-eyed and rooted in our values and our interests. China is a leading member of the international community and we have a strong and constructive relationship in many areas. It has to be part of the solution to many major global problems, whether that is global health, as we have seen in the past few months, or climate change. It has always been the case that where we have concerns, we raise them, and where the United Kingdom needs to intervene, we will.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab) [V]: I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Uyghurs. This new evidence shows that the Chinese state regularly subjects Uyghur women—hundreds of thousands of women—to pregnancy checks, forced sterilisation and even abortion. Some 25 years ago, we watched as the genocide took place in Bosnia, in 2017 we saw that of the Rohingya in Myanmar, and now it is the Uyghurs in China. It is about time that our Government—our Prime Minister—went to the United Nations and asked for a resolution from the Assembly to establish an independent investigation of the situation in Xinjiang region.

Nigel Adams: I thank the hon. Lady, the chair of the APPG on this matter, but she will be aware—I have referred to it several times during my answers today—that we have been leading on this at the United Nations. There is an issue with these resolutions being blocked, as she will be aware, but I think the United Kingdom can in some ways proudly declare that we have been on the front foot in ensuring that these human rights violations receive international attention, and the joint statement with 22 other countries was a testament to that.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con) [V]: I congratulate IPAC on this report. I am sure the Minister agrees that leadership on human rights requires consistency. Huawei has been public about its work with the Xinjiang Public Security Department, one of the bodies allegedly enforcing these repugnant policies. What will the Government be saying to Huawei about its ethical standards and about its alleged role in building an Orwellian surveillance state in Xinjiang and elsewhere? How on earth can Huawei be compliant with the ethical standards we expect in this country, and why are the Government still seriously considering having this company as a partner in our critical national infrastructure after this latest scandal?

Nigel Adams: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. This issue obviously touches on Huawei, and it is probably right for me to refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests; I have previously been a director and shareholder of telecommunications companies. I am so no longer, but I know the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards has a very beady eye on these matters and on debates, as several right hon. and hon. Members have discovered in recent years. I put that on the record, as my family does still have an interest in the telecoms sector.

There are credible reports of Huawei co-operating with security forces in Xinjiang. We understand that it provides IT and high-tech technology. On its participating in our 5G network, Her Majesty's Government considered a full range of risks when making our decision on the use of high-risk vendors in the UK telecoms network.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Only a few short years ago, the Chinese President was accorded a UK state visit, when he was fêted and petted by the UK establishment, and great care was taken not to mention human rights violations publicly. Given what we know about enforced organ transplants in China, and now that we hear of the sterilisation of 34% of all unmarried women of child-bearing age in the Uyghur majority city of Hotan and a whole range of other human rights abuses, what assurances can the UK Minister give this House that, in future, the UK Government will treat China as the international lawbreaker it is?

Nigel Adams: I would just say to the hon. Lady that we do raise cases of human rights violations reports. Obviously, we have only had this report in the last 24 hours, and it adds to the concerns we have regarding Xinjiang and the violations there. She raised harvesting, and we are very concerned about human rights abuses in that regard, as well as the mass detentions, discrimination, separating of children from their families and issues about religious observation. We do regularly have these uncomfortable conversations with China, and we call on it to implement the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): The Minister will have been struck by the unanimity of the disgust across the House at this latest manifestation of behaviour by the Chinese Government, and he will also be aware that this is just the latest in a long, extensive and growing charge sheet of unacceptable behaviour against the Chinese Government. In those circumstances, may I ask him and his fellow Ministers in the Foreign Office to lead

the charge inside Whitehall to reset Britain's relations with the Chinese Government, unless and until China becomes a normal respectable member of the international community?

Nigel Adams: My right hon. Friend speaks with a great deal of authority on this and other international issues, and he is right. As I have said, China is a leading member of the international community, and we must have a strong and constructive relationship, but we do not hold back from criticism. Where we have concerns, we raise them and where we need to intervene, we will do so. As I said, and as he will be aware, our relationship with China has to be rooted in our values and interests.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the consensus across the House. The condemnation of the demographic genocide is widespread, but the only reason we are debating this today is the bravery of those Uyghur Muslim women who spoke to journalists about their horrific experiences. So while I, of course, press the Minister for more information about the representations he is making to the UN to get investigators into those communities to find out exactly what is going on, I also ask this: what is being done to ensure that those women who shone a light on this abuse are being protected and will not pay the ultimate price for telling the truth about this horrific genocide?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Lady is right to raise those particular matters. At the risk of repeating myself, let me say that we have raised this issue several times at the UN and bilaterally with China. This report, which we have seen in the past 24 hours, adds considerably to our serious concerns about what is going on in Xinjiang. It is incredibly difficult to get access, and she will be aware that the lack of NGO presence and our inability to provide support, through whichever Government Department, affects that direct contact with the Uyghur women. It is heartbreaking to read that report, which contains incredibly personal tales—we have all seen that in the past few hours—and it adds to our concerns about what is going on in Xinjiang.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): It is with the utmost horror that I record what is at stake in this debate. The full might of an industrialised, advanced state, with a single-party Government, appears, under a mounting body of evidence, to be seeking to eliminate from its society a section of people on the basis of their identity—not for the first time in history. In such circumstances, speaking as someone who represents thousands of British Muslims in Wycombe, I must ask: do the Government understand that this is not an abstract and remote call for action, but something of the most profound importance to individuals and families right here in the UK?

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend is spot on, and I know that the situation is of great concern to communities, not just in Wycombe, but across the constituencies of right hon. and hon. Members in this House. We absolutely recognise the concern that there will directly be among British citizens and residents, and, of course, this is of great concern to the UK Government, but I can assure my hon. Friend and his constituents that we will be taking a lead on this matter internationally, not just through the UN, but through whichever forums we can do so.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP) [V]: The actions of China would today be considered one of the most serious threats to human rights in any state anywhere in the world. Hongkongers are facing intervention, against international law. Millions are imprisoned for their ethnicity, and these reports of forced sterilisation—if proven to be true—now show the full extent of China's disregard for human rights. Given the question marks over that country, how can this Government, in good conscience, pursue a commercial agreement with Huawei—a company with direct ties to the Communist party of China?

Nigel Adams: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. We have always been very clear-eyed about the challenge posed by Huawei. She will be aware that, following the US announcement of additional sanctions against that company, the National Cyber Security Centre has been looking carefully at any impact that it could have on the UK's networks. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has received that advice and will respond in due course. She is right to raise serious concerns about the human rights situation in Xinjiang.

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): The reports we are hearing via media outlets that China is using the concept of guilt by association linked to religious belief to incriminate and detain whole extended family networks in Xinjiang are deeply troubling. What steps is my hon. Friend taking to combat China's aggression against the Uyghur Muslim community and others and to address the lack of fulfilment of China's human rights obligations?

Nigel Adams: I know that this is very important to my hon. Friend's constituents in Keighley, and he is right to raise that. We are absolutely committed to promoting human rights in Xinjiang. As I have mentioned on several occasions, our continued multilateral and bilateral activity with China demonstrates that. At the 43rd session of the UN Human Rights Council, we raised our concerns about systematic violations of human rights and the reports of forced labour during our item 4 statement. When the Foreign Secretary met his counterpart, Foreign Minister and State Councillor Wang Yi, on 9 March, he raised our concerns about the human rights situation.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Uyghurs are singled out because they are Muslim, so their treatment reflects global Islamophobia as well as Chinese racism. The terrible persecution they suffer is often facilitated by technology, with local companies developing facial recognition and other surveillance technologies that they will then try to sell to us. The Minister talks vaguely about encouraging due diligence, but what will he do to enforce the elimination of human rights abuses from the technology supply chain?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Lady speaks with great knowledge of the sector. She must be aware that we have made it absolutely clear to any British firm wishing to do business in that particular region that they must they apply due diligence—it is essential that they do so. We will continue to press UK firms in that regard, because it is the right thing to do.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con): Time and again, we hear reports of torture, rape, concentration camps, systematic brainwashing, forced sterilisation and now forced labour

camps that feed into our global supply chain. The Chinese, of course, deny all those reports. Will my hon. Friend call for an international delegation to visit Xinjiang, so that we can find out the truth? Does he agree that global brands which may have these forced labour camps in their supply chain need to look long and hard at how and where they source their materials?

Nigel Adams: Yes, they absolutely have to look long and hard at their supply chains, for the reasons that I have given during this session. As I said, we have raised these concerns, and the report we have seen in the last 24 hours adds fuel to our serious concerns about human rights violations in Xinjiang.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): In common with all who have spoken this afternoon, I agree that the Chinese Government's policy towards its minority Uyghur population is and has been a stain on that country for many years. Sadly these revelations, while shocking, are not new. As early as 2014, senior Chinese Government Ministers were openly talking about extending the draconian family planning policies specifically to curb population growth among the Uyghur population. Will the Government assure the House that as they seek post-Brexit trade deals, they will not pursue trade to the exclusion of human rights, and that that remains an unmovable precondition?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise that issue. I can confirm that, as I have said previously, we want to secure growth and investment for the UK, but upholding human rights and our values is not a zero-sum choice. We believe that political freedom and the rule of law are vital underpinnings for both long-run prosperity and stability. By having a strong relationship with China, we are able to have open discussions on a range of very difficult issues, including human rights.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): Can the Minister outline what steps his Department is taking to help ensure that the United Nations Human Rights Council takes some decisive action, including setting up a special rapporteur or similar to better monitor and report on the Chinese Government's treatment of the Uyghurs?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Lady is right to raise the issue. At the risk of repeating ourselves, we have been on the front foot and very active in playing a leading role on this issue at the UN. I suspect that the last communication we had via Lord Ahmad with regard to Xinjiang will not be the last conversation we have on the issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I thank the Minister for responding to the urgent question. I ask Members please to be spatially aware as they leave the Chamber. The House is suspended for three minutes.

5.16 pm

Sitting suspended.

5.20 pm

On resuming—

BUSINESS AND PLANNING BILL: BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to the proceedings on the Business and Planning Bill:

Timetable

(1) (a) Proceedings on Second Reading and in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on Consideration, and proceedings on Third Reading shall be taken at today's sitting in accordance with this Order.

(b) Proceedings on Second Reading shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) four hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

(c) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on Consideration, and proceedings on Third Reading shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) six hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

Timing of proceedings and Questions to be put

(2) When the Bill has been read a second time:

(a) it shall, despite Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of bills not subject to a programme order), stand committed to a Committee of the whole House without any Question being put;

(b) the Speaker shall leave the Chair whether or not notice of an Instruction has been given.

(3) (a) On the conclusion of proceedings in Committee of the whole House, the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.

(b) If the Bill is reported with amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill as amended without any Question being put.

(4) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (1), the Chairman or Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions in the same order as they would fall to be put if this Order did not apply:

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment, new Clause or new Schedule selected by the Chairman or Speaker for separate decision;

(d) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;

(e) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and shall not put any other questions, other than the question on any motion described in paragraph (16)(a) of this Order.

(5) On a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(6) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under paragraph (4)(d) on successive amendments moved or Motions made by a Minister of the Crown, the Chairman or Speaker shall instead put a single Question in relation to those amendments or Motions.

(7) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under paragraph (4)(e) in relation to successive provisions of the Bill, the Chairman shall instead put a single Question in relation to those provisions, except that the Question shall be put separately on any Clause of or Schedule to the Bill which a Minister of the Crown has signified an intention to leave out.

Consideration of Lords Amendments

(8) (a) Any Lords Amendments to the Bill may be considered forthwith without any Question being put; and any proceedings interrupted for that purpose shall be suspended accordingly.

(b) Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement; and any proceedings suspended under sub-paragraph (a) shall thereupon be resumed.

(9) Paragraphs (2) to (7) of Standing Order No. 83F (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments) apply for the purposes of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (8) of this Order.

Subsequent stages

(10) (a) Any further Message from the Lords on the Bill may be considered forthwith without any Question being put; and any proceedings interrupted for that purpose shall be suspended accordingly.

(b) Proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement; and any proceedings suspended under sub-paragraph (a) shall thereupon be resumed.

(11) Paragraphs (2) to (5) of Standing Order No. 83G (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings on further messages from the Lords) apply for the purposes of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (10) of this Order.

Reasons Committee

(12) Paragraphs (2) to (6) of Standing Order No. 83H (Programme orders: reasons committee) apply in relation to any committee to be appointed to draw up reasons after proceedings have been brought to a conclusion in accordance with this Order.

Miscellaneous

(13) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on the Bill.

(14) Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply in relation to any proceedings to which this Order applies.

(15) Standing Orders Nos. 83J to 83O (Certification of bills, clauses, schedules etc) shall not apply to the Bill.

(16) (a) No Motion shall be made, except by a Minister of the Crown, to alter the order in which any proceedings on the Bill are taken or to vary or supplement the provisions of this Order.

(b) No notice shall be required of such a Motion.

(c) Such a Motion may be considered forthwith without any Question being put; and any proceedings interrupted for that purpose shall be suspended accordingly.

(d) The Question on such a Motion shall be put forthwith; and any proceedings suspended under sub-paragraph (c) shall thereupon be resumed.

(e) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on such a Motion.

(17) (a) No dilatory Motion shall be made in relation to proceedings to which this Order applies except by a Minister of the Crown.

(b) The Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

(18) No debate shall be held in accordance with Standing Order No. 24 (Emergency debates) at today's sitting after this Order has been agreed.

(19) Proceedings to which this Order applies shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(20) No private business may be considered at today's sitting after this Order has been agreed.—(*Alok Sharma.*)

Business and Planning Bill

Second Reading

5.21 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Alok Sharma): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Covid-19 has had a profound impact across the economy. It required many businesses to shut their doors on 23 March, and they have taken a significant economic hit to protect the public's health, so it was vitally important, at the start of this pandemic, that we put our arms around businesses to provide them with support to protect our people's livelihoods at the same time as we protected our nation's health.

So far, the job retention scheme has supported over 9 million jobs; 2.6 million people have been helped by the self-employment scheme; over 850,000 small businesses have benefited from around £10.5 billion in grants; and over £40 billion of Government-backed loans have been made to over 970,000 businesses. Every one of these interventions has helped individual families in each of our constituencies, but we are now reopening the economy in a cautious and phased manner, and the measures in the Bill are designed to provide a boost to businesses to help them as they look to bounce back from a period of enforced hibernation.

On 25 June, the Corporate Insolvency and Governance Bill received Royal Assent, and I thank the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and all colleagues for their support in an expeditious passage for that Bill. Similarly, I hope we will be able to expedite the passage of the Business and Planning Bill. I acknowledge the very constructive discussions that we have had on the individual measures in the Bill with the shadow Secretary of State and, indeed, all shadow Ministers.

The overall aim of the Bill is to provide an adrenaline boost to key sectors of our economy. We want to support the hospitality sector by allowing outdoor dining and off-premises sale of alcohol, helping the sector back on its feet with the promise of al fresco dining for all this summer.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the measures allowing al fresco dining are essential to allowing the food and hospitality sector to bounce back following lockdown, and will he encourage all those businesses to go and update their ceramics and buy purely from Stoke-on-Trent?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend makes a compelling case for his constituency, and he makes the equally important point that this is an opportunity to get businesses going—up and running—after a period of enforced hibernation.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): We are all very grateful for my right hon. Friend's efforts, particularly his efforts to help small businesses. I have noticed in Lincolnshire that small businesses and shops seem to have done better during the lockdown, as people have wanted to shop locally. As we are helping small business, would it not be a retrograde step if we were to reopen Sunday trading laws, since it is our present Sunday trading laws that do so much to protect small shops and businesses from large businesses and supermarkets?

Alok Sharma: As my right hon. Friend will know, measures related to Sunday trading are not in the Bill, but of course Sunday trading has been temporarily relaxed in the past, during the Olympics, and that was about ensuring support for businesses and consumers. But as I said, that is not in the Bill.

Through this Bill, we also want to support the construction sector to get Britain building again by enabling the extension of site operating hours and extending until 1 April 2021 planning permissions that have lapsed or will lapse between 23 March and 31 December.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that construction is vital to getting our economy going, including in South Ribble, where my constituents are looking forward to the new Tesco in Penwortham? For that reason, I welcome these measures. Does he agree that they are vital to supporting growth as we come out of lockdown?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I know she is working incredibly hard to support businesses in South Ribble, and I am sure she is looking forward to going to the new Tesco once it is up and running.

We also want to support the transport sector by providing for shorter-term licences for drivers of heavy goods vehicles and passenger-carrying vehicles and allowing for the risk-based testing of HGVs and public service vehicles. These measures will allow goods and public transport to keep moving. We want to continue to support small and medium-sized enterprises through the quicker delivery of bounce back loans, which have provided a financial lifeline for more than 920,000 small businesses so far. This measure is retrospective and will disapply elements of consumer credit law.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I speak as co-chair of the all-party group on fair business banking and support the suspension of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 with regard to bounce back loans due to affordability issues, but does the Secretary of State agree that it is vital that lenders still comply with the requirement to treat customers fairly in the collection process or if there are debt issues later on and that forbearance is applied?

Alok Sharma: As ever, my hon. Friend raises an incredibly important point. Yes, forbearance is part of these measures, and we would expect that very much to apply.

Before I turn to the detail of the Bill, I want to thank all those across industry and both Houses who have engaged with the Government to help develop the measures in the Bill. I also thank the Local Government Association, the National Police Chiefs' Council, the Home Builders Federation and the British Property Federation for sharing their expertise. I am pleased to say that the measures in the Bill enjoy wide stakeholder support. The LGA, the Federation of Small Businesses, the British Beer and Pub Association, UKHospitality, the Freight Transport Association, the Road Haulage Association, the Royal Town Planning Institute, the British Property Federation and UK Finance have all expressed their support.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I add my name to that long list, but can my right hon. Friend give some confidence to local authorities? There are a lot of planning rules and regulations, and some of our planning officers are quite conservative in their interpretation. Where there is discretion, can we send the message out from this place that decisions must be decided in favour of business and of opening up?

Alok Sharma: Of course we want to make sure that businesses open up, and we want local authorities to help local businesses do that, which is precisely the reason for these measures. We will publish guidance alongside the measures in the Bill, and I would ask local authorities to adhere to it. If my hon. Friend has any specific suggestions, I would be very happy to hear from him, as would my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, who will wind up this debate.

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a compelling case for giving a boost to many sectors of the economy, but will he reflect on the fact that some sectors will not be able to reopen because of the necessary rules? I am thinking of theatres, concert venues and other music venues. Given the need to adhere to the rules, will he make special provision for those that cannot trade their way out of difficulty?

On the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) made, it would be very unfortunate if any of these venues, theatres or concert halls fell into insolvency, and we hope to avoid that, but in doing so we should guard against granting planning permissions that take them immediately out of those very valued uses. Will my right hon. Friend reflect on both during the passage of this Bill?

Alok Sharma: My right hon. Friend, who has previously served as Business Secretary with great distinction, raises a number of important points. On insolvency, he will know that with the support of both Houses, we passed the Corporate Insolvency and Governance Act 2020, which came into effect on 25 June. When it comes to providing support to businesses, I think the best thing we can possibly do is to open them up, and I know that that is a sentiment that he will appreciate as a former Business Secretary. I would love to be able to have the whole economy operating and opening up, but we all understand why we are taking a phased and cautious approach: we want to continue to meet our five tests, and we want to ensure that the R value stays below one. In the tourism sector and the theatre sector, which he mentioned, ministerial colleagues are working closely on these issues.

I turn first to the temporary measures in the Bill to step up the recovery of our hospitality sector. Our 127,000 pubs, restaurants and cafés, which employ around 2 million people, are the lifeblood of our high streets and town centres. Social distancing guidelines significantly affect their capacity to accommodate customers, and food and beverage service activity has fallen by nearly 90% in the last quarter. The Bill introduces a temporary fast-track process for pubs, cafés and restaurants to obtain local council permission to place tables and chairs on the pavement outside their premises.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): I spent my weekend in Dartmouth speaking to some of those businesses in the hospitality and tourism trade. May I associate myself with the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) about making sure that councils are not over-zealous in their approach to allowing businesses to adopt the measures in the Bill for outdoor dining? I think it is very important that we can give those businesses reassurance.

Alok Sharma: Of course my hon. Friend makes an important point, but I think local authorities will understand that it is in their own interest to ensure that businesses can open and that high streets flourish. I certainly encourage businesses to look at the guidance and adhere to it.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): In my borough, licensed premises are a very important part of the local economy, and we work with local residents to support them. This measure, with seven days' notice, allows an enormous number of off sales, which are already causing havoc in my constituency with people defecating, urinating and leaving problems in parks. People are talking about fake Glastonbury. This is going to cost my borough a lot of money to police. We are not party poopers, but we do not want the other sort of pooping, either. Will the Secretary of State make provision to allow councils some discretion where there is a particular problem with a licensed premises causing antisocial behaviour?

Alok Sharma: Ultimately, it is possible to revoke these permissions, and expedited processes have been put in place. Nobody wants to see bad behaviour, but this is a 10-day process, and there is an opportunity in the first five working days for anyone to put in their views to the local authority. Ultimately, the local authority decides. There is also a clear requirement that a legible notice is put up at the premises, so anyone who is in the locality will be able to see it when they pass by, and they can make representations if they wish. These new measures will cut the time to receive approval for this licence from an average of 42 working days to just 10 working days, and the application fee is capped at £100.

Public safety and access for disabled people using pavements is of course absolutely vital, so I can confirm that local authorities will be able to refuse or revoke licences where appropriate. The Government will be publishing minimum requirements and guidance for footway widths and distances required for access by disabled people.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): The Secretary of State spoke earlier about the organisations that he has consulted. Has he engaged with, say, the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association to understand the sorts of risks and challenges that people with sight loss face? We have a centre for guide dogs in my constituency. This is a real issue for these organisations.

Alok Sharma: I can confirm that we have engaged with disability groups in the preparation of the clauses in this Bill.

We will also be making changes to alcohol licensing. Currently, any licensee wishing to add off-the-premises sales permission has to apply for a licence variation. This takes time, with a 28-day notice period, adverts

[Alok Sharma]

placed, and sometimes a hearing. Ordinarily, of course, that is necessary. However, hospitality businesses are not operating in ordinary economic times, as we all acknowledge, so the Government are temporarily changing the process. Under the measures in this Bill, most licences will automatically and temporarily be extended to include off-the-premises sales. However, there are safeguards in place. The extension will not include premises that have been denied off-sales permission or had it removed within the past three years. Taken together, these measures will help our hospitality industry to get back to business over the busy summer months.

Meg Hillier: Has the right hon. Gentleman given any thought to allowing a review of this Bill, because—I am particularly talking about the hospitality industry—it will be coming into operation over a busy summer period, and we will see the effects of that? If he were to agree to a three-month review period in which we, as a House, can see the evidence and then, if necessary, amend legislation, that would be a welcome step.

Alok Sharma: First, these are of course temporary measures. A 90-day rolling review, which I think the hon. Lady is proposing, would undermine the certainty that we are giving businesses in terms of these particular measures. She will know, however, that should the Government wish to extend any of the measures, they will be subject to made affirmative or draft affirmative procedures, so they will come before the House before there is any opportunity to extend them further.

I now return to the issue of trying to get the construction sector moving. In 2018, this sector represented almost 9% of our GDP. Lockdown has had a profound impact on construction sites across the country. We estimate that almost 1,200 unimplemented major residential planning permissions, with capacity to deliver over 60,000 homes, have lapsed or will lapse between the start of lockdown on 23 March and 31 December this year. Therefore, the Bill introduces powers to extend these planning permissions and listed building consents to 1 April 2021. This will be automatic for permissions that have not lapsed at the point that these measures come into force. Lapsed permissions can be reinstated and can benefit from the same extension, but subject to necessary environmental approvals.

We will also make it quicker for developers to apply for longer construction site working hours. This will help to facilitate safe working—for example, by staggering workers' hours—and to make up for lost progress. Applications will be concluded within 14 days. This measure does not apply to applications from individual householders. Local authorities retain discretion and can refuse applications where there would be an unacceptable impact. Again, this is a temporary measure. Extended hours can only last until 1 April 2021, unless extended by secondary legislation.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): Across my constituency, there is already tremendous local sensitivity about excessive developments, the planning process and some of the procedures for public participation in the process being curtailed—there are virtual meetings and sometimes council executives make decisions on their own. Will the Secretary of State assure me that the Bill

will not limit public participation in anything that might be the result of an extension or expansion of existing planning permission, or indeed a new planning permission?

Alok Sharma: No, it will not. I will talk a bit about hybrid appeal proceedings, and I think my hon. Friend will find that helpful.

There are two further planning measures that relate to the new spatial development strategy for London and hybrid appeal proceedings. The Mayor of London will shortly publish the new spatial development strategy, setting out plans for new homes for London. The Bill temporarily removes, until 31 December, the requirement for the strategy to be available for physical inspection and to provide hard copies on request. That ask from the Mayor of London will help to address practical challenges from social distancing.

Social distancing has also constrained the Planning Inspectorate's ability to conduct hearings and inquiries, and a backlog has been growing. Through the Bill, we will enable the inspectorate to combine written representations, hearings and inquiries when dealing with appeals. That change was recommended by the independent Rosewell review. A recent pilot undertaken on the review measures reduced average decision-making time from 47 weeks to 23 weeks.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The Secretary of State mentioned 60,000 houses that big companies will be able to build, but does he recognise that small and medium-sized companies that do refurbishments, extensions and small works are critical to the core of the economy? Will he ensure that they can also progress their applications through councils for approval? They may be sitting on the line where that may not happen.

Alok Sharma: As I said, these measures will not relate to residential applications that have been made. The whole point is to get the construction sector moving. I have talked about a range of measures that we have set out for the sector, and I hope that more SME builders will be able to take advantage of them.

The Bill will enable lenders to continue issuing bounce back loans quickly and at scale. It will retrospectively disapply the unfair relationships provisions in the Consumer Credit Act 1974 for lending made under the scheme. Reflecting current circumstances, the bounce back loan scheme allows lenders to rely on self-certification from the business that it meets the eligibility criteria for the scheme and can afford to pay back the loan. It also provides for simpler information disclosure requirements for the borrowers. That will ensure that small businesses can continue to access the financial support that they need without undue delay.

Richard Fuller: I am very grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. I want to take him back to the point about public participation, because it is such a sensitive area. He said that, the procedures for planning proceedings in clause 20 can be altered. Either now or in Committee, can he clarify who will be making those decisions and what impact that will have on public participation in relation to housing developments that might have a dramatic impact in the area? I want to be clear about whether the Bill will affect that dramatically.

Alok Sharma: The Minister for Housing, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher), will deal with the details of that. The point of these measures is to get the economy going, which my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller) is keen to do. I understand his point, and we will address it in Committee.

The Bill temporarily allows the issuing of one-year lorry or bus driving licence renewals, rather than the standard five years. Shorter renewals will be allowed if an applicant is otherwise healthy but unable to obtain the medical report required for a five-year licence. That will relieve pressure on GPs and allow drivers to continue to work. The Bill also reforms powers to exempt temporarily goods vehicles, buses and coaches from roadworthiness testing. That will allow the high demand for heavy-vehicle testing, which restarts from 4 July, to be managed in a manner that prioritises road safety by targeting higher-risk vehicles or operators.

In conclusion, the Government have stood shoulder to shoulder with businesses throughout the covid-19 emergency and now, as we emerge from this pandemic, we need to support our economic recovery and help businesses with more flexible ways of working. The great British economy, helped by a willing public, is reawakening from its enforced slumber. Taken together, the measures in the Bill are designed to provide a much-needed economic boost, and I commend it to the House.

5.45 pm

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): May I start by thanking the Business Secretary for the constructive conversations that he and I have had on the Bill? As he knows, we support the measures contained in it.

The wider context to this Bill is the economic crisis that we face, the scale of which we have not seen for a very long time. As an Opposition, we have tried to work constructively with Government. Indeed, we have welcomed a number of steps that the Government have taken. We called for the furlough scheme and indeed have welcomed it, though we believe that too many people remain excluded from support. We called for the 100% underwriting of Government-backed loans, and we have welcomed the bounce back loans, too. We have also supported the Government on the difficult decision to move from 2 metres to 1 metre-plus where 2 metres cannot be observed, although we do have concerns about the test, track and trace system.

I hope we can agree that the past few months have shown the power of Government to step in and protect jobs and businesses at a time of crisis. My case today is that that power has not gone away, and neither has the need for it to be exercised. The Government must not shrink from that, because, let us be clear, we are not at the end of this economic crisis, but just at the beginning of it.

Let me deal first with the provisions in the Bill. It is a short Bill and there is a large degree of agreement on it. The headline provisions, as the Secretary of State has said, will enable the hospitality industry to reopen quickly and serve a greater number of customers in a safe environment. We welcome the temporary loosening of planning regulations to enable bars, restaurants and cafés to serve customers outside their premises. I take the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) has made about the need for some caution here. It is important that local

authorities continue to have discretion in these matters because they are best placed to make the judgments about the local impacts. It is also right to put on record the concerns of the shop workers' union, *USDAW*, which has worried about the safety of staff. The guidance is very clear about the mitigation and reduction of risk that is needed if 1 metre-plus is in place. I am sure the Secretary of State agrees that that is really important, and that it is also very important that the Health & Safety Executive takes a tough line in enforcing safety as well.

We also welcome the measures in enabling those on construction sites to get back to work more easily through extended working hours. Again, and I am sure that Members across the House will agree with me, it is in the interests of local residents that local authorities have discretion in these matters.

Meg Hillier: I think we agree about the need for local authorities to have discretion, but they also need resources. In my borough, we have more than 1,300 licensed premises in a very small area of London, and a lot of licensing officers are needed just to deal with the flow of applications. Does my right hon. Friend not think that the Government need to address that?

Edward Miliband: My hon. Friend, in her customary eloquent way, anticipates my next point. We have seen—and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed), the shadow Secretary of State for local government, for giving me the exact figures—£10 billion of costs loaded on to local authorities during this crisis, and only £3.2 billion provided by Government, despite the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government saying that the Government would stand behind councils and give them the funding they need. We have another Bill that puts yet more pressure on local authorities, but with no clear plan about how they will be reimbursed, and our new clause 5 speaks to that issue.

We also welcome the changes to transport licensing and the removal of the unfair relationship provision in the Consumer Credit Act to ensure that bounce back loans are more easily accessed. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for the detailed discussions that we had about that particular provision.

Those are the main provisions of the Bill and, as I said, there is cross-party agreement on them. Obviously, there will be detailed discussions in Committee. However, I have to say to the Secretary of State and the House that we are under an illusion if we think that the measures in this Bill will go much of the way towards addressing the crisis that we face: 4 July represents a reopening of pubs and restaurants, but it does not represent recovery.

It is important to note that many sections of our economy employing hundreds of thousands of people, including gyms, leisure centres, live entertainment venues, beauty salons, conference facilities, nightclubs and swimming pools, will still not be able to open for public health reasons. We support those public health decisions. Other parts of our economy will open only with severe restrictions, including large parts of our hospitality industry, which employs 3 million people or one in 10 of the whole workforce. The British Beer and Pub Association says that 25% of pubs will not be able to reopen even

[Edward Miliband]

at 1 metre. The Government themselves acknowledge, in the scientific assessment of the change to 1 metre, that the hospitality industry will lose 25% to 40% of its revenue even at 1 metre distancing. That revenue translates into a risk to hundreds of thousands of jobs. Live performance remains prohibited, which affects the theatre sector, employing 290,000 people. Manufacturers, too, are reeling from the fall in domestic and worldwide demand.

I say all that not to cast doubt on the public health measures being taken or to speak against the Bill, but to point to the wider context, which is that the Government are taking a one-size-fits-all approach to the furlough, for example, demanding an employer contribution from August and a cliff edge at the end of October. The shadow business Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), received this letter from a venue in Manchester in the past week:

“As the Government furlough scheme draws to a close, I will be making very difficult decisions this week so that I can give notice during the period of 80% furlough contribution to commence a redundancy consultation with the majority of my venue staff. With zero income and no appropriate financial Government support, I have no choice but to make these decisions.”

We are not asking the impossible of Government; we are saying, “Look at what other countries are doing”, whether that is Spain, Italy, New Zealand, France or Germany. They are taking a sectoral approach to the furlough. They are saying that specific sectors are more affected by the public health measures and that, therefore, the economic measures have to match that.

Richard Fuller: The shadow Secretary of State will be aware that the Government measures taken across the economy, which he has welcomed, already raise issues of fairness between those who fall on one side of the line and those who fall on the other. What is his proposal for those sectors? Some businesses will fall just to one side, but who will be the expert to understand who fits where? I am all up for it if he can reconcile that, but there are risks, are there not?

Edward Miliband: Of course there are, but the fact that we cannot do everything does not mean that we should not do anything. The grants programme that the Government introduced was done by sector—retail, hospitality and leisure. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about boundaries, and some business organisations would raise that issue, but I worry that technical concerns about boundaries, which have been overcome for the grants scheme, stop us doing something that makes real sense.

Kevin Hollinrake: What the right hon. Gentleman says about the sector-based nature of the grants scheme highlights the problem in his argument. All MPs in this place, I am sure, have been contacted by people—in the hospitality supply chain, for example—who were not getting support. It is so difficult to take a sector-based approach. Will he concede that that is not as easy as he thinks?

Edward Miliband: Of course it is not easy, but the hon. Gentleman’s implication is that nothing can be done for those sectors that are obviously more affected by the public health measures.

Kevin Hollinrake indicated dissent.

Edward Miliband: The hon. Gentleman is shaking his head. If things can be done, they should be done, but my point is that the strength of the Government response is that it has been comprehensive. It has used the power of Government and it has not necessarily taken a one-size-fits-all approach. I am worried—we see this in the evidence that has been brought forward—about the one-size-fits-all approach.

Kevin Hollinrake: I speak as a business person as well as a Member of Parliament. In my view, the Chancellor made the job retention scheme very generous allowing it to continue for a lot longer than many thought it would; and rather than have a sector-based scheme to help some people and not others, he has tried to help all employers and make it flexible for all the different categories of employer.

Edward Miliband: I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important that we have had the furlough, but I disagree that it should be cut off at the end of October, because I really worry about the economic impact. We have 2.8 million people already claiming unemployment-related benefits, and I worry about the implications for these other industries.

The tragedy is that the Government have spent £22 billion on the furlough, but I fear that we will throw away some of that investment by not recognising that specific sectors face specific challenges. I urge the Business Secretary—he knows this, as he talks to the same people that I do—to use all the powers of his office to make representations to the Chancellor to find a way of fixing that, so that we have a sector-specific approach to the furlough, including an extension beyond October.

Just as I do not believe that the furlough should be abruptly ended, I believe that there are issues of access to loan finance. As I have said, the bounce back loan scheme has been successful at getting money out of the door, but the same cannot be said of the other small business loan scheme, the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme. In the case of CBILS, only half of all applications have been approved, and the supposed freeing up of the scheme as a result of bounce back loans being made available is yet to materialise. We still do not know why 48,000 out of 98,000 CBILS loans are stuck in a holding pattern, and we do not know how many have been rejected and how many are still in the queue. One of the things we are asking for in the Bill is for the Government to publish data on the true number of rejections and the total number of inquiries.

The problem is not just with the small loan scheme. We have seen a wave of job losses in manufacturing, from Rolls-Royce to McLaren to Jaguar Land Rover. Make UK is predicting that as many as 170,000 jobs could be lost this year in the manufacturing sector alone. Any talk of levelling up will come to naught if we lose those jobs—I am sure that sentiment is shared across the House—and I urge the Secretary of State to look at the international comparisons of France and Germany, which have protected and supported strategic sectors of the economy, such as steel, aerospace and automotive, in a number of different ways. That is why our amendment to the Bill calls on the Government also to publish the true number of rejections in respect of the larger loan scheme, the coronavirus large business

interruption loan scheme, and explain why 400 larger businesses have not been able to access support through the scheme. Again, we do not know whether they are stuck in a holding pattern and still waiting in the queue or have just been rejected. These sectors are calling for tailored Government support to help them through the crisis, but it has not been forthcoming. The big point is that, from hospitality to leisure to manufacturing, this is a general recession, but it is also much more acute in specific sectors, and the Government need to recognise this far more in their response.

If one part of the Government's strategy is about shielding sectors of our economy from the sectoral recession, the other part must be about job creation and employment. We are to have a speech tomorrow from the Prime Minister. It is a shame that we do not have a Budget; I do not really understand why we do not have a Budget in what is potentially the worst recession in 300 years. If now is not the time for a Budget, I do not know when is the time for a Budget, but there is a speech tomorrow and big promises are being made about it.

The Bill rightly talks about what can be done in the construction sector. The way to help the construction sector is not just to tweak the operational hours, although that is important, but also to deliver on some of the promises the Government have made. Again, I think this view can be shared across the House; I do not often quote the Conservative manifesto approvingly—*[Interruption.]*—or at least not enough, but it promised £9.2 billion for energy efficiency in public and private buildings. Conservative Members all stood on that manifesto and I am sure that they support it.

We know how behind the Government are on building retrofits. The Committee on Climate Change recently said that there has been “negligible progress since 2015” and that the challenge of retrofit and renovation has gone “largely unaddressed.” We know that investing in retrofit is the ultimate win-win. This is the ideal opportunity—it would help the construction sector, not just in relation to operational hours, and could create tens of thousands of jobs—but today there are reports that it is being blocked by none other than Dominic Cummings. Apparently, he is uninterested and thinks it is “boring old housing insulation”. The Secretary of State and I have a good relationship, and I am happy to give way to him so that he can say that the £9 billion is going to happen. We need the £9 billion, so I am happy to give way. He has overruled Dominic Cummings on Sunday trading; now is the time to overrule him on this.

Let us also bring forward the £12 billion of social housing spending that has been promised. All these things are important, and they are also part of job creation. I think the idea that we need a green recovery is shared throughout the House, at least at the level of principle. Some people—assiduous readers—will have read over the weekend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's rather long speech, which mentioned Franklin Roosevelt 17 times. *[Interruption.]* I see Members nodding. Let me tell the House about Roosevelt: he put 3 million people back to work in the Civilian Conservation Corps. We need that kind of ambition on retrofit; on manufacturing low-carbon engines; on adapting our towns and cities to walking and cycling; on creating green spaces; and on reforestation and rewilding. We need what I call a zero-carbon army as part of a youth jobs fund.

We should see all these things as part of the green new deal because—this is the point—we face an unemployment emergency in this country. We should be under no illusions: a million young people are forecast to be out of work this year. We need a scale of action that matches that. That is my point. The Government measures we have supported over the past few months have recognised the power of active government in a crisis like this. My appeal to the Government is not to shrink from that now, because we are just at the beginning.

To conclude, we welcome the Bill as a step to help the hospitality and construction industry to reopen, but it is not nearly enough. The Government have shown that they are willing to take action, but we face the deepest and sharpest recession possibly for hundreds of years, and Government power has to continue to be used. The decisions taken by the Government in the coming weeks will determine how many jobs are lost and how many businesses survive. The commitment to do whatever it takes cannot be a hollow promise. We are calling for an extension to the furlough for specific sectors; an urgent jobcreation programme with a green recovery at its heart; and real action on infrastructure, not just words. I urge the Government not to step back when our economy, our businesses and our workers desperately need support.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): To make her maiden speech, I call my constituency neighbour, Katherine Fletcher.

6.3 pm

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. Owing to covid, this maiden speech risks being something of an old maid—no comments in the Gallery, thank you. I rise to give this speech in tribute and with thanks to the wonderful people of South Ribble who, throughout this horrible once-in-a-century pandemic, have kept their heads, asked sensible questions and looked out for each other in myriad ways, small and large. Their humour and perseverance truly are the best of British, and I am chuffed to bits to serve them in this House.

I must also pay tribute to that fantastic Lancastrian, my predecessor Seema Kennedy. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear!”] From her work securing millions to prevent flooding in Croston and Penwortham to her championing of our communities with Jo Cox, she is an intelligent, warm, generous, true lady. I extend my very best wishes to Seema and her young family and look forward to working for her at some point in the future.

And so to South Ribble and our history. Around 15,000 years ago, as the ice sheets retreated, fertile soils were carried down off the majestic Pennine hills to form the deep rich loams of Rufford, Longton and beyond. This soil of the very best grade, along with the skilled farmers and horticulturalists who look after it, produces some of the best produce in the world. Who in this House can say that their white turnips grace Harrods food hall? Not many, I'll warrant. I pay personal tribute to all our growers, whose skill is legendary.

In advance of the next bit, I am going to have to apologise to Professor Mary Beard and her colleagues, because this is not something I have been taught. I have just read it in books, so I am going to get something wrong. If we look at Lancashire in the Roman era, we have the first written evidence of our proud culture.

[Katherine Fletcher]

The ancient historian Tacitus describes how the northern tribes prepared for war: singing, chanting, drinking, tattoos and blue woad, and even being roused to laughter by a man at the front of the group. It strikes me, 2,000 years later, that Peter Kay has an ancestor and that Tacitus would have recognised the same in the people of Penwortham as they walk to Deepdale, Old Trafford, Anfield or, if you must, Ewood Park. Plus ça change!

Before you think our northern history is all about blokes, let me introduce a peer of the famous Boadicea, Queen Cartimandua of the Brigantes. The Brigantes were the iron age tribe of the north, and at the time of the Roman invasion we were ruled by Queen Cartimandua. Now, that was a politician! As Channel 4's "Time Team" found, to its televisual disappointment, our lands are not covered by huge Roman forts, temples or mosaics. In doing pragmatic deals with local leaders, Queen Cartimandua protected her peoples, focused on trade, avoided oppression and avoided being killed by the Romans—in many ways, a woman who would approve of recent Bills in this House. For example, in her later years, when she tired of her king, she divorced him and took up with a handsome man in uniform, the head of her guard—[Laughter.] A development that I can see has caught the imagination of several genders in the House.

Slide forward another 1,000 years and South Ribble is at the heart of the Danelaw, the proud lands above the line between Chester and the Wash. Here we find the first reference in history to southerners up north. In about 1069, a bunch of people with silly accents—apparently they were Normans—rolled up in helmets and said "Gud moaning, we own all of this now." Funnily enough, the north of England's response was, "Er, no thanks!" There then followed quite a lot of genocide and burning people in their houses. In the recent history books, this is entitled the harrying of the north. Something of an understatement, that. While the details may be largely forgotten, the sentiment of mistrust is not.

To my friends in the north, I say in the here and now: what is in the interests of the north is in the interests of the Tory party and the country. Full stop. You have made the right choice. Despite what you may hear from those who want you to know your place, I see no conflict at all in being proud to wear both the red rose of Lancashire and the blue Conservative rosette. We want a fishing rod, not a fish. We do not want a force-fed narrative of being downtrodden and oppressed; we want to rewrite a century of complacency. We need infrastructure to get to our work quicker and get back to our families without getting stuck. We want to be respected and cherished, and in all honesty we probably want to win the premier league every year with about 2 billion people around the world watching, although I am happy to concede to the House that there is a tiny bit of internal division about which team should actually do it.

A few hundred years later still, we enter the age of machines and steam. Take one look at the skills in Leyland, the trucks they built and still build, and their contribution to engineering across Lancashire, and it warms my heart. I am a sister, cousin, niece and friend to engineers across the north, but I must mention one in

particular: my dad. A man who comes from the same political tradition as Mr Speaker, as you well know, Mr Deputy Speaker. Having a daughter who comes home and announces she wants to be a Tory MP was something of a surprise to him.

When we used to go on holiday as a family to Llandudno, there were people on the front selling see-through plastic macs that had emblazoned on the back in large, colourful letters, "The views of this child are not necessarily those of the parents". It has been a family joke for some-ty years that I should have been bought one. However, attending the works old buffers' buffet this winter, shortly after the general election, my dad was assailed with an astonished, "Fletch, I didn't realise you were a Tory. Is it your daughter that's just been elected next door?" With shock, he has now realised that the shoe is on the other foot; it is he who now needs a badge that says, "The views of this child are not necessarily those of the parents". That is no way to repay a man who made huge sacrifices to feed his family, climbing in toilet windows to earn a wage but break a strike, moving halfway across the world to work on his own when jobs were tight in the early '80s. Dad, I am sorry that you need the badge, but thank you anyway.

For those who do not know us, it is easy to think that the innovations of the industrial revolution were all brownfield, so what if I told you of the canals and land reclamation delivered for more rural areas such as Tarleton or the village—the clue is in the name—of Banks? Banks possesses the wonderfully named road Ralph's Wife's Lane, a long, wide thoroughfare that on first introduction leads to a couple of immediate questions. Who on earth was Ralph? Arguably more importantly, why was he so awful that his wife had to live down a long, massive, wide road to get away from him? And why did she not have a name? I look forward to hearing her story.

In fact, let me highlight the continued strength throughout the ages of the northern female. Rightly, there are wonderful statues to the Pankhursts and the fight for women's votes, but I argue to the House very strongly that the movement's success was due in part to symbiosis with a Lancashire culture that has roots far deeper than the industrial revolution. Step into Edwardian shoes in a Manchester terrace—can you imagine the conversation between the educated middle classes and a bunch of working-class Lancastrians like Annie Kenney and Mary Leigh? "Actually, we have campaigned for votes since the 1860s and have yet to succeed in our aims." "Right, yeah, we're just going to have to blow something up." I add my voice to their quote:

"I'd rather be a rebel than a slave."

My grandma passed grammar in Salford shortly after the votes for women movement succeeded. My auntie won prizes for academic achievement, but at 12 she had to leave and work in a shirt factory. Her experience means that my family values education beyond anything else as an engine of getting on—we aspire. "Do your best. Try harder. See what you can get up to." My mum was the woman who said to her daughter, "No, you can't go and knock-on and go out and play; you've got to do this next practice paper for your exams". She regularly said: "Katherine, I've been saying since you were two that you'll either be a stripper, a social worker or a scientist." Well, mum, given that I have a biology degree, and with the nature of modern politics, there is a very good chance that I have achieved all three. Thank you, mum—you were right about the exams.

You may have guessed that I am very proud of what I am and where I come from—a community that says, “Go on, succeed, but don’t get too big for your boots. Don’t be patronising or ignore us or make assumptions about who we are or what we want. Definitely don’t come up here with southern accents to gain access to safe seats and explain how oppressed we are. You will get two words to that: ‘Look, love’”. Call it the northern powerhouse, call it levelling up—I am interested in labels only if they help communicate real action, and I will tirelessly advocate for exactly that. Championing the old lands of the Danelaw will guide my actions in Parliament.

To conclude, I think the ultimate lesson we should take from the suffragette movement is not actually one of women’s lib. It is that we are always only going to achieve big things—huge changes—when the people who say, “Actually—” and the people of different cultures and classes work together. We are best as one nation, not divided by class war or political tribalism. Look around me on these Benches. Look at the breadth of experience of culture, of vowel sounds—it is true. I can report to you that while some of the accents in this place are still silly, I have yet to see a southerner in a northern helmet, and I am struck by how serious they are about investment and growth and jobs. In short, they’re all right.

This flipping covid. It is a huge test for us, and we will pass it only if we take a leaf out of the suffragettes’ book and work together equally. I say to South Ribble, the north and the country: “Let’s combine our efforts, turbo-charge business and trade the hell out of our current position with all the peoples of the world.” I look forward to working with the descendants of everyone to make that happen, and I almost definitely promise not to metaphorically blow something up to make that happen.

6.15 pm

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP): May I take this opportunity to warmly congratulate the hon. Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) on her fantastic maiden speech? The Business and Planning Bill was perhaps not the most auspicious starting point for a maiden speech, but she gave us an industrial, geological and historical tour d’horizon of the constituency. She follows a distinguished predecessor in her constituency, and I am sure I will not be alone in saying that I look forward to hearing more from her throughout this Parliament.

I will keep my remarks comparatively brief, as the Bill only really affects Scotland in respect of three clauses: clauses 12, 13 and 14. However, it would be remiss of me to miss the opportunity to say, on some of the licensing aspects, that the picture painted by the Minister of pavement cafés opening up the length and breadth of England presented a very—what’s the word?—European picture of England, which my party certainly, and I am sure others too, very much looks forward to seeing.

The changes in the Consumer Credit Act in clauses 12, 13 and 14 are welcome. I hope that they lead to more instances of loans being given to the businesses that require them. I must say, though, that I am somewhat sceptical that that will lead to the transfer of cash that we need in that respect. The right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) was absolutely

right: that we are really only at the start of our response to this crisis, and we are going to have to revisit this.

It is extraordinary that we have not heard from the Chancellor about his coming back to deliver what should be an emergency Budget. Much more still needs to be done as the crisis and our response to it evolve. In that respect, I very much commend the 10-point plan announced earlier today by Scotland’s First Minister, who talked about a major fiscal stimulus for the economy, VAT reductions for hospitality, investment in low carbon and digital, and of course changes to increase flexibility in the Scottish fiscal framework.

I will now deal with the other clauses that affect legislation in Scotland. The changes to the Road Traffic Act 1988 regarding driving licences and vehicle certifications are reasonable, proportionate and risk-based, and we support them. It would be sensible to keep those measures under regular review, along with other aspects of the Bill. However, I make this plea to the Minister: we must return to the status quo ante as soon as reasonably possible, once it is possible to clear the backlog of testing of drivers’ continued fitness to drive and of vehicles themselves.

The Bill is a narrow one and a necessary one, but what we should really be hearing about is the emergency Budget that we need as we plot our way out of this crisis economically.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call Paul Howell to make his maiden speech.

6.18 pm

Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con): They tell us all that it is a challenge to make a maiden speech—I knew that I should not follow my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher). I am one of the last of my intake to deliver my maiden speech, but I am probably one of the last who were expected to be here anyway, so that fits.

This Bill is a critical step in the recovery, but before contributing to this debate, I would like to talk a little bit about Sedgefield and give you a context for my comments. Sedgefield as a constituency has a significant rurality, with many farms, including the outstanding Archer’s ice cream, and around 40 different settlements. We have the William Beveridge-designed Newton Aycliffe as the biggest town. We have businesses ranging from the well-known, like Hitachi and 3M, through to the iconic Cleveland Bridge, to Crafter’s Companion, founded by our local Dragon, and some of the most innovative companies in the UK, like Kromek and the Centre for Process Innovation, and so many SMEs.

I was born in one of the mining villages, Ferryhill, before going to school in Newton Aycliffe and spending close to 40 years as an accountant in the manufacturing industry. I have also had the opportunity to sit as a councillor in both my local authorities, Durham and Darlington. I have an insight into the rural communities because I have been married to a farmer’s daughter for around 35 years. We have Charlie, born in 1993, whom we are both immensely proud of, being the first in our family to go to university—somewhere called Cambridge.

My dad was originally a miner but mainly a fireman, who, along with my mother, provided my brother and me with an upbringing that was loving, stable and

[Paul Howell]

showed us the value of hard work as he rose to be a divisional officer. I have to thank my agent, Charles Johnson, and his sadly recently departed wife, Carol—Carol did not know where a fence was to sit on it; she had views—who were particularly instrumental in my becoming involved in local politics in the first place. I, of course, thank my campaign team—this is all of them: Keith, Catherine, Oliver, Giles and, of course, my wife Lillian. There was a little bit of a target around me—some target seats. Their support in the campaign was invaluable, and I certainly would not be here without them.

Some notable politicians have held Sedgefield over the years. [Laughter.] I, of course, think first of Roland Jennings, who held the seat from 1931 to 1935 and served in the Durham Light Infantry in the first world war. He was the last Conservative Member of Parliament for Sedgefield. He had an entry in *Hansard* with him asking the Minister of Transport for help—nothing is changing there.

My immediate predecessor is Phil Wilson. I thank Phil for his magnanimous speech at the count. He was Labour, not Corbyn, and with that conflict, he found it a very difficult campaign. I have heard good comments from Members on both sides of the House about Phil—in particular, the work he did on the all-party parliamentary group for the armed forces—and I wish him all the best.

I said in my campaign that I would listen to the people of Sedgefield, and that is what I will do. So far, I have been lobbied on everything, from the price of pipe tobacco to HS2. One of the early pleasures in my role has been to meet the young ambassadors from Ferryhill and Chilton, whose latest campaign is “#dontthrowitallaway”, and it is about the rubbish that comes out of McDonald’s and places like that. I will give them all the support I possibly can.

I have started in this place with two primary areas of focus for Sedgefield: to work for the communities left behind as our economy became too London and financial services dependent, and to support local business. To that end, I am now joint chair of an APPG for “left behind” communities, and I have been elected to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee.

It is, hopefully, from this informed base that I would like to contribute a little to the debate. I would first like to say that I support the measures in the Bill as necessary first steps that will undoubtedly help pubs and restaurants, and I encourage as many of you as possible to visit them—of course, in a socially distant way. While I am strongly in favour of developing pavement café space and so on to help with the recovery, we must remember to be as inclusive as possible and not forget that some of our visually challenged people might find these changes difficult.

In deciding what our next actions should be, we need to ensure that we do not look to recover to where we were—we need to go to where we want to be. Remember that before coronavirus, we had committed to the communities that had been left behind that we would level up this United Kingdom. With Sedgefield being equidistant from the north coast of Scotland and the south coast of England, we are a great place to start.

We must be aware that, even with these measures, some great businesses will need to reposition themselves for a new future that requires fewer people. One example

would be the outstanding Rockcliffe Hall hotel, whose staff have been writing to me, praising the way they have been treated during the lockdown, but the hotel is still having to make redundancies because of forecast lower occupancy rates. We need to take every opportunity to find ways to support job retention and creation and to minimise as far as possible the impact on our people and their economic opportunities. There are businesses, particularly many new start-ups and the self-employed, that have fallen through the gaps of the incredible efforts delivered by the Chancellor, and I would ask, if at all possible, for the Government to take another look at how we can help them to survive and grow.

There are many options we can take to move forward. As is typical of the north-east, we have some suggestions about what and how. A local business fellowship forum that I have listened to has written to the Chancellor providing some suggestions. It says that infrastructure needs accelerating and should not be frustrated by overly protracted planning processes. Tax breaks are needed to support construction and in particular green construction. The forum also argues for some 100% capital allowances, bonds for local authorities to support local investment, and supply chains that maximise local content for integrity and the socioeconomic benefits that come. We need to consider mass contingent equity investments to drive investment.

The forum also asks us to lift some of the restrictions on the enterprise investment scheme and venture capital trust funding to improve access. In the end, cash is king, so it also asks the Government to push the importance of prompt payment and to broaden the Government-backed insurance scheme. Those suggestions show that businesses are looking at how to deliver growth, and I encourage the Chancellor to listen and to be as expansive as possible in his consideration of such suggestions.

I suggest that we can combine economic delivery with our levelling-up agenda, for example, by delivering promises on infrastructure. In Sedgefield, several of our villages are named after railway stations. We have Ferryhill Station, Trimdon Station and Station Town. They have one thing in common: none of them has a railway station any more. Ferryhill is an obvious place to rectify that. It is something that had been campaigned for since it was closed in the Beeching era, and not even Tony Blair, who was Labour Prime Minister for 10 of his 24 years as the Sedgefield MP, managed to deliver that. Maybe its time has come.

Broadband is key infrastructure and it needs to be for all. In Sedgefield, we have a number of rural blackspots, such as Killerby, which has close to zero broadband, never mind gigabyte broadband, and that needs to change. The delivery of local management for local need could be further developed. I would like to see people such as the Tees Valley Mayor, Ben Houchen, given the opportunity to drive more agendas and for devolution gaps such as Durham, which fall between combined authorities, to have their situation sorted and for them all to have the latitude to crack on and deliver.

I would like to see a mechanism for getting some direct funding support to community groups, such as Deaf Hill Regeneration Group and Ferryhill Ladder, which are so embedded in their communities and can ensure that all the money hits the target for maximum benefit.

The opportunity to relocate some Government Departments, such as possibly the Treasury and others to the north-east—and preferably to Sedgefield—could not only improve local economies and Government understanding, but reduce pressure on the housing and travel densities in London.

It has been noticeable during the crisis how much people have stood up and helped their neighbours, and that is something we need to encourage. I will therefore look to my immediate neighbour, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to pop over the bridges on the Tees and give me a hand.

Those are the key strands that should be part of our approach to starting the process of levelling up, while at the same time invigorating our economy. People will no doubt question whether it can be done. Well, we got Brexit done, and this is a Government who can get things done. I remind the House of a poem by Edgar Albert Guest, which starts:

“Somebody said that it couldn’t be done
But he with a chuckle replied
That ‘maybe it couldn’t,’ but he would be one
Who wouldn’t say so till he’d tried.
So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin
On his face. If he worried he hid it.
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn’t be done, and he did it!”

For us, it is now all about getting it done.

My message to the Government is that we have the ideas and talent to deliver the economy and welfare of the UK from these challenges, and my message to the people of Sedgefield is that we can get it done. I will do everything in my power to listen to you, represent you and shout for investment in our amazing constituency to deliver the connections and visions that create the aspiration and opportunity for you to get it done, too.

6.29 pm

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Paul Howell). He may be surprised to discover that between Sedgefield and Shoreditch there is a bigger connection than he might imagine and that we might be on the same side on tackling the issue of broadband, because my constituency, like his, has hotspots, even in the heart of what some people call Tech City. So we can perhaps work together on that. I am also a supporter of relocating Government Departments outside London, championing it when I was in Government, so we have two points in common. In other ways we may be hammer and tongs against each other, but we can find the points of agreement, and if we disagree, let us disagree well.

The hon. Gentleman was right to pay tribute to Phil Wilson and to describe him as magnanimous. Phil is a good, kind, thoughtful and wise man, and it was a real mark of the man that despite losing Sedgefield to the other party, he did not take defeat badly. It is noble of the hon. Gentleman to acknowledge that.

I want to focus on the Bill’s clauses relating to hospitality. Before doing so, I wish to stress that my borough of Hackney is very pro-enterprise. We support it to such an extent that we have more than 1,300 licensed premises in a 19 square mile borough; we are the third most densely populated borough in London, and there has been a

66% growth in the number of premises since 2006. So this is something we have been pushing, and I pay tribute to the many exciting and interesting entrepreneurs who have set up businesses. In one ward alone, Hackney Central, we have five microbreweries. So this is a great place to come to drink, party and have fun, but we have always tried to balance that, for the most part, with the needs of residents. I worry that with this Bill the balance is shifting so far one way that we will rue the day, in a few months’ time, when we see what residents have had to put up with.

I need to describe what our local residents are already putting up with. We may have had lockdown, but businesses have been able to sell off the premises in open containers, and some of my local parks, notably those without boundaries—London Fields, Well Street Common and others—have become party places. They have not just become party places for people having a responsible, quiet drink in a gathering with friends, within the social distancing rules. I am afraid to say that we are talking about people who have no regard for other people, and who have defecated and urinated in the parks, and in people’s doorways and stairwells. People are having to scrub down their front doors and remove human excrement to get out of their house cleanly. That is not acceptable, and it is not down to the shortcomings of the local authority or the police.

The volume has been so great that this has been very difficult to keep on top of. The police are receiving complaints about antisocial behaviour, with about 70 to 90 on a sunny weekend, depending on the day. The local authority noise patrols and wardens are out in force doing what they can, but they are simply outnumbered. Fines have been issued, and more than 100 of the 193 issued were to people from outside the borough, be they from south London or as far away as Bishop’s Stortford or St Albans. We welcome people to Hackney—we want people to come to support our vibrant businesses—but they need to have some personal responsibility. My fear about this Bill is that it rushes through one of the most radical changes in licensing laws in a matter of a couple of hours this evening, with a handful of Members engaged. The Bill was unveiled only on Thursday and we had until Wednesday, or until today, to make amendments—this is going very fast.

I wish to refer to a couple of clauses. Clause 3 deals with the determination of applications, with subsection (3) setting out what happens at

“the end of the public consultation period.”

The business has to put in an application to the council, and the day after that it is deemed as received. This is deemed as being the start of the public consultation. Ten days later, at the end of that period,

“the local authority may—

- (a) grant a pavement licence to the applicant, or
- (b) reject the application.”

Of course if there is a public concern, the application can be looked at again, but subsection (8) states:

“If the local authority does not make a determination under subsection (3) by the end of the determination period, the licence for which the application was made is deemed to be granted by the authority to the applicant.”

We are quite willing to support businesses by looking at extended licences and so on—that happens all the time in my borough. But with some 1,330 licensed premises,

[Meg Hillier]

the pace at which this is going means that there will not be enough resources in Hackney Council, or in any council in the country unless there are few licensed premises in the area, to deal with the onslaught of licence applications.

The clause is very much in favour of business, and of course I am in favour of businesses getting support, but we need to ensure that we get a balance. The Secretary of State talked about limits—for example, a premises that has had problems or an application for an off-licence refused in the past three years is not eligible, but that has not happened to many businesses. A lot of businesses will be applying for the first time because of the peculiar and difficult circumstances of covid-19.

An obligation on the business to deliver a restrained service is missing. Such a service is difficult to control because once people are spilling out of a premises on to the pavements and into car parks, it does not take much for them to spill further into our parks and create more of the nuisance that we have seen recently, to the real detriment of residents.

For some, this may be a dilemma, but for me it is about getting the balance between what is right for residents and what is right for business. The Bill goes far over the line to support business. Yes, it is a difficult time, but there are not enough safeguards for local councils and not enough resources. The Government need to provide the resources to councils such as mine and that of the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Nickie Aiken), whose constituency must have even more licensed premises than Hackney South and Shoreditch and the borough of Hackney, so that they can cope. That is difficult to do. They cannot rustle up licensing officers with the right experience in the time available. The Government also need to give powers to councils where there has been antisocial behaviour so that there is a quicker way of withdrawing a licence.

We have to get the balance right. Of course we want things to return to normal as soon and as safely as possible, but the Bill will create other problems. I am sure that the Minister does not need me to remind him that one of the challenges of becoming a Minister is the unintended consequences element of the work. A Minister makes a decision and officials say that they have checked everything, it is all great, everyone has looked at it, but there is one little bit that perhaps they have not thought through fully. That usually connects the decision to life out there in the real world. The Minister is very welcome to visit my constituency—we might even go for a socially distanced drink in a responsible establishment—but the reality in my part of the world right now is not pleasant. It has become a party place and it has been very difficult, almost impossible, for the council to keep on top of.

I urge the Government to reconsider the matter and think about any safeguards, support and succour they can give local authorities. I am not a party pooper. I support enterprise and the licensed premises in Hackney, but there must be a balance. Any measure must not be to the detriment of residents who have had to put up with the fouling and bad behaviour of recent weeks and months.

6.37 pm

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con): I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) and for Sedgefield (Paul Howell) for their maiden speeches. They truly demonstrated the depth of talent in the party, and why I believe that this side of the House will be a formidable force for many years to come. I congratulate them.

Covid-19 has not only caused one of the most significant public health crises that many of us will ever experience, but posed significant challenges to our economy, the way we do business and our life as we knew it. Social distancing, self-isolating and the new normal are all terms that I would never have guessed I would use regularly when I first entered the House in December 2019. Indeed, we do not yet know what the new normal will look like, but we can all agree that it will be different from the old one. It has been a long, hard slog, and as we find that new normal, it is vital that we pass legislation such as this Bill that allows us, our businesses and our economy to emerge from this economic slumber.

I was pleased that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor took decisive steps to protect the livelihoods of as many people as he could. The decision to put our economy on life support was backed by Members of all parties, and hopefully means that we have been able to soften the blow of covid-19, as I hope the Bill will also do. When I spoke to business owners in my constituency, everyone relayed to me their relief at having the business support packages, including the bounce back loan scheme, the job retention scheme—the original and the revamped flexible one—the rates reliefs and the grants. In Meriden, 14,900 people have been furloughed, representing 22% of our resident population. Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council has distributed more than £25.4 million of grants to almost 94% of the eligible businesses. I thank Solihull MBC, the leader, Councillor Ian Courts, and the chief executive, Nick Page, for their hard work in ensuring that the money got to where it needed to be, and the Chancellor for taking the decisive steps that needed to be taken at the time.

I welcome this Bill, particularly the opening up of outdoor spaces, which could mean the difference between a business surviving and failing completely. I wholeheartedly welcome the reduction of the fees to permit the opening up of new spaces and the reduction of red tape. Of course, I encourage everyone to behave responsibly as they enjoy this new *al fresco* Britain, as these are new hard-earned rights, earned by the whole nation.

Finally, the bounce back loan scheme is a timely intervention and, once again, the Chancellor's proactive approach has provided businesses with a lifeline. Banks were struggling to lend as they had to do so in accordance with the Consumer Credit Act 2006, so it is right that we agree to clause 12 to stop the BBLs being subject to the unfair relationship provisions. We needed our banks to step up and they needed this to do so. Not to have done this would have had the result of delaying vital funds for businesses and would have posed onerous requirements for checks, which would have inhibited the very purpose of the BBLs and irreparably damaged our economy.

This virus has meant that we continue to adapt to an ever changing landscape, and this Bill is part of the responsive and responsible way in which we have dealt with one of the most testing periods of our time.

6.40 pm

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): May I add my congratulations to the two new Members who have made their maiden speeches, the hon. Members for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) and for Sedgefield (Paul Howell)? I recall that when I made mine, I harked back to the wars of the roses, so I feel somewhat outdone by the hon. Lady's references to the ice age.

From my conversations with local businesses over the last few weeks, it is clear that the coronavirus has affected different businesses in different ways. Many have been able to continue their services across digital channels, and to expand or diversify their offering to new and existing customers. Food and drink stores have been able to continue trading, and some have even seen sales increase, as people have had more time for shopping and cooking. Other forms of retail, such as books, music and clothing, have been able to maintain some level of sales via online shopping and delivery. I have been really impressed by the ingenuity of our business community and the way they have responded to this crisis. I have a great deal of confidence that, in this nation of shopkeepers, we will continue to respond to the challenges of the post-lockdown world.

There is one sector, however, that has been badly hit by the lockdown and continues to face enormous challenges in its ability to revive—our hospitality sector. Encompassing cafés, restaurants, pubs, events, tourism and accommodation, it exists to bring people together, to encourage contact and to promote social gathering. It is facing an existential threat from a new world that needs people to keep their distance from each other.

I cautiously welcome the Government's moves to lift restrictions on people visiting pubs, cafés and restaurants, although, like many of my constituents, I remain anxious about how this can be achieved while maintaining social distancing guidelines. This virus remains far from beaten, and I am dismayed at the mixed messages from the Government about how people should conduct themselves in the face of what is still a major threat both to our health and to the economy. We would face the future with more confidence if we had an effective system for tracking, tracing and isolating future diagnosed infections, and the lack of such a system constitutes a major risk to the effective functioning of our whole economy.

In that context, the Liberal Democrats welcome the provisions in today's Bill. In particular, the provisions to ease the process for cafés and restaurants to apply for permission to provide pavement seating are very much to be welcomed. They will give many businesses the flexibility they need to open up again, while adhering to social distancing guidelines.

I particularly welcome the fact that councils are to continue to play a major part in the granting of such licences. In many parts of the country and in many town centres, our hospitality businesses play a major role in the local economy. To encourage that economy, councils can play a major part in reconfiguring our town centres to enable more pavement seating—closing roads to motor traffic and introducing pedestrianised areas, for example—which can support businesses in meeting the conditions of their licences.

Can the Government confirm that they intend to include mobile catering units in their plans? Many of these micro-businesses are missing out on their regular trade at festivals this year, and would benefit from the

boost to business that being able to set up in a town centre could give them. We also support the powers given to councils to vary the terms of licences.

While we are all keen to see our hospitality sector given this essential support, it does not come without costs. I really want to echo the point made by the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), because we have seen many of the same problems in Richmond and Kingston, and it is really appalling and a huge burden on local residents. Local residents may experience additional nuisance, for example, from strong lighting and noise later in the evening, and also an increase in antisocial behaviour after closing time. Additional pavement furniture may cause accessibility issues for those in wheelchairs or those who are partially sighted. It is to be welcomed that councils will have the power to judge each application on its own merits and to apply its own acceptability criteria. It is also welcome that these changes are temporary. Short-term changes to support local business owners during this difficult time are more likely to be welcomed by our local communities than permanent changes that threaten to cause a long-term nuisance.

In the same vein, we support the changes to allow businesses with an on-site licence to convert to an off-site licence, but we have some concerns about the overall provision for off-site licences. Like many areas of the country, Richmond and Kingston have needed police interventions to disperse large crowds who have gathered on our open spaces to drink and play loud music. This has led to considerable antisocial behaviour, including drunkenness, public urination and drug taking. Local residents and police report that they have not seen antisocial behaviour on this scale before, and it is causing considerable distress to residents affected.

Meg Hillier: The hon. Lady is describing very delicately, I have to say, the reality of what this is like when you are living through it. Does she not think that the Government need to recognise that we want businesses to be supported, but the cost to councils, and to the police, of enforcing this and managing antisocial behaviour will be huge?

Sarah Olney: I am really glad that the hon. Lady has made that point. I have had lots of conversations with both the local council and the local police. It is clear that for suburban boroughs such as mine in London, where the Met police have, quite rightly, violence reduction as their priority when it comes to targeting their resources, the resources are simply not there to pay for the neighbourhood policing that we need to be able to keep on top of this kind of menace to our local residents. It is a really important point. I take this opportunity to press once more for further funding for neighbourhood officers in the outer boroughs in London, because that is a really urgent priority.

From my conversations locally, it appears that, by and large, our licensed premises are behaving responsibly in their provision of off-sales, and that a lot of the problem is coming from supermarkets promoting the purchase of alcohol in large quantities. There is a debate to be had about whether this is ever a good idea, but during a pandemic when people are being instructed not to gather in large groups, it is completely irresponsible. Supermarkets were quick to introduce limits on the number of toilet rolls or bags of pasta that customers

[Sarah Olney]

could buy at the beginning of the lockdown, and they ought to do the same for alcohol now. If they do not act reasonably in this regard, councils ought to be able to take action, in the face of threats of large gatherings and antisocial behaviour, to require shops to restrict their alcohol sales. These increased powers to councils, while welcome, will come at a cost, as the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch pointed out, and there should be greater financial assistance to councils to enable them to administer, review and enforce the new licensing regime.

We cautiously welcome the extension to hours that can be worked on a construction site, but support the discretion granted to local councils to restrict those hours in residential areas. Building work is one of the chief sources of nuisance in residential areas, and that nuisance is compounded when people are spending many more hours at home. We also welcome the extension of planning consents already granted. It will save local authorities a great deal of time and money not to have to review planning consents already granted that may have expired during the lockdown. However, in acknowledging that construction has been delayed for many developments, the Government also need to consider that local authority housing targets will also have been put at risk, and they should look again at any proposed sanctions against local authorities in this regard.

In summary, we support this Bill principally because it recognises the important role of local authorities in supporting our local businesses and safeguarding our local communities. This Government place too much faith in technological solutions, whether for their doomed contact-tracing app or as a way to make the Irish border magically disappear, so it is reassuring to see that they still recognise the value of local leadership and decision making in meeting the health and economic challenges of this pandemic.

6.48 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney), and indeed to speak in the same debate as two excellent maiden speakers. The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Paul Howell) made an excellent speech. It reminded me that we are next-door-but-one neighbours, because I am also a neighbour of the Chancellor of the Exchequer—they are big seats up north, some of them. I would be delighted to work alongside the hon. Gentleman in making sure that we get the right investment for the north of England.

Once upon a time, in 1997, when Sedgefield was on the map for a different reason, I was a candidate for South Ribble and got annihilated, just about holding my deposit, so I very much congratulate the hon. Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) on an excellent and very entertaining speech. However, she has the biggest and most formidable task ahead of her, because she is now my dad's MP. That will make life difficult for her. I note that she was very much on the fence, shall we say, on which team she supports. Just to be clear, her predecessor supported the right team. Anyway, it was a marvellous speech and I thank her ever so much.

Katherine Fletcher: United.

Tim Farron: Not North End? Fair enough. Anyway, all the best. Both maiden speeches were wonderful. On to even more serious matters, Mr Deputy Speaker. You must really have to sit on the fence where you are—good golly, Burnley? Blackburn? My goodness me. Stick with Clitheroe—that is my advice.

The Liberal Democrats support the provisions in the Bill and recognise how necessary they are. We recognise the colossal sacrifice that so many people have made in the last three and a bit months. Many did so before there was any guarantee of any kind of financial support, which might have made it a little easier for them. My constituency has an average age 10 years above the national average, and we were one of the infection hotspots right at the beginning. The number of deaths was tragically high in our community in south Cumbria. Many people running businesses of all sorts closed down or restricted their economic activity right at the beginning, before any compensation was available to them, because they put the interests of their neighbours and people they had never met before their own financial interests. I pay tribute to my constituents and indeed folk around the country for doing that.

At the head of the movement to try to get people to restrict their economic activity right at the beginning, even telling people not to visit the Lake district—Britain's biggest tourist destination after London—was Cumbria Tourism itself, our tourism board. It led the calls for people to visit us, but just not now, not yet, in order to keep people safe. We need to remember that sacrifice. I am very moved by and proud of it.

Of course, the Government package did come weeks later and it is very welcome. It is important in this process—in this crisis—that we find ways of working together and being collectively responsible for the mission to get Britain through the covid crisis as much as possible. It is right for those on the Opposition Benches, and indeed those on the Back Benches, to hold the Government to account, and to do so constructively. I take my role as Cumbria's only Opposition MP seriously. I have a responsibility, which must not be abused, to speak out, but I recognise that my job would be undermined, and I would be undermining my constituents and folk across Cumbria, if I were oppositionist for opposition's sake. So it is important to congratulate the Government and work with them, when they have done the right thing. The furlough scheme, the grant schemes and so on have undoubtedly saved, at least for the time being, millions of jobs around the country and thousands of jobs in my constituency.

There are, however, some gaps, and I want to spend a moment or two talking about them. It is beyond me that the Government have still not been able to find a package to support people who make their living by being directors of very small limited companies. I can think of a person I know well in my constituency who is a photographer. He is a one-person band, effectively; he is not the director of some large corporation. His income has been completely stopped these past three months. The Government surely could still find ways of ensuring that directors of small limited companies are able to get support.

I also think, in relation to this package of measures, of the plight of people in the mobile catering industry, whose interests have been represented incredibly well, especially by my hon. Friend the Member for North

East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain). It is important that they are referred to explicitly in the Bill so that they are supported to be able to make a living, and supported for the shortfalls in their incomes over the last few months.

I am bound, though, to focus on the gap in provision for those who have been self-employed for not so long. One in four people who work in my constituency work for themselves; they are self-employed. Our community is hugely entrepreneurial and we are very proud of that. New business start-ups are one of the council's most important focuses. Many small businesses do not make a profit in their first, or even their second, year; it just does not happen. People put their effort, money and capital into getting going, and they maybe turn a profit in year three. Those innovative, risk-taking people, who have perhaps made a lifestyle choice to earn a bit less money but to live in a nice part of the world, put their kids through the local school and add to our community, are falling through the gaps. We know that when Westmorland and Lonsdale had the largest single increase in unemployment in the United Kingdom—of 312%—we know that many of those people were the hard-working, innovative people who were starting off, and the Government did not find a way to be able to support them.

The Government said that they were not able to support them because there was not 12 months' worth of evidence of them operating. I would argue strongly against that, but even if that is an argument, why, when we came to the second iteration of support—when some of the people who were denied the first time round would have then done 12 months—were those people not included? It is so important that those people are not forgotten and that we as a country invest now in supporting them.

In my constituency, 37% of the entire workforce is on furlough. That is the biggest number anywhere in the north of England and the biggest number outside London. It is important to remember that a large part of that will be down to the significance of the hospitality and tourism sector, with 60,000 people working in it throughout Cumbria, the bulk of whom are in my constituency, the Lake district, the Yorkshire dales and other parts of south Cumbria. While we look forward nervously and cautiously, but with a level of excitement, to 4 July and the comeback of much of the hospitality and tourism industry, we recognise that many, many businesses will not be able to function fully. I am thinking of, for example, the survey that Cumbria Tourism did of its members just last week, when it discovered that 69% of those businesses will not be able to open fully even after 4 July. We must not assume that everything is back to normal in just a week or two's time.

With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, in Committee, I will want to talk about our new clause 1 and hospitality and tourism in a bit more detail, so I will not go further at this point, save to say that I recognise many of the comments from my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park and the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) about antisocial behaviour sometimes coming with the immediate upsurge in visitor numbers. That is not just in urban areas. The road on the east side of Coniston water had to be closed down in the last couple of weeks because of the antisocial behaviour we have seen there, and many of the florid descriptions from my hon. Friends can be

repeated about the Lake district and the Yorkshire dales. I could say many things about that. One is that the countryside code is very good. It does not need amending. It needs publicising and embedding in our schools and to be promoted by the Government. I hope that they will do just that.

I turn to planning and the easing of planning restrictions being seen as underpinning the revival of our economy. That is absolutely right—at times, that will be worth pursuing. However, I point out to the Minister that in some cases, the revitalisation of a local community can be helped by restrictions or new changes in planning law. In particular, I am thinking of absentee ownership, or second home ownership, in places such as the Lake district, the Trough of Bowland, Yorkshire dales and other places of natural beauty.

In my constituency, 7,000 of our properties are not holiday lets, but second homes—they are boltholes that are not lived in for nineteen twentieths of the year. That means a home owned by somebody who sends no children to the local school and who rarely contributes to the local post office, the bus service and so on. It is possible to make planning laws that would enable places such as the Lake district and the Yorkshire dales to have a lid on the number of empty homes in our communities. Therefore, a community that has been built and shown to be vibrant during the covid crisis can have the opportunity to grow still, and not peter out owing to a lack of full-time homes.

I am intrigued by the speech the other night about Roosevelt—we will wait to see whether there is anything behind that. Undoubtedly, the only answer as we build back better from all this is to take that Keynesian, investment-based approach and do so in a thoroughly green way, with renewables, recycling, making sure that we have retrofitted insulation, and moving forward with public transport. This is an opportunity for us not only to build back better and demonstrate our ambition for a different kind of country, but to do so in a way that our children and our grandchildren will thank us for, because we did so sustainably, renewably and in a thoroughly green way.

6.59 pm

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): I will keep my remarks short, Mr Deputy Speaker. First, I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) and for Sedgefield (Paul Howell) on two remarkable maiden speeches.

There is no question but that we need to get the economy up and running again, and that we need to do so with a sense of urgency. There is also no question but that the hospitality and construction sectors have suffered, and that they need our help. I welcome a number of things in this Bill, such as allowing tables and chairs to be put on pavements on a temporary basis. However, I am concerned about one particular provision in the Bill, which has already been mentioned by the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), and that is off-sales of alcohol. As I read it, off-sales of alcohol will be allowed to run for the same time as on-sales of alcohol. I have a central London constituency, so I have many premises with late licences. I am concerned that if these late licences are to run until 1 o'clock in the morning, bars will still be selling alcohol on the streets to big groups of people until 12.30. Like the hon. Members

[Felicity Buchan]

for Hackney South and Shoreditch and for Richmond Park (Sarah Olney), I can say that my area, central London, has seen issues over the course of the past two to three weeks. I certainly had issues at the weekend in my constituency when the police were heavily involved. I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to think about whether we could put a time limit on off-sales—let us say 11 pm.

My other point concerns construction work continuing on residential developments until 9 pm. I was delighted that my right hon. Friend said that this would not apply to single dwellings and that local authorities would have discretion even in major developments. Can I ask him to ensure that local authorities have that discretion, because many people in my constituency live in small terraced houses, bang on top of each other, and in mansion blocks? It is not like building a new estate outside a new town, where it does not affect anyone. Obviously, I spent a few weeks at home during the lockdown and I must say that a basement development going on next door until 9 pm would have been intolerable. I welcome what was said, but let us ensure that local authorities have that discretion.

In conclusion, I welcome the Bill, but ask my right hon. Friend to consider the time restriction on licensing for off-sales.

7.3 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Before I start, may I thank the hon. Members for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) and for Sedgefield (Paul Howell) for their maiden speeches? As I have said before, an abundance of talent has been shown by new Members from all parties, though I particularly enjoyed the two speeches today. I wish both Members well for the future in the House. I hope they will make many more contributions; if they are as good as they were today, we are in for a lot of good times. Their speeches were absolutely excellent.

The explanatory notes make it clear that the Bill includes a range of measures to help businesses adjust to new ways of working as the country recovers from disruption caused by covid-19. May I put on record my thanks to the Government and to Ministers for what they have done not only to hold fast against covid-19, but to ensure that businesses have an opportunity to go forward? The measures support the transition from the immediate crisis response to the recovery and getting the economy moving again. They support businesses in implementing safer ways of working to manage the ongoing risk of covid-19, in particular the need for social distancing.

I am probably not the only Member who has received a summary of information from SIBA, the Society of Independent Brewers. It has asked a couple of questions that I want to put on the record in *Hansard*, and the Minister might be able to respond to them at the end of the debate. Some breweries do not have a premises licence and cannot offer takeaway and delivery directly to the public. The Bill will not help them during the covid-19 crisis. One in four breweries—about 500 out of 2,000 breweries in the UK—do not currently have any way to sell directly to the public, and the sales of small breweries have been reduced by 65% to 82% because of covid-19. They have not received the same level of

financial support as pubs and the hospitality sector, such as through the business rates holiday or the £25,000 grant.

Some 65% of small breweries have been mothballed since covid-19, and trade during the summer months will be vital for their survival. Some have been using temporary events notices to offer limited services, but they are by their very nature limited in time and number, and a business owner must already be registered with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs under the alcohol wholesaler registration scheme and approved as a fit and proper person.

The small breweries ask the following questions. They call for an extension to the licensing relaxation to allow small independent breweries who cannot sell directly to the public to be able to do so on a temporary basis. That could be done by extending the authorisation of off-sales to small breweries that do not hold a premises licence but are registered under the alcohol wholesaler registration scheme, and allowing small breweries that do not have a premises licence to apply quickly and more easily by treating the application as a minor variation—that might be a simpler way of doing this. Also, the number and time period for temporary events notices might be expanded to assist breweries, allowing for takeaways and deliveries. Will the Minister respond to those points at the end of the debate?

None of us in the Chamber could argue against the need for the Bill. With an estimated 25% of the people on furlough facing redundancy, there is a crystal-clear need for help for business, and not simply in the form of grants, but right through the economic period. Only this morning a business owner with two small convenience stores was on the phone asking for clarity on whether the new regulations will allow him to have more people in his shops, and therefore, it is to be hoped, fewer people having to queue who might then go elsewhere rather than wait. The current situation is unfair because the same problem applies to the big supermarket chains but the waiting time is less, and people can get most of their shopping in one place. All businesses apart from the major supermarkets are clearly facing a rough time ahead.

It is abundantly clear that we must enable businesses—especially small businesses, which are the backbone of the economy—to survive this time. We in Northern Ireland have a larger proportion of small and medium-sized businesses than the rest of the United Kingdom. The high street in Ards—Newtownards—which is my major town, won the Northern Ireland high street of the year 2019 award. We are doing, with others, all we can to secure grant funding and measures with the local council to help the boutique shops, which people travel to from the length of Northern Ireland, to survive. What a difference a few months make!

The Bill also has measures to help haulage businesses and other commercial interests, and that is absolutely necessary. As I have said, I am supportive of this Bill, but a point was highlighted to me by an interested party, and it is of concern and must be addressed: the closure of the Bill powers. The Minister will have received correspondence from my office on the issue of licensing, and in particular HGV licensing. In simple terms, the Bill rightly gives the Secretary of State the power to issue exemptions from testing as he sees fit, and he can also withdraw that exemption at any time. However,

there is a concern in that there is no obligation to set standards or rules, and the Secretary of State's powers are constrained. In previous times, such power vested in a Minister would be resisted by Parliament, especially without a covering sunset clause to make the power temporary. I want to ask the Minister about this point; the Secretary of State mentioned it at the beginning of the debate, but unfortunately I did not get a chance to ask this question. The 12-month exemption can be granted so that haulage companies and operators can maintain their schedules for maintenance, so that they are not compromised and those schedules do not have to be rearranged twice. I just want to make sure that those companies are able to deliver and have their maintenance schedules in place, and will not be disadvantaged in any way.

There is also the issue of new vehicles and trailers. I welcome the information about a temporary reduction in duration of certain driving licences in Northern Ireland. That is a response to some of the things that I have written to the Minister about, so I am glad to see it in place. That tells me that we all have a role to play in the House to assure the Minister, or to change his mind—advise him—so that he comes forward with some ideas, which he clearly has. I thank him for that.

We all understand that unprecedented times call for unprecedented measures. That is why I was pleased with the furlough scheme, and many people have taken advantage of it. To be honest, had the furlough scheme not been there, many businesses would not still be here. The scheme has done some excellent work to ensure that businesses can hold on, until they get the chance to reopen over the next period of time, which will happen.

We must also ensure that we secure the way forward, not having the Minister with absolute and unending power as the new norm. That is not how democracy works. I add this caution: I hold firmly to that belief in democracy, even if I do not always agree with its outcome, such as the imposition of abortion legislation in Northern Ireland—not an issue in the Bill, but an example of a recent decision on an issue that we think should have been for the devolved Assembly to determine. We are in grave danger of forgetting that we can never allow power to be abused, whatever form it takes. I ask the Minister to insert a sunset clause in order to bring the powers to an end, or to have further accountability in the process of decision making under the Bill.

I conclude with this comment: we need this Bill and I support it, but we also need accountability and limitation of power. I ask the Minister to come back to us on that matter. I thank the Government for all the help for businesses so far, but we need it for the future as well and to take us through to the last part of this year. I hope that with the reduction in the R rate across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, especially in Northern Ireland where it is reducing greatly, the future will be better—as Captain Moore always says, “Tomorrow will be a good day.”

7.11 pm

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): Reducing and removing red tape is vital to enable businesses to bounce back rapidly as they reopen. In north Devon, we are blessed with vast areas of open space, so many of our pubs, cafés and restaurants will be able to open more effectively this summer if customers are able to spill on

to pavements, car parks and beaches. I warmly welcome the Bill and the opportunities it presents to many of the local businesses that I love to visit, such as Johns of Instow, Lilico's in Barnstaple, SQ in Braunton, The Rising Sun in Lynton and The Grove in Kings Nympton.

I recognise that consultation with stakeholders has been undertaken. However, with an elderly population in North Devon, I remain somewhat concerned. Clear access along pavements must be available to the disabled and partially sighted, who frequently find street furniture a hazard. I trust that that will be facilitated. I hope that the proposed amendments to the planning process will include measures to enable our town centres to revitalise themselves completely, giving speedy changes of use, and opportunities for new businesses or much-needed housing to be rapidly developed in the unfortunately ever-growing number of vacant shops on our high streets.

All that will not be possible if our councils do not have the resource to deliver it. Multiple layers of councils in counties such as Devon do not always have that resource, despite their best attempts to deliver rapidly. Indeed, the interaction between different council tiers makes such changes more challenging. Councils have made an unprecedented response to the pandemic, and I take this opportunity to thank the teams at North Devon District Council, the town councils and Devon County Council for their tireless commitment, despite the increased workload.

I fear, however, that, as we have already seen in North Devon, some well-intentioned initiatives are hard to bring to fruition and take far too long to implement. Small district councils have small teams, some still working from home, with poor broadband that is already overloaded. Reducing red tape can only work if council teams are able to implement plans rapidly and have the necessary resources to deliver what our businesses and high streets so desperately need. That is not in any way to criticise the work of the officers and staff at my local councils, but more to recognise the structural difficulties that are endemic in multiple layers of local government. I would like to take this opportunity to urge everyone, in the coming weeks, to come and visit some of our fantastic pubs, cafés and restaurants in North Devon; to enjoy our great hotels, holiday parks and B&Bs; and to indulge in the new outdoor drinking and dining facilities that I hope will rapidly appear with the passing of this Bill.

Those of us who live in North Devon all year round know that people need to be robust to dine with us outside. It can be wet and windy, but that is part of the charm of a British seaside holiday. We have weathered many storms back home, and we will weather this economic one. The shops of Barnstaple, Ilfracombe, South Molton and Braunton will be more than happy to sell everyone additional waterproof and windproof layers as we seek innovative outfits in which to dine out in weather like we had this weekend—or people could take a leaf out of my book and wear a wetsuit more often.

7.15 pm

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): I add my tribute to the two brilliant maiden speeches that we have heard this afternoon, particularly—Members will expect this from the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee—the avowed commitment to girl power from my hon. Friend the Member for South

[Caroline Nokes]

Ribble (Katherine Fletcher). She spoke of Queen Cartimandua, whoever she may be. I will now lapse into the awful vowel sounds that she talked about and use the word “actually” rather a lot. It is okay, though; we became firm friends on our first meeting and she forgives me for being from south of the M4, although she does not yet know where that is.

This debate is a brilliant opportunity to highlight some of the challenges that our local businesses have faced during the pandemic. I welcome the measures that we have seen for pubs, in particular, including the ability to have off sales and extend how they work. I will highlight two examples of what we have seen in my constituency so far; there are many other hostelrys. The Hatchet Inn in Sherfield English got regulars to sponsor sheds in the car park, which are converted into dining areas. At the end of the pandemic, the sheds will be sent off to their new homes to become woodsheds. That provoked a challenge, which I would like the Minister to think about. Although the outdoor dining areas were brilliantly located in the car park, they were, of course, within the curtilage of a listed building.

I am sure that many of us, up and down the country, have public houses that are also listed buildings—or perhaps my constituency is particularly blessed. The reality is that 18th-century pubs and coaching inns tend to be very small inside, and to have low ceilings and small doorways. The alternative—in rural areas, in particular, we can get away with this quite easily—is to spread outdoors into the car park or the beer garden.

That brings me to another point: the Rockingham Arms, in the village of West Wellow, has already installed a marquee at the front of the building, hard up against the road. I absolutely welcome it, and the Rockingham is one of my favourite pubs in the entire constituency, so I have no doubt that I will find myself in the tent on the car park. It does, however, bring outdoor dining much closer to local residents, so I particularly welcome local councils’ ability to exert their influence and work hand in glove with publicans and licensing authorities to ensure that solutions are appropriate for each place and circumstance. The Hatchet initially thought that it might have to submit a full-on listed building application, but it is working closely with Test Valley Borough Council to ensure that that does not have to happen. Those are exactly the sorts of challenges that will be thrown up on a case-by-case basis.

I wish to speak a little bit about pavements. We have heard the valid concerns about the elderly and those with disabilities, particularly from the RNIB and Guide Dogs, which are concerned that those with visual impairments will find outdoor seating a challenge, but we have to find a way to manage that. In the centre of Romsey, we are very lucky. Within the past 12 months or so, the county council has spent in excess of £2 million providing us with a new outdoor piazza in the centre of the town. I am sure that that will prove to be a real boon to premises such as Josie’s, Café Fresh and Café No. 5 by enabling them to have outside seating areas. If only we could make sure that the sun will shine. I give credit to the former leader of the county council—I must declare a personal interest—who was absolutely determined that the seating area would be on the side of the marketplace that stays in the sun until late in the afternoon. It is no good if such areas are in the shade.

This is, as I have said, a good and important Bill, but when we are talking about planning and business, it would be remiss of me not to get on to one of my favourite hobby horses. I am possibly the only MP from the Solent region who will speak in the debate. I welcome the measures that are being taken to enable house builders to get on and build, which is important, and I concur with those who have said that that must be done sensitively in residential areas—of course it must—but in south Hampshire we have a particular problem with nitrates. It has not been able to grant planning permissions for many months because of the nitrate build-up in the Solent, which leads to algae. That means that we have a massive logjam in the planning system and many councils are in real danger of not meeting their housing targets, so while the Housing Minister is sitting on the Treasury Bench it would be remiss of me not to ask him, please, to crack on, with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Natural England, and find a solution to that significant problem.

Let me move on to another great hobby horse of mine. An enormous amount of work has been done to open up the economy in a safe and measured way—we have seen all sorts of sectors coming back—but I cannot help feeling that this has been a recovery designed by men, for men. We have seen female-led businesses left at the back of the queue. It is obvious that men with hair need barbers and hairdressers; they perhaps find less need for pedicures and leg waxes. It is noticeable that 90% of the beauty industry’s employees are female and a majority of its businesses are women-led. We are preventing our female entrepreneurs from getting back to work. It seems to me to make little sense that a haircut is okay but a pedicure is not. Perhaps the Minister knows how far feet are from anybody’s mouth—although I have a habit of putting mine in mine.

I also want to talk a little about sport. Football, fishing and golf were very quick to return. I absolutely get it that women like all those things, but football audiences are 67% male. What someone cannot yet do is open up a yoga studio. There is a massive difference between factory-style gyms with banks of treadmills and individual yoga and pilates studios, where there are very few aerosol emissions and which can be cleaned thoroughly between individual customers. Even in a group yoga session, there can be massive space between individual participants. Again, yoga instructors are 80% female and the client base is predominantly female too.

I appreciate that there is no longer a BEIS Minister on the Treasury Bench. I wish very much that the Secretary of State had been here to hear my comments, because it is crucial that we reflect the point that this apparently male-led recovery has taken little account of the physical, emotional or mental wellbeing of women. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that he considers, in winding up the debate, that we need a recovery that brings women along with us, or else we will fail.

7.22 pm

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): May I add to the long list of deserved congratulations to my hon. Friends the Members for Sedgefield (Paul Howell) and for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher)? My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble is actually a good friend, not just an honourable one. She may be completely misguided about football—in a minute, I will ask her to intervene

and tell us all who won the premier league recently—but she is a good egg none the less. They both showed why their constituents made a good choice.

I wanted to speak in this debate because I think what the Government are proposing is exactly the sort of thing that they should be doing at this time. I welcome the ability to vary construction hours and to extend outline planning permission, and the changes to the Consumer Credit Act to facilitate bounce back loans, for which I have heard universal praise in my constituency. In contrast with the CBILS loans, where it was felt that the banks were slow and bureaucratic, the bounce back loans have been warmly welcomed. However, I want to speak particularly about allowing bars, pubs and restaurants to seat and serve people outside, and to focus especially on pubs.

From the Barrington Arms in Shrivenham to the Town Arms in Wallingford, I have 85 pubs in my constituency, which puts it in the top eight by number of pubs. We have heard a lot about how many of them have been closed and had to furlough staff, and how few of them have more than six months' cash. The Government's support package for pubs has been phenomenal—the business grant scheme, the furlough scheme and the business rates holiday have all been hugely welcome—but the sector has been in trouble, or at least facing challenges, for some time. Between 2010 and 2019, the number of pubs in the UK fell by 29%, so there have been some real challenges for many years before we got to coronavirus.

In rural constituencies—mine is predominantly rural—those challenges are a particular problem, because the pub is the beating heart of village life. After a certain time, it is quite literally the only light that is on for some considerable distance. Pubs in my constituency, and I am sure those in many others, have been at the heart of the community's response to coronavirus. The George & Dragon pub in Upton said to elderly and vulnerable people, "If there are any essentials that you can't get, give us a ring and we will go and find them and bring them to you entirely free of charge." With the help of a couple of benefactors, the Fox in Denchworth has been giving free fish and chips to every villager every week during this period—that is 171 villagers—and has now set a challenge in which people can earn gift vouchers to spend there if they lose 10% of their body weight in two months. Many of us could join that challenge in the hope of having a healthier lifestyle.

Despite all the challenges they have faced, those pubs have been there for their communities, and now those communities want to be there to support their pubs. Reducing the distance from 2 metres to 1 metre will certainly help, but measures to allow them more easily to seat and serve people outside will make it that little bit easier for us to support them and give them the best chance of survival.

7.26 pm

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I add my congratulations and pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgfield (Paul Howell) and to our own Queen Cartimandua, my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher). They both made fantastic contributions.

As someone who joined the House recently after 27 years in business, I welcome the measures in the Bill; they are positive and practical steps at a time of national

need. I look at them with one eye on how they will help our wider economic growth, which is the next challenge coming at us. For most of these businesses, there is a very thin line between costs, which are mostly fixed, and revenues, which even at the best of times depend on myriad factors. All the Government help in the world—and this Government have been generous and done what it has taken—is no substitute for real customers and real revenues, so the measures in the Bill are literally a lifeline for many of the hospitality businesses that I represent in Arundel and South Downs. The Federation of Small Businesses said that the measures on food and drink outdoors

"will help small businesses in the hospitality sector to resume trading with confidence",

and they will.

In most businesses, the single most valuable commodity is time, so having short and clear timeframes for the grant of a licence is as much of a benefit as capping the administration costs. I echo my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes): there is nothing in the Bill for businesses such as spas and nail bars. I would like to see some of the same creative thinking that has put together the package in the Bill applied to those sorts of businesses, as well as to exhibition businesses, which have been quite hard hit in my constituency and do not have a path to reopen.

Members from all parties will recognise the familiar sight of queues outside pharmacies during this crisis. It would be welcome if, ahead of the winter, Ministers would take the opportunity to repeal the National Health Service (Pharmaceutical and Local Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 2013 and thereby remove one of the last restrictive practices on our high streets. As our population ages, pharmacists have a vital role in our towns and villages, but there is currently a regulatory requirement to demonstrate need, which acts as a barrier, meaning that there is not a single pharmacy store on Arundel High Street. That forces the elderly and infirm to walk almost a mile out of town for the simplest prescriptions. Such a change would be simple and popular.

Like others, I welcome the reforms of the planning process. Here, too, as we look to boost the economy, there may be sensible opportunities, and I urge my ministerial colleagues to go further in the future. The shift from working from home offers a step change in productivity, sustainability and the employment of previously excluded groups, such as mothers, joining the workplace. The extension of permitted development rights to create home and garden offices, as well as the automatic change of use of retail and office premises to residential, will lock in those benefits and help create the homes our nation needs.

Finally, I note the one permanent change in the Bill to the way the Planning Inspectorate works. With the greatest respect to the hard-working individuals involved, too often the Planning Inspectorate is the sticking plaster on a broken process. We literally ask it to reconcile the impossible and then wonder why it produces answers that please nobody. The answer—I accept that this is probably a longer debate for another day—is an end to one-size-fits-all planning policies, which mean that measures designed to expedite rapid construction in towns and cities that have the infrastructure to cope end up blighting rural areas, and yet still the homes do not get built.

[Andrew Griffith]

The Centre for Cities says that, with imagination, we can easily accommodate all the new dwellings that we need within the existing curtilage of our cities. I agree, and as we focus on sustainability, food supply chains and achieving net zero, which we have baked into law, we have the opportunity, once and for all, to make it clear that precious woodland, countryside, agricultural land and rural flood plains must never be developed for housing, thus putting an end to the long-term planning blight suffered by my constituents around Adversane, West Grinstead and the 17 parishes around Henfield.

I am pleased to support the Government on this excellent Bill, but where possible I urge them to go further and faster in the interests of business and the economy.

7.31 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak after my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Andrew Griffith), and an even greater pleasure to speak after my hon. Friends the Members for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) and for Sedgfield (Paul Howell), who made wonderful maiden speeches. It is great to hear those regional voices. They are from the north and for the north, and they will add to the compelling case to rebalance this country by further investment in the north. It is great to hear them make that case.

I will focus most of my comments on clause 12, but I welcome all measures in the Bill, particularly the aid to the hospitality sector. I have some fine hostelrys in my constituency, including, I have to say, the world's best restaurant, as identified by TripAdvisor—the Black Swan at Oldstead. It is a wonderful place, about four miles from my house, and is run by celebrity chef Tommy Banks, a local person from a local family. It has a wonderful back story. There are many, many good restaurants throughout my patch, and they will get lots of support through the Bill.

Clause 12 talks about bounce back loans, which have been a huge success of the Government's and an excellent scheme that many businesses have taken advantage of; I think about a million businesses have secured a bounce back loan. The scheme gets money out of the door as quickly as possible to businesses in need. It is fair to say that because of the length and depth of this crisis, not every business will get through this recession. This is the third recession that I have been involved in with my business, and it is no doubt the most difficult.

It is absolutely right that we have suspended the provisions of the Consumer Credit Act to get that money out of the door quickly, so that lenders did not have the responsibility of ensuring that businesses were creditworthy for the amounts of money they were taking. The worry is what happens down the line. I am the co-chair of the all-party group on fair business banking, which has spent much of the last decade trying to fight for justice for lots of businesses that were badly treated in 2008 and post 2008. We desperately want to make sure that that does not happen again.

It was great to hear the Secretary of State confirm in his opening remarks that although the Consumer Credit Act provisions have been suspended in terms of creditworthiness, they have not been suspended in terms of collection, which should mean that lenders show

forbearance if things go wrong. Inevitably, some businesses will need help to get through this, and, sadly, some businesses will simply fail, but we have to ensure that those businesses are treated fairly through the process. For our larger banks, which are regulated firms, there is now the senior managers regime, which has a requirement to treat customers fairly through the process and a requirement to stick to the Lending Standards Board standards of lending practice for business customers. That is good, because there are checks and balances that we can apply to the bigger banks.

I sound a note of caution, though. Quite a few lenders that are distributing loans through this scheme are not regulated firms, so they do not come under that regime. Additionally, I believe that some of them are not even accountable to the Financial Ombudsman Service, so if there is a dispute there is not a means of alternative dispute resolution. We have to ensure that the message goes out loud and clear to lenders that have distributed money through these schemes that they must treat customers fairly through that process if things go wrong and ensure that any restructuring gives the business every chance of staying in business and getting through this crisis.

The loan scheme has been a huge success. One of the big successes in the SME lending market over the last few years has been the emergence of FinTech sector alternative lenders, which is breaking the stranglehold of the big four banks. Some 80% of SME lending is controlled by the big four banks, and we want to see much more choice for SMEs in their borrowing decisions. The British Business Bank has authorised about 80 lenders for the CBIL scheme and about 20 lenders for the bounce back loan scheme. The difficulty is that it is not just about getting authorisation; it is also about getting access to funds. The big banks, being deposit takers, get access to something called the term funding scheme. They can borrow money from the Bank of England at 0.1%, so if they are lending money at 2.5%, 3% or 4% through the CBIL scheme, that still makes commercial sense, and they have access to moneys.

Non-bank lenders—FinTech companies such as Funding Circle, Tide and iwoca—and lots of lenders in the asset finance space do not get access to the term funding scheme. They are relying on borrowing from their normal sources—wholesale markets—and they cannot borrow as cheaply. The Government loan guarantee also specifically excludes situations where money is being borrowed from third parties. That puts these lenders in a very difficult situation. Tide had secured £500 million to distribute to UK businesses through an EU wholesale funder, but it could not provide that money because of the lack of guarantee for that lending. The Treasury is aware of that, and we need to deal with it, to ensure that the choice of finance provision is as wide as possible for our SMEs. The other way to deal with this is for the banks that can access the term funding scheme to simply on-lend to non-bank lenders, but that is not working currently. This is a work in progress, and we need to deal with it.

As a number of Members have said, bounce back loans are relatively easy to get, whereas CBILs are much more difficult to get. It is possible to move from one to the other—a company can get a bounce back loan quickly and then upgrade to a CBIL of a higher amount, to pay off the original loan. That is right and proper, but lots of businesses are not managing to get CBILs

because the criteria are stricter. One reason behind that is that there are restrictions on state aid, one of which is that undertakings in difficulty cannot be supported through those schemes at the moment. The EU has said that it will drop that requirement, which is good—it is an EU requirement, and we are still bound by it currently—but we need to implement that quickly, so that more businesses can get access to the CBIL scheme and borrow as they need more money.

That aside, this is an excellent Bill. I will be supporting it if we go through the Division Lobbies, and I very much welcome it.

7.39 pm

Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): I would like to start by saying that I welcome this Bill on behalf of the Labour party. It is a pleasure, after my disagreements with the Secretary of State over recent weeks, to find myself broadly in agreement with Government Front Benchers this evening. I thank the Minister for engaging with me so constructively about this over recent days. Businesses clearly need more support to get back to work quickly and safely. This Bill is a start. It is intended to enable the next phase of easing the lockdown to go ahead.

Before I elaborate, I thank the Members in all parts of the House who have made contributions to the debate, including my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), who raised concerns about the impact of further relaxing licensing on antisocial behaviour to which I am sure the Minister will wish to respond. I add my congratulations to the many we have already heard around the House on the two maiden speeches from the new hon. Members for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) and for Sedgfield (Paul Howell). They were very different speeches in style but both extremely admirable debuts in this Chamber. I look forward to many more—I suspect—entertaining contributions from the hon. Member for South Ribble.

The country is facing a major recession, perhaps the worst in three centuries. It will take a major national effort to help families and employers to get through this while also making sure that the risks of a second damaging peak in covid-19 infection are minimised. These circumstances would be challenging for any Government. Without a vaccine—and we do not have one yet—nothing is risk-free. My right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) outlined from the Dispatch Box how the Opposition have supported the Government in many key decisions throughout this pandemic, and that extends to this Bill and other very significant measures such as the furlough scheme.

However, we must recognise too, so that we can learn from them, that the Government have made mistakes that have made the situation more difficult than it needed to be. Their initial promises on council funding have still not been matched by action, leaving many local authorities that will be key to supporting economic recovery in their own localities uncertain about funding just a few weeks ahead, let alone in the months and years ahead as the recession deepens. The Government's instinct to overcentralise and their failure to listen enough to communities and professionals on the frontline has led to serious and avoidable failures in obtaining protective equipment, ramping up testing, protecting care homes, and accurately identifying everyone who needed support to self-isolate through the shielding programme. I would add, in the light of what we have seen in Leicester today

and over recent days, their failure to share the data on the infection rates in localities with the relevant authorities in those localities, who will need it in order to marshal the support that is needed to enforce local lockdowns if they are required.

After the Government wasted two months on a centralised track and trace programme based on an app that never worked, they belatedly, although rightly, recognised the importance of engaging local government and public health professionals, but not soon enough to provide reassurance that the lockdown could be eased as safely as possible. As a result of that, we are reopening, but with higher levels of risk than were necessary. These failures have made the challenges to people's health, people's jobs, our high streets and our businesses worse than they needed to be, and there are important lessons to learn if we want to avoid a second lockdown.

The hospitality sector faces particular challenges. The temporary changes in licensing rules will help pubs, cafés, bars and restaurants to reopen quickly and serve customers outside. Many of these businesses operate on extremely tight margins, and without this lifeline many would not survive, so the changes are welcome. However, the British Beer and Pub Association points out that 10,000 pubs are not eligible for the Government's grant scheme. It says that unless the Government make specific support available now, thousands of pubs will close for good, taking hundreds of thousands of jobs with them. We cannot allow that to happen to such an important part of the British way of life for so many people, so I hope that the Government will move quickly to provide the support that is needed.

My right hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Business made some very important points about the need for the Government to review the flexibility of the furlough scheme to support the specific needs of the hospitality sector. Sectors of the economy will open at different rates. Some are more susceptible to covid-19-related restrictions than others, and the hospitality sector is one of those most at risk. There needs to be greater flexibility, or many businesses that are vital to the life and identity of their locality, and the jobs that come with them, will be lost forever.

Local authorities have a key role to play in supporting their local hospitality sector, but they need greater clarity from the Government on their new role. The Government must be clear on how the new licensing requirements will be monitored and enforced, given the severe lack of resources available in local authorities to carry out those functions. Council budgets are under unprecedented pressure after 10 years of austerity and the Government's broken promises on fully compensating them for the costs they have incurred as a result of covid-19. It is important that the Government now offer cast-iron guarantees that none of the measures in this Bill will place further costs on councils that could lead to further cuts elsewhere.

We welcome the extension of construction site working hours. The sector has a backlog of work to catch up on, and this flexibility will allow that to happen. It is important that communities do not feel their interests are being ignored in this, so Labour would like to see councils given the discretion they need to restrict hours of operation whom there is a compelling and overriding local reason to do so.

The introduction of more flexible planning appeals is also welcome in speeding up the process—although perhaps not as flexible as those in which the Secretary

[Steve Reed]

of State for Housing has been involved recently—but we want reassurance that no legitimate voice is digitally excluded from being heard. Local government is worried about the cost implications of these new rules, so I urge the Minister to publish a report detailing the extra costs that councils will face in processing increased volumes of planning applications through the new system.

The measures to speed up lending through the bounce back loan scheme are welcome, but I hope the Government will recognise that many businesses are still finding it difficult to access loans through CBILS, as the backlog builds up and the rules lock out too many. We need a fresh look at how the scheme can be amended to support more businesses faster. I agree with the points made by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) about people who are directors of small limited companies—often freelancers—who have been denied support and, as I know from my own constituency of Croydon North, are really struggling as a result.

In conclusion, the measures in the Bill are welcome and we will help to ensure its passage, but I want to be clear that it only helps at the margins of what will be needed. We are facing a deep recession—possibly the worst for three centuries—and millions of people up and down the country fear for their jobs and for their livelihoods. We will need more than this Bill to help this country to weather the coming storm, but for this evening, we welcome the Bill and we will support its passage through the House.

7.48 pm

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): First, I am sure on behalf of the whole House, I want to write into the record my appreciation of the maiden speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) and for Sedgefield (Paul Howell). My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble demonstrated some oratorical elasticity in the sense that she was able to draw together Tacitus, Cartimandua and Peter Kay. Historians among us recognise and honour that feat, although I suspect the Whips Office paid greater attention to the fact that she said she might occasionally prefer to be a rebel.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield paid full tribute to Phil Wilson, a strong and fine member of the Opposition Whips Office, and he also paid some tribute to the chap who preceded him; I forget his name. My hon. Friend spoke in prose and gave us some poetry, but whether he speaks in poetry or prose, he will always be welcome in this Chamber and, perhaps one day, even in Trimdon Labour club.

I also wish to congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Meriden (Saqib Bhatti), for Kensington (Felicity Buchan) and for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on their support for the measures we are introducing—I shall say some more words about those shortly. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) and applaud the entrepreneurial spirit of all at the Rockingham Arms, and look forward to her letter to me on nitrates. I also congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Wantage (David Johnston), for Arundel and South Downs (Andrew Griffith) and for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake)—whose support for the bounce back

loan I am grateful for; I shall pass his message on that to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. I thank all Members across the House for this lively, constructive and, I think, supportive debate, and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed) for his support for these measures. He is right to say that occasionally we fling some spice and some ginger across the Chamber in our debates, but when it really matters, when the chips are down, we all want the best for our country, which is why we are coming together to support this Bill tonight.

The Bill is good news for our businesses, for jobs, and for everyone who is looking forward to enjoying a safe summer as we bounce back from an incredibly difficulty period. We need to tread carefully, but, thanks to the sacrifices and resolve of the British people, and the unprecedented support this Government have provided, we are turning a corner and on the road to recovery. This Bill is pivotal to that economic and social recovery, and I am pleased that the measures it contains to support hard-hit sectors and help businesses adjust to new, safer ways of working have, as I say, been largely welcomed. As my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary said earlier, we listened to and worked with a wide variety of stakeholders and experts, and we are delivering on what they told us through this Bill. So I welcome this opportunity to address important issues raised in this debate, to ensure that the Bill gets Britain back to work safely and that the power, prosperity and opportunities we all want to see are returned to our economic sector.

We know that the hospitality industry is raring to go. Our restaurants, pubs and bars want to make the most of summer trading and welcome back their customers, and it is vital we support them to do that safely. As my right hon. Friend said, this is the third largest employer in our economy, with the pandemic and social distancing measures having serious consequences for its ability to operate. That is why the Bill will temporarily make it easier for businesses, including restaurants, pubs and bars, to obtain a licence, to set up outdoor seating and to sell either food or alcohol, or both, with a fast track to get permission for furniture such as tables and chairs on pavements, thereby enabling them to maximise capacity, within social distancing guidelines. I understand that there may be concerns about potential obstruction of highways, so I wish to reassure the House that we are taking steps to mitigate that. Recommended minimum footway widths and distances required for those with impaired vision and mobility, for example, will be clearly set out using the Department for Transport's inclusive mobility guidelines, thus striking a balance between the effective use of space and maintaining traffic and thoroughfare. In addition, we will provide councils with enforcement powers and the ability to revoke licences when conditions are breached.

I should emphasise that the changes to outdoor eating and drinking and off-sales will be carefully implemented to minimise public nuisance and reduce any crime or disorder. The police already have powers to issue closure notices to premises in such cases under section 76 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, but we are also building in safeguards to the Bill, such as an expedited review process for alcohol licences, which allows responsible authorities such as the police to quickly alter the licensing conditions granted to premises if necessary. They will be able to revoke permissions granted.

I will work with my colleagues in the Home Office and the Local Government Association to ensure that those measures work.

Taken together, the temporary new measures will be a lifeline for our hospitality industry, as are those we propose for planning to restart the construction industry and deliver the homes this country still very much needs.

Jim Shannon: In my contribution, I referred to the temporary events notices for breweries. Has the Minister had a chance to look at the provisions that they need in order to ensure that they can continue to prosper and do well after the covid crisis is over?

Christopher Pincher: The hon. Gentleman mentions breweries. He knows that the Bill largely covers England, and England and Wales. It does not cover other areas of our devolved community. However, I can tell him that by ensuring that breweries' customers open up and can sell alcohol to their own customers, we are helping breweries around the country and in Northern Ireland, whether they are big or small.

As hon. Members have heard, activity is picking up in the construction industry, another sector that is an engine of our economy and that is keen to get Britain building again. I pay particular tribute to construction workers up and down our country who worked through the pandemic and the businesses that got their sites back up and running in these difficult circumstances. I am pleased to support their efforts through the safe working charter, which my Department developed with the Home Builders Federation.

However, we know that there is more to do. Home starts and completions are well down on last year, with planning permissions for at least 60,000 homes hanging in the balance. That is why we are speeding up the planning system through the temporary measures in the Bill as part of a wider reform to ensure that it is fit for the 21st century. That means greater flexibility for builders to seek extensions of site working hours to facilitate social distancing, which will support the sector's safe economic recovery. We want work on construction sites to resume swiftly and safely, but I recognise the potential effect of the change on residents when we are all spending more time at home. Several Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington, raised that point.

I encourage builders to work constructively with local communities and councils to minimise disruption. I want to be clear that councils will retain local discretion over the decision-making process. They also have legal duties regarding statutory nuisance, which continue. They know their areas best and that is why they will continue to have discretion in their local decision-making processes. They are well placed to judge the effect on local businesses and residents, and where there will be an unacceptable impact, they retain the discretion to refuse extended hours.

We are also enabling the extension of planning permissions that have expired since the lockdown began or are about to expire, saving literally hundreds of projects. This is at the request of local authorities and the construction sector. I recognise that there is a risk of

schemes being delayed further if existing permissions are extended too long, which is why this will be only a temporary measure. Our extension date of 1 April 2021 strikes the right balance between giving certainty to the sector and ensuring that there are no further undue delays to new developments.

Another significant measure, which will help us double the pace of appeals while maintaining fair decision making, is the proposal to enable the Planning Inspectorate to advance appeals using more than one type of procedure. When we tested this hybrid approach last year, we more than halved the appeal time. This change, backed by all parties in the planning system, will be introduced on a permanent basis. In making these changes, it is important that we bring communities with us, and I am satisfied that, by agreeing through the Bill to temporarily remove the requirement for copies of the London plan to be made available for inspection at premises and on request, and instead enabling inspection free of charge by electronic means, the interests of transparency and accountability will be served.

Richard Fuller: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for clarifying a point that I raised earlier during the Secretary of State's speech. I would just like to ask him for clarification on a slightly more detailed point about housing developments outside London, particularly those in my constituency. It is about the process in the Bill for the public themselves to have the opportunity to review any application. What changes, if any, might occur to their rights to make representations on applications?

Christopher Pincher: I do not believe that this Bill does anything to disadvantage anybody in their right to fair access to information. Some of the changes that we have already made allow people to take part in planning committees virtually. Not everybody wants to go down to their town hall at 10 o'clock on a wet February evening if they can, quite literally, dial into those planning committees and see what is going on. They have access in a way that they would not ordinarily have.

I make this final point with reference to my hon. Friend's point and the changes that we are making to the Planning Inspectorate's processes. This particular proposition was made by Dame Bridget Rosewell as part of her recommendations. It was one of the 22 recommendations that she made, and it will allow planning inspectors to use a variety of tools consecutively to speed up their adjudication on decisions, which is good for everybody involved in the process. The average time has already been cut from 47 weeks to 23. We believe that this mechanism will speed up adjudication on planning decisions even more, and that is to the betterment of all involved.

This Bill could not be more important for reopening our economy, for championing firms large and small and for helping people live their lives again, with safety still paramount. Let us ensure this Bill's swift passage, as I think all hon. Members have said in their contributions, and get Britain back in business. I commend this Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time; to stand committed to a Committee of the whole House (Order, this day).

Business and Planning Bill

Considered in Committee (Order, this day)

[DAME ELEANOR LAING *in the Chair*]

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Eleanor Laing):

I should explain that, in these exceptional circumstances, although the Chair of the Committee would normally sit in the Clerk's Chair a during Committee stage, in order to comply with social distancing requirements I will remain in the Speaker's Chair, although I will be carrying out the role not of Deputy Speaker but of Chairman of the Committee. The occupant of the Chair during the Committee should be addressed as the Chair of the Committee, rather than as Deputy Speaker.

Clause 1

PAVEMENT LICENCES

8.4 pm

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): I beg to move amendment 2, page 2, line 2, at end insert

“, and—

- (c) to which a temporary traffic regulation order under section 14 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 is operative and will remain so for the time period of the pavement licence, and which has been made pursuant to the Road Traffic (Temporary Restrictions) Procedure Regulations 1992 as amended by the Traffic Orders Procedure (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020.”

The purpose of this amendment is to include pavements where temporary measures are in place already to deal with the effects of coronavirus, by assisting social distancing and enabling active travel, such as cycling and walking.

The Chairman: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Clause stand part.

Clauses 2 to 8 stand part.

Amendment 3, in clause 9, page 7, line 37, at end insert—

“(1A) Subsection (1B) applies for the purposes of—

- (a) the reference in section 1(5)(a) to a highway to which Part 7A of the Highways Act 1980 applies, and
(b) the references to traffic orders in section 3(6)(a)(i) and (b) (which, by virtue of section 3(7), have the same meaning as in that Part of that Act).

(1B) The definition of “traffic order” in section 115A(2) of the Highways Act 1980 is to be treated as if it included an order under section 14 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 made pursuant to subsection (1)(b) or (c) of that section under the procedure provided for by regulation 18 of the Road Traffic (Temporary Restrictions) Procedure Regulations 1992 (S.I. 1992/1215) (procedure for temporary orders made for purposes connected to coronavirus).”

This amendment secures that the provisions about pavement licences apply where a highway is subject to a temporary traffic order under section 14 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 for reasons relating to coronavirus.

Clauses 9 and 10 stand part.

Amendment 1, in clause 11, page 19, line 13, at end insert—

“(6A) The Secretary of State may by regulations apply sections 172F to 172L of the Licensing Act 2003 to vehicles and moveable structures in order to vary the requirement under section 189(4)

of that Act that a vehicle or moveable structure not permanently situated in the same place be treated for the purposes of that Act as if it were premises situated at only that place.”

This amendment is intended to provide flexibility for mobile licensed premises which are already licensed in one place to benefit from the temporary provisions of this Act in other locations.

Clauses 11 to 26 stand part.

New clause 1—*Support for the tourism and hospitality sector—*

“(1) The Secretary of State must—

- (a) carry out a review of the effect of Part 1 of this Act on the tourism and hospitality sector in England and Wales;
(b) set out the conclusions of the review in a report;
(c) publish the report; and
(d) arrange for copies of the report to be laid before both Houses of Parliament before 15 September 2020.

(2) The report under subsection (1) must also make an assessment of the effects of this Act on the tourism and hospitality sector in England and Wales compared with possible further and complementary measures, including, but not limited to, extending through to 2021 the period of operation in that sector of—

- (a) the furlough scheme,
(b) Bounce Back loans, or
(c) other grants or financial support from public funds.”

The purpose of this new clause is for a review to examine the effect of this Bill's proposals for the tourism and hospitality sector through to 2021, compared to extending the furlough scheme and the grants currently available.

New clause 2—*Monthly report on hospitality sector measures—*

“(1) The Secretary of State must publish a review of the effect of this Act's provisions on the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism sector.

(2) A report under subsection (1) must be published within one month of the day in which this Act is passed and at least once in every month thereafter up to and including January 2021.

(3) Every report under this section must include relevant contextual information including (but not limited to) the effect of the changes to coronavirus job retention scheme on the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism sector.

(4) The Secretary of State must arrange for a copy of each report made under this section to be laid before each House of Parliament.”

The purpose of this new clause is to require the Secretary of State to publish a monthly report for the next six months on the impact of the Bill in the context of changes to the coronavirus job retention scheme on sectors including hospitality.

New clause 4—*Explanation for extending periods under Part 2 of this Act—*

“(1) Before any exercise of the powers listed in subsection (2) to make regulations under this Part of this Act the Secretary of State must make a statement on the reasons in each case for extending the provisions of this Act beyond 1 April 2021.

(2) The powers listed in this subsection are—

- (a) section 16(7), on conditions relating to construction working hours;
(b) sections 17(8) and 17(9), on extending the duration of certain planning permissions;
(c) section 18(7), on extensions in connection with outline planning permission.

(3) The Secretary of State must arrange for a copy of the statement required under this section to be laid before each House of Parliament.”

The purpose of this new clause is to require the Secretary of State to provide a full explanation to the House before seeking to extend beyond 1 April 2021 any measures under this Part 2 of this Bill in relation to planning permission or construction working hours.

New clause 5—Costs on local authorities—

“(1) The Secretary of State must make an assessment of the additional costs to local authorities of the effects of Part 2 of this Act.

(2) The Secretary of State must consult local authorities before making the assessment under subsection (1).

(3) The Secretary of State must arrange for a copy of the assessment required under this section to be laid before each House of Parliament.”

The intention of this new clause is to require the Secretary of State to publish a report detailing the extra costs accrued by councils as a result of processing increased volumes of planning applications through the new deemed consent route and additional environmental approvals.

New clause 6—Rolling three month parliamentary reviews—

(1) This Act expires at the end of a review period unless the condition in subsection (2) is met.

(2) The condition is that the House of Commons has, following a debate, agreed a Motion moved during the review period by a Minister of the Crown in the form in subsection (3).

(3) The form of the Motion is—

“That the provisions of the Business and Planning Act 2020 should not yet expire.”

(4) The first review period begins on the day 90 days after the day on which this Act is passed.

(5) Subsequent review periods begin on the day 90 days after the day on which the previous review period ended.

(6) A review period ends at the end of the seventh sitting day after the day on which it begins.

(7) In this section, a “sitting day” means a day on which the House of Commons is sitting (and a day is only a day on which the House of Commons is sitting if the House begins to sit on that day).”

The purpose of this new clause is to provide a rolling review period for this legislation so that it can be revisited 3 months after it is passed and then every subsequent three months if necessary.

Mike Amesbury: The Government are asking Parliament to expedite the parliamentary progress of this Bill. In everyday circumstances, it would not be fast-tracked, but would be subject to a lower gear of progress. We are not in ordinary times or everyday circumstances, and the Opposition recognise, and have indeed constructively argued, that many of the measures outlined in the Bill need to be in place before the summer recess in order to be effective.

If legislation is not passed in time, hospitality businesses and their customers will not be able to benefit from the flexibility and covid safety arrangement measures relating to outdoor seating and alcohol service over the coming months. Likewise, road hauliers and others are dependent on heavy duty vehicle and passenger-carrying vehicle testing and licensing, and construction projects may be paused or delayed without planning permissions being extended. Furthermore, the measures will facilitate bounce back loans by disapplying unfair relationship provisions in the Consumer Credit Act 1974.

Our position on the Bill is one of constructive engagement. We want to provide support for hard-pressed businesses while giving additional freedoms and flexibility to respond to covid-19 spatial requirements. Although the additional freedoms will be welcomed by many, I ask the Minister for reassurance that checks and balances are in place in order to maintain social order. We want to ensure access for those with visual impairment or limited mobility, and the right to peace and quiet in

residential areas must be maintained. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) will come on to that later.

It is also important that these measures are temporary and time-sensitive, with constructive engagement at the heart of any proposals to extend the operating hours of a construction site. Good planning is an enabler, rather than a constraint. Consultation helps to deliver good community, business and place outcomes.

Amendments 2 and 3 are common-sense amendments that aim to extend the provisions in the Bill to more businesses and ensure a streamlined procedure for businesses serving food and drink to access pavement licences. We welcome the provisions that will allow cafés, restaurants and pubs to reopen quickly and serve more customers, while maintaining a safe environment. The amendments would simply extend those measures to include spaces where temporary pavements have been created or extended for social distancing measures, so that businesses will be able to take advantage of that. I note the calls for caution. This needs to be done sensibly, and the impact on staff, local residents, local authorities and disabled pedestrians must be kept in mind.

New clause 2 addresses a vital omission in the Bill. The food and accommodation sector has had the largest decline in economic output of all sectors with available data in this crisis. An extraordinary drop of 92% between February and April led to almost 6% of workers being furloughed. Despite the help the Bill offers to businesses, it does not offer “business as normal.” It is vital that we understand the impact the measures in this Bill will have on these industries, especially considering the support that the Government are providing through the furlough scheme. We need not undo the good work done by the scheme so far. The new clause would require the Government to publish a report every six months on the impact of the Bill in the context of the coronavirus job retention scheme. Such a report is vital to the understanding of the ongoing impact on hospitality, tourism, leisure and the travel sector. Only by knowing the scale of the problem after the measures in the Bill are implemented will the Government be able to match it with the proper level of tailored support that this sector will clearly need.

New clause 3 addresses the lack of regular data provided for applications for coronavirus support schemes. The Government do not currently release data on the number of businesses that fail to access loan schemes. Current data relates only to the total number of applications and the number of loans granted. Again, we must know how well the schemes are working in order to help businesses through this crisis, so I hope the Government will consider this new clause.

New clause 4 relates to part 2 of the Bill, which in turn relates to my brief, and the Minister’s brief, of planning and construction. I broadly welcome, as does the Royal Town Planning Institute, the planning measures in the Bill, which will ensure that building work can safely restart, especially in the light of the “build, build, build” message that will be detailed tomorrow in the Prime Minister’s much-trailed speech. However, considering the impacts of longer working hours and extended planning permissions on neighbourhoods is important. Under the new clause, the Secretary of State would return to the House if he wished to extend the measures relating to construction working hours or extensions to

[Mike Amesbury]

planning permissions beyond 1 April 2021. That is not to say that we would necessarily oppose any extensions, but it is vital that these provisions are not extended without explanation, and the new clause addresses that.

Finally, new clause 5 would require the Secretary of State to publish a report detailing the extra costs of processing these measures for local authorities. It is not clear at the moment what the measures contained in the Bill will cost local authorities in practice. Throughout this crisis they have been working around the clock to protect their communities from the covid-19 outbreak and its immediate impact. The Bill emphasises that local authorities will also be crucial in the recovery phase. Their work has, as my colleagues my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed) have said, come at a huge financial cost. Austerity measures over the past 10 years have had a devastating impact on local authority budgets, and despite the rhetoric of “whatever it takes”, the Government have not provided local authorities with anywhere near the level of funding they need in the wake of the immediate crisis. The provisions in this Bill will certainly result in yet more work and higher costs for local authorities, including local planning departments, which have already had to cut spending by half in the last decade. Given that, it is essential that we understand fully what the impact of these changes will be on local authority finances, and that local authorities are fully consulted. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) has made clear, the measures in the Bill will also not have a uniform impact across the country, and that needs to be taken into account.

We have enjoyed constructive communication on this Bill with the Government, and these amendments are tabled in a similarly constructive way. I look forward to the Government providing us with the detail and assurances on the broad range of issues I have outlined.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): Diolch, Dame Eleanor, and thank you for calling me so early in the debate. I think this must be a first for a Plaid Cymru Member; it is certainly a first for me. It is a great pleasure to follow the shadow Minister, and that is not something that I say very often because I do not often follow shadow Ministers, so once again I am grateful to the Chair.

8.15 pm

This is a short Bill, and the measures it contains are necessary to help otherwise viable businesses to survive the unprecedented impact of covid-19. The clauses relating to the hospitality sector are especially important. Other hon. Members made clear on Second Reading just how important the sector is, and the Minister, in summing up the debate, pointed to the fact that the sector employs as much as a third of the UK workforce. Others have also argued effectively that when these businesses are able to reopen safely, they will urgently require as much flexibility as possible to adapt to the new ways of operating, not only to comply with social distancing requirements but to cater for changes in consumer demand and habits.

With this in mind, I shall address amendment 1 to clause 11, which is tabled in my name. I want to make it clear that this is a probing amendment and that I have

no desire to push it to a vote, but I would like the Minister to address the points that I shall try to make. In short, the amendment is intended to provide the flexibility for mobile licensed premises that are already licensed in one place to benefit from the temporary provisions of this legislation in other locations. One of the innovative ways that pubs and restaurants in Wales have sought to adapt to the covid-19 restrictions has been to develop, or try to develop, a delivery service, but it has become apparent that the provisions of the Licensing Act 2003 make it difficult for some licensed premises to run such a service.

Under the Act, a person cannot sell alcohol from a vehicle or movable structure at a series of different locations—say, for the sake of argument, house-to-house—unless there is a premises licence in respect of the vehicle or movable structure at each location where a sale of alcohol is made in, on or from it. Pubs, therefore—and bars, for that matter—face complicated restrictions if they wish to reorient their business models to comply with covid-19 restrictions. We believe that, by amending sections 189 and 190 of the Act, the Government could temporarily remove the requirement for licensed premises to have a licence for each location at which a sale of alcohol was made, thereby helping the businesses to adapt to these unprecedented times. This is a probing amendment, but I would welcome the Minister’s comments on the proposals.

I want briefly to address the issue of small, independent breweries. I would welcome similar support for these organisations. We know that a quarter of all small breweries currently have no way to sell directly to the public, and in this respect I agree with the points made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on Second Reading. I appreciate the point the Minister made in response to the hon. Member intervention that as the hospitality sector—and the pub sector in particular—reopens, some of those breweries will find that they have customers again, but this is worth keeping under consideration, because if the pub trade has to go *al fresco*, it will be quite dependent on the weather, and some of those small breweries might find that their customers do not require quite as much towards the end of the summer or in the early autumn, and they might therefore want to sell directly again. It is a point well made that small breweries have seen their sales reduced by between 65% and 82% owing to covid-19, and they have not received the same level of financial support as other businesses in the hospitality sector.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): As the MP for a constituency that has a lot of small breweries, I have some sympathy with this. I would not want to see more off-sales in my constituency, but does the hon. Member not think the root of the problem is that these small breweries did not get support through the existing Government mechanisms, which went quite a long way but did not cover this sector?

Ben Lake: The hon. Lady makes a good point. A lot of these issues would have been circumnavigated if small breweries had been entitled to some of the support measures that were made available to other businesses in the hospitality sector.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Not only do the breweries have an issue with how to sell their products; they also had a lot of their product in storage, which then went off and had to be disposed of in whatever way that is done. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the breweries had a double whammy in not being able to make sales and having their stock destroyed?

Ben Lake: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. It is particularly the smaller independent breweries, where storage is perhaps even more of an issue, that will have had to dispose of a lot of their stock at considerable cost. Then there is the relative uncertainty as to when they might reopen and, indeed, how much beer to brew again. That is another problem that small breweries in my constituency have tried to tackle. I still think that might be a discussion to have. It is at least worth keeping the matter under review. I would welcome the Government's willingness to do that.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned temporary events notices and licences. Another proposal would be to consider extending the authorisation of off-sales to small breweries that do not hold a premises licence, but are registered under the alcohol wholesaler registration scheme. That would be temporary and quite exceptional, but in these exceptional times there might be a case for it.

New clause 1 was tabled by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), and he may well speak to that at greater length in a moment, but I put on record my support for it. The Government need to recognise the need for sectoral flexibility as they review how to withdraw some of the support schemes and take stock of whether these measures, exceptional as they are, are working. Given the nature of the crisis we face, our focus must continue to be on protecting otherwise viable businesses and supporting employment, so I welcome new clause 1.

Finally, I turn to the provisions in the first part of the Bill relating to the consumption of food and drink outdoors. A few Members have referred to those provisions as ushering in an *al fresco* age, which I am sure we are all excited to see, weather permitting. That part of the Bill extends to Wales as well as England, but the wording of clause 1 has caused some confusion as to whether it will apply directly to Wales. I ask the Minister to clarify in his summing up whether the provisions will apply to Wales directly. If not, is he content that the Welsh Senedd is empowered to introduce similar provisions to support bars and restaurants in Wales, so that we may also see an *al fresco* culture in Wales over the summer?

Meg Hillier: I rise to discuss new clause 6, which stands in my name. The Bill has been very rushed. It was announced on Thursday in the business statement. We had to lay amendments by Friday, and I thank you, Dame Eleanor, for allowing a manuscript amendment today in order to get the new clause put forward.

As the Government rush into this legislation—I think there are questions about why that is—it is important that we make sure there are points of review and reflection about how well it is working. To put it more charitably, I am trying to save the Government from themselves. I think there is a lot of support across the

House for the new clause, but in the very short time between Thursday and now, it has been hard to marshal all that and enable people to come and express their views.

The Minister may be able to answer this, but why has the Bill been quite so rushed, given that we have been in lockdown since 23 March and we knew that was coming for some time before then, and given that we knew these sectors would be among the hardest hit? One would have thought that somebody in the Government would have been working up a Bill and stress-testing it before now, so that it would not be such a surprise to Members of this House and sectors out there.

Local government has been caught rather by surprise. Of course it has been involved. I am not saying to the Minister that the Government have not spoken to local government. It would be extraordinary if he had come to the House from his Department and not done that. But there has not been enough detailed discussion about the impacts. We have heard—I will not go into the detail again—about some of the impacts in constituencies such as mine and other urban constituencies with a high density of licensed premises, where antisocial behaviour has already been happening as a result.

We are already seeing problems, so there is a warning sign for the Government. The reality is that once off-sales are allowed, as the hon. Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan, said, at the same hours as on licensed premises—almost with a sweep of a pen, with a very short period for councils to object—we will see an awful lot more sales off the premises at all hours of the day and night. We also have the big issue about the resources involved from the police and local councils to police it.

It is easy to say, as the Minister did, that the police have certain powers and there are powers for local authorities, but the issue is the resourcing. We cannot just do all that in one go. A lot of licences are being applied for. There are more than 1,300 licensed premises across my borough as a whole. How many licensing officers are needed to do that work? The police have other things to do with their time—certainly that is the case in my constituency, where they are dealing with serious crime issues, as well as antisocial behaviour and managing and policing social distancing and covid-19 regulations. There is a lot on everyone's plate. We want to support businesses, but a three-month review after this has been in place would give the Government the chance to come back and either reassure us that it is all fine everywhere, or, if there are problems, look at ways of addressing that. The Minister has heard today from the Labour Front Benchers that there is strong support for measures to get the economy going, and backing to make sure that businesses can survive the next period, as we still live in the pandemic. That is really important, certainly in a constituency such as mine with so many licensed premises, but we have to get that balance so that residents do not lose out.

This is a very mild proposal. Earlier, the Secretary of State rejected it because I had discussed a rolling amendment—I just say to the Minister that I had very little time to draft it and get advice about how to make it fit. I did not have time to discuss it in detail with the Government, otherwise I would have, and I know that other Members around the House agree with it.

[Meg Hillier]

I will not push the new clause to a vote today, but I am hoping that in the other place, they will have more time to think about, listen and reflect on it, and that, in the meantime, the Government will also have time to reflect on it. Perhaps the Minister can give me some indication of whether this is something that the Government are willing to reflect on—to build in, simply, a three-month review point, so that three months after the Bill becomes an Act, the issue would come to the House again. A Minister would come to explain what was happening and we would have a debate about how this was working in our constituencies up and down the country, in the four nations of the UK, and we could make sure that we were getting it right. If there were problems then, the Government would have my backing to bring in certain powers to ensure that the antisocial behaviour that I fear this may herald was tackled, and I am sure that the Government would have the backing of other Members.

It would be helpful to hear from the Government about their thinking on this very mild new clause. We pushed for a review of the covid-19 legislation, which was pretty draconian. That was accepted by the Government and I propose this review in a similar spirit. I do not think that this will provide uncertainty for businesses. A review, when there has been such cross-party support in general for a proposal that supports businesses, is unlikely to completely reverse it, but it may allow for amelioration of some of the worst impacts if they materialise, as I fear they may in my constituency, or it may allow for different approaches to how the measures are applied in different nations of the UK, different regions or different cities.

The key thing is that if we have the review, it will give the Government and the House an option to look at this again. I think that something as draconian as this—the biggest change in licensing rules for decades—warrants a review. Some of these licences will be granted for a year if they pass through on the nod. A lot of them will go through very fast because of a lack of resources in local authorities. I urge the Minister to take my suggestion constructively. I will not push the new clause to a vote today because I recognise that, although the Bill is rushed, the new clause is also rushed. I hope, however, that the other place will consider it, that the Government will approach it thoughtfully and that when the Bill returns to this place, we can consider having a three-month review.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I shall speak to new clause 1, which I will not push to a Division because, for reasons mentioned by others—not least the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier)—I accept the premise of the Bill. It is about boosting the economy and creating flexibility so that people can begin to make a living again within the confines of the important safety restrictions that there are. However, I am very much looking to the Minister and the Government to be very clear that they will accept the terms and the general approach of my new clause, which seeks Government support for the hospitality and tourism industry beyond the current date set, which is the end of October, when the Government's financial support schemes run out.

We welcome this Bill, rushed though it is, and understanding the necessity for that. We also welcome the support that the Government have given to the sector and the economy more widely. Undoubtedly, the furlough scheme, the grant schemes and, more recently, after a lot of lobbying by myself and plenty of others, the discretionary schemes delivered through local authorities have helped to save thousands of companies from bankruptcy and protected millions of jobs. I am grateful to the Government for that.

8.30 pm

However, tourism and hospitality is a special case. It is a special case because, for many parts of the country, and especially the Lake district, the Yorkshire dales and the rest of south Cumbria in my constituency, it operates on a seasonal basis—on a feast and famine basis. The reality is that covid-19 kicked in at the end of the winter, so there was famine and then the feast was cancelled. October—the month when the Government support for this industry and others will end—is the beginning of the next famine. We have to be very clear about this: if we say to the hospitality and tourism industry that, having missed out on its feast, it has to survive on its own two feet after October, we will simply be signing the death warrant of an entire industry right across this country. As I say, the industry operates on feast and famine. The other way of looking at this is that our hospitality and tourism industry across the UK will be expected to live on the basis of three consecutive winters, and there is no way it can absorb that—there is no way that many of these businesses will be able to survive it.

We are all working towards 4 July, and we are excited about it, with trepidation, but I want to remind the Minister and anybody else who needs reminding that, on 4 July, we will not see the widespread opening up of all the tourism and hospitality sector. In a survey of its members just a few days ago, Cumbria Tourism revealed that 69% of hospitality and tourism businesses in Cumbria will not be able to open fully on 4 July or any time soon after that, and 10% will not be able to open at all. The Government must not fall into a false sense of security that opening up to a degree on 4 July rescues the industry. Instead of famine, feast, famine it will be famine, small picnic, famine. We must not allow ourselves to assume that all is well within the industry just because of 4 July, welcome though that may be.

I remind the Minister that my constituency has had the single biggest increase in unemployment in the country since March—314%—and that 37% of my entire workforce is on furlough, which is the single biggest percentage outside London. The vast bulk of those people work in the tourism and hospitality sector. We hope that, having waited through the summer without a holiday, some of the people who would have travelled abroad might decide to holiday at home; I hope they do, and I support them in doing so. But we cannot assume that a rise in staycations will do anything to compensate for the losses that the industry has had over the summer months, which are of course not the Government's fault, but we look to the Government to extend the support.

Alongside others, I have presented a petition calling for Government support beyond October through to spring 2021. It has the support of MPs across the House, including, I am pleased to say, my neighbours the hon.

Members for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson) and for Barrow and Furness (Simon Fell). It also has the support of the heads and chief executives of the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales national parks, and many other destination organisations around the country such as Visit Cornwall, as well as my own, Cumbria Tourism.

This is a cross-party effort. New clause 1 is in my name, but it is supported by many Members. I hope that the Government will take notice and provide support for an industry that is the fourth biggest employer in the United Kingdom and the biggest employer in Cumbria. While I recognise that extending support for the industry from October through to spring will be expensive, I want the Minister to realise that not providing that support will also be hideously expensive, as tens of thousands of people become unemployed and we see the collapse of businesses that would otherwise be healthy and ready to start the fightback from the beginning of the new season in spring. I will not seek to divide the Committee on this matter, but I strongly urge the Minister to acknowledge what I am saying and to commit the Government to supporting a package of support for hospitality and tourism right the way through to spring 2021.

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): I thank everyone in the Chamber for the constructive discussion that we have had in Committee and on Second Reading. I want particularly to thank Opposition Front Benchers for the positive discussions we have had over the last several days to bring this Bill through all its stages today.

I also thank all the members of the BEIS team who have provided such great support for the Bill, those in the Department for Transport, those in my office and particularly—in my own Department, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government—Simon Gallagher and his planning team for all their efforts while there have been other demands, with the covid-19 emergency, on their time.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy set out, the overall aim of the Bill is to provide a boost to key sectors of our economy—the hospitality, construction, transport and SME sectors. It will support businesses across the economy, particularly in the hardest-hit sectors, to transition from the immediate crisis and the response to lockdown towards economic recovery. It will also support businesses to implement new safer ways of working to manage the ongoing risk of covid-19, and particularly the need, as we all know, for continued social distancing.

Hon. Members have made important points in their contributions on the amendments and new clauses tabled in Committee, and I should like to discuss them in turn. I turn first to amendment 3 to clause 9, which speaks to the same point as amendment 2. I thank Opposition Members for this amendment, as it raises the important matter that we would want to include in our definition of “relevant highway” those highways that benefit from a temporary traffic restriction order. This is particularly so given that more of these orders are now being made to encourage active travel, including walking, as people get back to work and more shops reopen. Our definition did not include highways where such temporary traffic restriction orders are in place, and it should have done;

that was our intention. If we do not make this change, the scope of the pavement licence provisions will be limited, reducing the number of businesses that will be able to benefit and undermining the powers granted to local authorities that allow them to manage their public spaces in response to covid-19.

For those reasons, and in the spirit of the constructive comments made by the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury), I will accept this minor technical amendment, amendment 3, to the definition of relevant highway in clause 9. I am grateful to him for bringing it to our attention, and I invite him to move it formally later. *[Interruption.]* It may only be the one, but bag them while you can.

I turn to amendment 1 to clause 11. Clause 11, as drafted, provides a bespoke temporary change to the Licensing Act 2003 to provide an automatic extension to the terms of on-sales alcohol premises to allow the sale for consumption off the premises. This is the amendment to which the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) spoke very eloquently. It is important that every person wishing to sell alcohol has a licence to do so, and for licensing authorities to be able to record and regulate the sale of alcohol through their area of control. The amendment would allow mobile traders to sell alcohol in places not previously allowed, and that could lead to a significant number of alcohol sales taking place from new locations not previously allowed by licensing authorities, potentially leading to crowding and disorder in those new locations. I would encourage mobile traders to apply for a variation order to their licence under existing legislation. For that reason, I am not able to accept his amendment, although I understand the thrust of it. I also recognise that it is perhaps an important issue in rural areas such as the one that he represents, so I would be happy to talk to him further about how we can help the rural economy through this difficult time moving towards winter. I am sure that my colleagues in the Home Office will be prepared similarly so to do.

I now turn to new clauses 1 and 2. The extraordinary support that we have put in place has been about getting us through this crisis, and the Bill is now supporting us out of it. It is the case that some firms will be affected by coronavirus for longer than others, and the Government will seek to support these firms appropriately. So far, the coronavirus job retention scheme has helped 1.1 million employers across the United Kingdom to furlough 9.2 million jobs, protecting many, many people’s livelihoods. Starting with the first release on 11 June, Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs is publishing monthly figures for the coronavirus job retention scheme claims, broken down by employer size, sector and geography. These figures are publicly available on the gov.uk website. They show the total number of jobs furloughed and the value of claims made within the accommodation, food services, arts, entertainment and recreation sectors. The Office for National Statistics also provides a great deal of data.

I therefore believe that there is data available that the House can see and that Opposition Members can use, and therefore there is no need for the new clauses. The hon. Member for Weaver Vale is, I would suggest, a seasoned player in the Standing Orders of this House, and he knows how to use urgent questions, SO24 applications and Opposition day debates. There will be

[Christopher Pincher]

plenty of opportunities for him to raise issues of concern with the Executive at the Dispatch Box without the need for the new clause.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) spoke very eloquently about the importance of supporting the hospitality and leisure sector, particularly in rural economies as wintertime approaches. I remind him that the tools that we have put in place already, such as the job retention scheme, are only temporary. There may be other, more effective and more sensible long-term tools to support the economic sectors to which he referred. The Chancellor made it absolutely clear in his remarks at the Dispatch Box during the Budget and subsequently that he will do whatever it takes to support our economy and its relevant sectors as we move through this crisis. I am therefore afraid that we cannot support new clauses 1 and 2, and I encourage those who proposed them not to press them.

I thank the hon. Member for Weaver Vale for tabling new clause 4, which would require the Secretary of State, prior to making any regulations to extend the time limits associated with the powers in respect of construction working hours, or extending the duration of certain planning permissions or extensions in connection with outline planning permissions, to make a statement to the House on the reasons for the extension beyond 1 April 2021. We recognise that there are concerns about this, but let me assure the hon. Gentleman that the powers in question were drawn in a proportionate way to address only what is necessary to facilitate the continued activity in the sector through this crisis. These delegated powers are considered essential to allow the flexibility necessary to respond to the emerging effects of coronavirus, its potential continuing effect on the sector, and the uncertainty about its future trajectory. Our intention is to exercise the powers only if the effects of coronavirus, including social distancing measures or other restrictions, continue for a longer period. I can make that clear to him from the Dispatch Box.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I want to pick up the reference to new clause 4, and also the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier). While what the Government propose is envisaged as continuing into the future, the new clause is important because it would allow us to take stock of the situation and see how well that had worked. From comments across the Chamber, I am sure that the Minister understands there is concern about or fear of mayhem, because this is being rushed through. Local authorities such as Warwick, District Council and Warwickshire County Council have few resources, are under huge financial pressure and have little capacity to be able to enforce such changes. I welcome what the Government are trying to do, but I have real concerns about the ability to enforce.

8.45 pm

Christopher Pincher: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that point. I will address it, if I may, when I come to new clause 6, which the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) mentioned. To speak partly to his point, and in conclusion on this, the powers are subject to the affirmative procedure for draft regulations, which will enable Parliament to scrutinise thoroughly

any relevant use of the powers, because the approval of both Houses will be needed. I therefore do not think that there is a need for new clause 4, and I would invite the Opposition to withdraw it.

With respect to new clause 5, again I thank the hon. Member for Weaver Vale for its tabling, because it provides an opportunity to give reassurance that local authorities will not be overburdened by the proposals in the Bill. This new clause would require the Secretary of State, following consultation with local planning authorities, to publish a report to provide an assessment of the costs to be incurred by local authorities as part of our proposed planning measures in the context of the covid-19 epidemic.

The applications relate to both the provision allowing for applications to extend construction working hours under clause 16 and the additional environmental approval process under clauses 17 and 18. Both the new forms of application will be free of charge to the applicant, which is to encourage developers to take advantage of the provisions in order to start or resume development as quickly as possible.

For three reasons, we do not consider the cost burden of either route to be particularly onerous on local planning authorities. First, each route deals with a single issue, and the onus is on the applicant to provide sufficient information. If insufficient information is provided by the developer, in the case of an additional environmental approval application or of an application for an extension to construction site working hours, the application will not count as having been made at all.

Secondly, as I said, the measures are temporary. This will therefore only be a short-term administrative burden over the course of this financial year. Thirdly, we do not expect individual authorities to face a deluge of applications under each route. For example, our analysis shows that by 1 August, 546 planning permissions for major residential developments across the country would have lapsed since 23 March, an average of 1.5 permissions per authority. Cumulatively, it is important to the economy to see those progress, but for individual local planning authorities we do not believe that the effect will be particularly onerous. Again, I invite the Opposition to withdraw the clause.

I will speak briefly to new clause 6, as many Members are watching. I appreciate that some Members are concerned about the need to ensure that any changes made under the fast-track legislation are restricted to what is proportionate and necessary. Ensuring that measures are time-limited can be an effective way to do that, but a rolling review provision across the whole of Act is not the best approach in this case.

The first reason is that two provisions in the Bill are permanent; they would be jeopardised by a rolling review of the entire Bill. The second is that part of the reason for these measures is to give the business community, local authorities and Government agencies certainty about what they need to do with certain planning activities. A cliff edge 90-day end to the processes that they are undertaking would remove any chance of the certainty that they are looking for.

The hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch has many ways in which she can advance her concerns. She can use Standing Orders, on which she is a seasoned expert, to look at SO 24 debates; she can encourage her Front Benchers to undertake Opposition debates, and

she can use the Public Accounts Committee to undertake inquiries. There are many ways in which she can progress her concerns other than through new clause 6.

Meg Hillier: My drafting may not have been perfect; the Bill has been very rushed, so it was difficult to get it right. Can the Minister give me any comfort that, in his mind or the Government's, there is scope to allow a three-month review point on the licensing element so that there is simply a review? Given the Government's majority, they would have to agree to any change anyway, but a review point seems a sensible, proportionate measure so that we can all reflect on how this is working and pick up any issues. If he could give me an indication of whether that is something the Government might consider as the Bill goes through the other place, that would be very helpful.

Christopher Pincher: I appreciate the hon. Lady's concern and I understand why she raises those points. However, I simply reiterate that introducing a rolling review would kill certain aspects of the Bill and reduce the certainty and clarity that businesses and planners are looking for. It might also jeopardise the conclusion of the Bill before the summer recess, and we need to get it on the statute book so that businesses around our country can benefit from its provisions over the summer months.

Let me reiterate the importance of this Bill for our economy in these extraordinary times. As we emerge from this pandemic, we need to do all we can to support our economic recovery and help businesses adjust to a new and safe way of working. I therefore encourage the House to support amendment 3 tabled by the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury), and I encourage the proponents of all other amendments to withdraw them.

Mike Amesbury: This has been a constructive debate, and I thank Members across the Chamber for their positive contributions and suggestions, which I hope will be taken up in the other place. I thank the Government, and I thank the Minister in particular for his positive engagement. We are happy to withdraw amendment 2

in my name and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends, and I look forward to moving amendment 3. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 to 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 9

INTERPRETATION

Amendment made: 3, page 7, line 37, at end insert—

“(1A) Subsection (1B) applies for the purposes of—

- (a) the reference in section 1(5)(a) to a highway to which Part 7A of the Highways Act 1980 applies, and
- (b) the references to traffic orders in section 3(6)(a)(i) and (b) (which, by virtue of section 3(7), have the same meaning as in that Part of that Act).

(1B) The definition of “traffic order” in section 115A(2) of the Highways Act 1980 is to be treated as if it included an order under section 14 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 made pursuant to subsection (1)(b) or (c) of that section under the procedure provided for by regulation 18 of the Road Traffic (Temporary Restrictions) Procedure Regulations 1992 (S.I. 1992/1215) (procedure for temporary orders made for purposes connected to coronavirus).”—(*Mike Amesbury.*)

This amendment secures that the provisions about pavement licences apply where a highway is subject to a temporary traffic order under section 14 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 for reasons relating to coronavirus.

Clause 9, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 10 to 26 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill, as amended, reported.

Bill, as amended in the Committee, considered.

Bill read the Third time and passed.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I will now suspend the House for three minutes to allow the safe exit of hon. Members participating in this item of business and the safe arrival of hon. Members for the next.

8.55 pm

Sitting suspended.

Covid-19 Update

8.59 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): Mr Speaker, with permission, I will make a statement on local action to tackle coronavirus. The impact of coronavirus has been deeply felt, yet, thanks to the extraordinary action that this country has taken, it is now in decline at a national level. The number of positive new cases is now below 1,000 a day, and the number of recorded deaths yesterday was 25. I am pleased to report that there were no deaths in Scotland, for the fourth consecutive day, and that there is currently nobody in intensive care with coronavirus in Northern Ireland. So we have been able, carefully, to ease the national restrictions.

Alongside the easing of the national restrictions, we have been increasingly taking local action. In May, we shut Weston General Hospital to new admissions, after a cluster of cases there. Earlier this month, we closed two GP surgeries in Enfield and a meat processing factory in Kirklees, and the Welsh Government have closed factories in Anglesey and Wrexham. We have put in place a system to tie together local and national action, based on insight provided by the Joint Biosecurity Centre, working closely with Public Health England and the NHS. Analysis is based on three levels of spread. Individual cases are identified and managed by NHS Test and Trace. When many cases are found in one setting, be it a care home, factory or hospital, that is classified as a cluster, and it will be dealt with largely by the local director of public health, who has statutory powers to close individual organisations. When PHE or the new JBC identifies clusters that are linked to one another, that is defined as an outbreak, and a range of local and national actions may be needed. Decisions are taken through our local action committee command structure, which works as follows: if PHE or the JBC spots a problem that needs attention, or the local director of public health reports up a problem, through the regional health protection teams, the outbreak is assessed at the daily local action committee bronze meeting; issues of concern are raised to the local action committee silver meeting, which is chaired by the chief medical officer; and problems requiring ministerial attention are then raised to the local action committee gold meeting.

Yesterday, I chaired an emergency local action committee gold meeting specifically to deal with the outbreak in Leicester. Unfortunately, while cases in most parts of the country have fallen since the peak, in Leicester they have continued to rise. The seven-day infection rate in Leicester is 135 cases per 100,000 people, which is three times higher than the rate for the next highest city. Leicester accounts for about 10% of all positive cases in the country over the past week, and admissions to hospital are between six and 10 per day, rather than about one a day at other trusts.

Over the past fortnight, we have already taken action to protect people in Leicester: we deployed four mobile testing units and offered extra capacity at the regional test site, and we provided thousands of home testing kits and extra public health capacity to boost the local team. This afternoon, I held a further meeting with local leaders, PHE, the JBC, the local resilience forum

and my clinical advisers, which was followed by a meeting of the cross-government covid operations committee, chaired by the Prime Minister. We have agreed further measures to tackle the outbreak in Leicester. First, in addition to the mobile testing units that I mentioned earlier, we will send further testing capability, including a walk-in test centre. Anyone in Leicester with symptoms must come forward for a test. Secondly, we will give extra funding to Leicester and Leicestershire councils, to support them to enhance their communications, and ensure those communications are translated into all locally relevant languages. Thirdly, through the councils, we will ensure support is available to those who have to self-isolate. Fourthly, we will work with the workplaces that have seen clusters of cases to implement more stringently the covid-secure guidance.

Given the growing outbreak in Leicester, we cannot recommend that the easing of the national lockdown, set to take place on 4 July, happens in Leicester. Having taken clinical advice on the actions necessary, and discussed them with the local team in Leicester, and Leicestershire, we have made some difficult but important decisions. We have decided that from tomorrow non-essential retail will have to close and, as children have been particularly impacted by this outbreak, schools will also need to close from Thursday, although they will stay open for vulnerable children and children of critical workers, as they have done throughout. Unfortunately, the clinical advice is that the relaxation of shielding measures due on 6 July cannot now take place in Leicester.

We recommend that people in Leicester stay at home as much as they can, and we recommend against all but essential travel to, from and within Leicester. We will monitor closely adherence to social distancing rules and take further steps if that is necessary. The more people follow the rules, the faster we will get control of this virus and get Leicester back to normal. We will keep all these local measures under review and will not keep them in place any longer than is necessary. We will review whether we can relax any measures in two weeks' time.

These Leicester-specific measures will apply not just to the city of Leicester but to the surrounding conurbation—including, for example, Oadby, Birstall and Glenfield. I know that this is a worrying time for people living in Leicester, and I want them to know that they have our full support. We do not take these decisions lightly but do so with the interests of the people of Leicester in our hearts. I want everyone in Leicester to know that we have taken every one of these decisions to protect them from this terrible virus. We must control this virus. We must keep people safe.

These actions are profoundly in the national interest, too, because it is in everyone's interests that we control the virus as locally as possible. Local action like this is an important tool in our armoury to deal with outbreaks while we get the country back on its feet. We said that we would do whatever it takes to defeat this virus, and we said that local action would be an increasingly important part of our plan. The virus thrives on social contact, and we know that reducing social contact controls its spread. Precise and targeted actions such as these will give the virus nowhere to hide and help us to defeat this invisible killer. I commend this statement to the House.

9.6 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of the statement, and also for the many direct conversations we have had in recent days about the situation in Leicester. I hope the House will forgive me if I ask a number of questions about the situation in Leicester; it is the city that I represent, but I hope the House will understand that many of the points that I raise would be applicable to their own local areas should they also see an outbreak in their own constituency.

The Prime Minister talks of his “whack-a-mole” strategy to suppress local outbreaks. We were alerted to the situation in Leicester 11 days ago, and tonight we have from the Secretary of State the whack-a-mole strategy. Does the Secretary of State agree that if we are, as a nation, to ease from lockdown smoothly, those areas that do see flare-ups will need greater speed in the response? Otherwise, we risk no moles getting whacked.

Ministers, Public Health England and other agencies must work closely with local government leaders—that has happened in Leicester and we are grateful for that—and local directors of public health need rapid and ongoing access to testing data. Can we resolve whatever the issues are around the data-sharing protocols, so that if we see flare-ups in other cities, local authorities can get data speedily? Will the Secretary of State look into ensuring that the testing data also captures ethnicity and occupation? For a city like Leicester, it is crucial to capture that level of intelligence.

People in Leicester were concerned, anxious and scared yesterday to read in the newspapers, and see on TV screens, news that we were going into some form of lockdown, based on anonymous briefings. Grandparents who had recently formed bubbles to see their grandchildren were asking me whether they had to withdraw again. Parents were asking whether they could send their children to school today. Those shielding were particularly worried. I have been around politics for a long time so I understand that things get leaked and so on, but I urge him to appreciate that on something of this seriousness and sensitivity, people need crystal-clear clarity and not briefings from over-eager advisers—perhaps; I do not know.

The Secretary of State has announced a number of extensions to the lockdown measures. I support those extensions, given the outbreak in Leicester. Will he just clarify what powers he has to enforce those extensions and whether he needs to bring forward any legislation or any statutory instruments? I welcome the fact that there will be a two-week review. Will he undertake to keep the Members of Parliament updated on that, and will he come back to the House to announce the outcome of that review?

This decision will impact many Leicester businesses, which were preparing to open up on Saturday. Many feel that they are now in limbo, so will they be eligible for adequate financial support for this extension period, and will employees affected be eligible to stay furloughed as well?

We know that this virus thrives on inequality, and that a disproportionate number of black and Asian people die from this disease. A disproportionate number of the poorest are also most likely to become infected and to die from this disease as well. It means that a city

such as Leicester is particularly at risk. The Secretary of State will know that Leicester is a proudly diverse city, but we also have one of the highest child poverty rates in the country. Those who are in work are often in low-paid, precarious employment. Our housing is overcrowded. Our public services have been cut back and years of austerity have taken their toll. Saving lives and keeping people safe across Leicester is always my priority, so I support the measures that he has announced, but we also need extra support, extra testing and extra resources to protect people in our city. I am grateful for the extra testing stations that he has put in Spinney Hill Park and Victoria Park. Will they remain in place for the duration of this outbreak? I note what he said about an extra walk-in centre, and I welcome that, but could he also provide the city with thousands of home testing kits, so they can be distributed to local people?

I welcome the extra resources for Leicester and Leicestershire to translate literature into the many languages that we are proud of in Leicester. The Secretary of State will also know that, for those who are asked to isolate, financial security is absolutely crucial to the success of contact tracing. Where people live in multi-generational households, which we have a lot of in Leicester, will he provide accommodation for those who need to isolate away from home? Will he also ensure that workplace inspections happen, to check that people who need to isolate have not been forced back to work? Furthermore, given that schools are closing, people who live in Leicester but work outside it will now have childcare responsibilities. Can they be furloughed and their employment rights secured? Will he consider giving Leicester City Council masks to distribute to every resident? I am pleased that he accepts that the extension to restrictions cannot just apply to the tightly drawn Leicester City Council boundaries, but must include the wider Leicester urban area as well.

There will be many other cities and towns with similar demographic profiles to Leicester: Birmingham; parts of Manchester; parts of London; Bradford; and Coventry. What extra resources and testing capacity will the Secretary of State now put into those areas and what extra support and testing capacity is he putting in place to support those in the many occupations that are particularly at risk, such as taxi drivers and bus drivers?

Finally, tonight, the World Health Organisation has warned that the virus is still spreading at speed and that those countries that have opened up are beginning to see a resurgence. The virus remains deadly. It causes significant long-term harm and still demands a resolute response. If that means restrictions have to remain in place or be reimposed, whether in Leicester or elsewhere, then so be it.

Matt Hancock: I want to put on record my gratitude to the shadow Secretary of State and his Leicestershire colleagues in this House, who have all worked in a constructive manner to try to make sure that we get the right answers here and then we communicate them in the right way to the people of Leicester. He, after all, is both a Leicester MP and the shadow Secretary of State.

I set out in my speech the action that we have already taken over the past fortnight to support Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County Council to tackle this outbreak. We have been acting on it since it first

[*Matt Hancock*]

came to our attention. It is clear now that further action is necessary. He talks about the debate that has been in the media. All I can say is that, within two hours of the final decisions being taken, I have come to this House. I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to come to the House at this unusually late hour in order to set out the decisions immediately.

The hon. Gentleman rightly asked about the powers that will underpin the decisions that I have taken. They will be brought forward with a statutory instrument very shortly, and I commit to keeping the House updated on the two-week review of whether we can lift some of the measures.

The hon. Gentleman is quite right to talk about the proud diversity of the city of Leicester. It is very important that that diversity is taken into account in communicating these decisions and undertaking the public health measures in Leicester. That includes, for instance, the financial support that we put in place for the translation of the messages.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the testing units can be there for the long term. They will absolutely be there for as long as they are needed. He asked for the provision of home testing kits. I will take that away, but I commit to him that we will increase the number of home testing kits that are available for Leicester. He asked about accommodation for those who are required to self-isolate but whose accommodation does not allow for that in practice. We are working with the city council to put in place availability, on a discretionary and exceptional basis, of accommodation for those who are required to self-isolate by public health officials.

The hon. Gentleman asked about childcare. I appreciate that these decisions—especially the closure of schools—will have an impact on working parents. Childcare is, of course, a reason for essential travel, and I hope that, as during the broader lockdown across the country, people will be able to make arrangements for it.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked about other areas that have high intensity. We are of course looking across the country at the cities where cases of this virus remain higher than elsewhere. However, the number of cases in Leicester is three times higher than the next highest city. That is not due to the fact that there is now more testing in Leicester. If it were, the proportion of people who test positive would be falling. Actually, that proportion has remained static, which is one of the reasons why we are specifically concerned about Leicester. It is not just that there is increased testing; it is that there is a higher prevalence in Leicester. That is why we have taken the actions that we have.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): I support the actions being taken in Leicester, but, like the whole House, I feel for the people of Leicester at this particularly anxious time.

I want to ask the Health Secretary about the broader matter of testing NHS staff. He has said many times that he supports the routine testing of NHS staff, but last Wednesday—the day we debated this issue in the House—a letter went out to the NHS saying that testing NHS staff will be based on the PHE SIREN study, which is the antibody testing programme. Given that it

takes up to three weeks for an antibody to show, how can a regime that is meant to stop the asymptomatic transmission of the virus to patients and colleagues possibly work?

Matt Hancock: The regime for testing NHS staff, which will apply in Leicester and right across the board, is the one recommended by clinicians. The SIREN study starts with an antibody test, but then has regular swab testing, including at weekly frequency. There is regular testing to find out if people have the virus, and also a test at the start to find out if they have had it. That not only ensures that they are kept safe and finds out if they have the virus, but supports the immunology research to find out if people who have antibodies can catch the virus a second time. We are doing it that way in order to get the practical benefits and the research benefits.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: Naturally, I too am delighted that Scotland has had no deaths for four days and only five cases today.

Public Health England began publishing combined data from commercial as well as NHS labs at the beginning of this month. Since then, it has become clear that Leicester has had far more covid cases than it was previously aware of, with almost 900 over the last three weeks. This data is published only weekly, however, which is of no use for tracing contacts or the early identification of an outbreak.

The Secretary of State tends to focus on the number of tests, but does he accept that it is actually tracing and isolation that stop the spread of the virus? How does he expect local public health teams to identify an emerging outbreak if they cannot access accurate data, and how can they manage one if they are not sent individual test results in real time? When will he be able to guarantee that test results are sent immediately to GPs and local public health teams, so that they can trace contacts and isolate patients?

The lack of accurate data can also affect Government decisions. On 10 May, when the Prime Minister eased lockdown across England, almost 40,000 positive cases from the commercial labs were not included in the data of the four nations. Even now, the UK Government website claims that there have been just over 160,000 covid cases in England, despite Public Health England reporting that there have actually been 240,000. Does the Secretary of State really think it safe to go ahead with opening pubs and restaurants across England when there have been 50% more cases than previously reported? If the UK Government were aware of this much higher incidence, why have they knowingly been publishing false information on their website?

Matt Hancock: I think the best way to explain that is that all the data we have on Leicester has been made available to Leicestershire County Council. I pay tribute to Ivan Browne, director of public health at Leicester City Council, who has done a superb job through this. All the data available to us is available to him. Indeed, I can commit to the House that we will publish all the data on test results, in order to ensure that the wider public, as well as directors of public health, are able to access that data.

The hon. Lady frequently tries to divide the testing system between those tests done in hospital labs and those done in the labs that we have built over the past few weeks. That is the wrong approach—it is only because we managed to build those labs that we have such large testing capacity across the UK. Those tests from the Lighthouse labs are available in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as England. I pay tribute to the work of those labs, which have done so much to deliver what is now an extraordinary testing capability that we can bring to bear on specific problems, such as this one in Leicester.

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): As the Secretary of State said, speed is of the essence in responding to the pandemic. However, on 8 June, in the Chamber, I asked my right hon. Friend to intervene immediately to correct the situation that elderly people and people with physical and learning disabilities in supported and sheltered accommodation cannot get testing kits. Three weeks later, they still cannot. How can we have confidence in a speedy and targeted approach to testing and tracing if those of great vulnerability still cannot be tested three weeks after a clear commitment was given to grip the matter?

Matt Hancock: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his question. I am pleased to be able to say that we are now rolling out testing to the settings that he describes. This will be rolled out over the coming three to four weeks, to coincide with the time that it will take us to build that roll-out capacity. It is important that, first, the testing is where it needs to be, and secondly, that we do that on the basis of clinical need, which is why we supported testing in nursing homes and residential homes first.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, I thank the Secretary of State for his strong and focused response to the covid-19 rise in Leicester. Is he aware that, in my local council area of Ards and North Down, we have a lower than average number of cases in Northern Ireland? That is for many reasons, including the decision made by bodies such as the Orange Order, the Apprentice Boys of Derry and the Royal Black Preceptory not to hold our annual parades, which are so precious to so many, including myself. That is a sacrifice to be noted and replicated, so that the downward trend can continue. What is being done to encourage others to be safe in exercising their religious and civil liberty?

Matt Hancock: I know that, right across the United Kingdom, people have given up events that they hold dear. That is a sacrifice, and tonight, we are asking the people of Leicester to take further difficult action. I appreciate that the decisions we have taken have led to people not being able to enjoy life in the normal way. I hope that, by cracking down on the disease in the way we have been able to across the country and then taking decisive action where there are local flare-ups, we will be able to get this country back to normal as much as possible, so that people can do the things they love.

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con): My thoughts go out to the people of Leicester at what must be a very worrying time. I am grateful to the Health Secretary for taking such swift action to tackle this local outbreak. I know that many of my constituents will welcome being

able to spend more time with family and friends and to visit restaurants and pubs like the Eden Arms in West Auckland for the first time in far too long. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that some restrictions may be put back in place if local outbreaks are identified, in order to keep people safe?

Matt Hancock: Yes. Today's action demonstrates that we are willing to take action to protect people. Local action, in concert with the local council, is sometimes what is needed. There have been local outbreaks thus far, for instance in Kirklees. Along with Kirklees Council, to which I pay tribute, we managed to tackle the problem in one particular factory effectively, and it did not lead to onward community spread. Likewise, in Weston-super-Mare, they closed admission to hospital and tackled the outbreak, and it did not lead to community spread. In the case of Leicester, unfortunately, the outbreak has led to community spread, which is why we have had to take the wider action that I have announced today.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): The Secretary of State said that data had been made available to public health officials in Leicester, but the reports yesterday said that that was quite late in coming. I have talked to local government colleagues in Kirklees, and they are still struggling to get granular data at a street level. If we are going to rely on local authorities and local public health officials to manage this outbreak, we need postcode-based data, so that outbreaks on a street, on an estate or in a ward can be picked up very early and dealt with, and preferably broken down by ethnicity, given the demographic issues that have been highlighted in Leicester. Why is that not available in real time, as the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) asked? What is the problem with making that data available immediately at that level?

Matt Hancock: That data is available to directors of public health in local councils who have signed a data protection record. I am committing to the House to publish it at as local a level as possible, so that everybody will be able to see and analyse that data.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): It was right to ease lockdown, as we must get the economy breathing again, but it is also dispiriting to see packed beaches, passengers without masks on public transport and other mass gatherings. Given that the Government will no doubt get blamed for any second spikes, how serious is the Secretary of State about imposing similar measures more widely beyond Leicester?

Matt Hancock: People will have seen from the action we have taken today and announced tonight that although I do not want to take that sort of local action, we are perfectly prepared to take it if that is what is needed to control the virus. Throughout the lifting of the lockdown measures, our plan has been to lift the national measures and have a more targeted approach, whether that involves an individual case, whereby NHS Test and Trace contacts all those who have been in contact with the person who has tested positive, or a cluster in one setting, for example in the factory in Kirklees that was mentioned, which was addressed at that level, or a wider outbreak, as demonstrated by tonight's action.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab) [V]: The age-standardised covid mortality rate for severely disabled men is nearly 200 per 100,000, and for severely disabled women it is over 141 per 100,000. That compares with death rates of 70 and 36 per 100,000 for non-disabled men and women respectively. When poverty is factored in, it will show even higher death rates for disabled people. Will the Secretary of State undertake an immediate analysis of the impact of covid on disabled people living in poverty? Will he speak to his counterpart in the Department for Work and Pensions about releasing data on the disabled social security claimants who have died during the covid pandemic, as to date those data have been very limited?

Matt Hancock: I am absolutely determined to address the questions and the impact of covid on those who live with disabilities. The hon. Lady's point is important, and this will form part of our work on inequalities and the response to covid. The Minister for Equalities is taking that work forward.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): First, will my right hon. Friend share what factors lie behind the infection rate being so high in Leicester? Will those factors be shared with local resilience forums, such as mine in the south-east, so that they can also prepare? Secondly, he said that children in Leicester were particularly vulnerable. That is not the norm for covid, so is this a separate strand of covid, or can he say why the youngsters in Leicester are so vulnerable?

Matt Hancock: To be clear, children have a very low risk of suffering from covid, but we have been looking at the proportion of children who have tested positive and therefore may be transmitting the disease. Thankfully, the disease poses a very low risk to any individual child in terms of their becoming ill or worse, but the challenge is that it still transmits through children. That is why we have taken the decision that we have on schools in Leicester. Of course, there are many reasons and potential reasons why the outbreak has occurred in the way it has in Leicester. We are still getting to the bottom of those, but I undertake to ensure that directors of public health in other areas understand those reasons. For instance, we are doing work specifically on food processing factories, which seem to have a higher rate of infection in countries around the world, including America, Germany and also north Wales. Of course, there is a challenge in the community to ensure that we understand properly the origins and the spread of the outbreak in Leicester and then look at similar cities where the case rate is thankfully much lower, but ensure that we learn the lessons for similar cities, precisely as the shadow Secretary of State said.

Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend has mentioned the outbreaks in Wales. Does he agree that the Welsh and UK Governments working together would be beneficial for everyone, particularly on test, track and protect, but especially for my constituents in Brecon and Radnorshire, who share a border with England?

Matt Hancock: Yes. I know the Welsh borders extremely well. My hon. Friend is right to raise the need to work cross-border. We work as closely as we can, supporting the Welsh Government, for example, with their testing capacity and with test and trace. We are working on

better data sharing between the two Governments, not least because of the importance for those who travel across the border.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I can get a routine blood test result on the same day with no problem, but a swab test typically takes days, not hours, severely limiting its usefulness as a public health tool, as the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) described. Does my right hon. Friend believe that directors of public health should have access to comprehensive datasets in good time if they are to identify the clusters that he envisages in his statement?

Matt Hancock: Yes, absolutely—in real time, effectively.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) [V]: As the Secretary of State has detailed, when areas are put into local lockdown, businesses will have to close, including some that had probably been preparing to reopen this week. Can he confirm that any business impacted by a local lockdown in Leicester, and in other areas in future, will be able to access the furlough scheme as it currently exists, rather than having to subsidise the wages of staff who cannot work?

Matt Hancock: Of course the furlough scheme is available, as it is across the country. In addition, we have provided the councils in question—both Leicester and Leicestershire, because some of the affected area is in the conurbation of Leicester that is technically in Leicestershire—with support to use at their discretion for this sort of purpose.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): Although I welcome the fact that people have been able to make use of open public spaces during the recent warm weather, I have been shocked at the behaviour of a small number of visitors to Blackpool, who have left our lovely beach strewn with litter and not observed social distancing rules. Will my right hon. Friend join me in reminding people of the need to be considerate of others and to obey the current rules at all times?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend speaks for Blackpool, and he has a clear voice that people should listen to. The message that people should take away is this: to defeat this virus, we need to stick together and follow the social distancing rules. That is as true on a beach in Blackpool as it is anywhere else in the country. If people do go out and enjoy the beach on a day of good weather, they should follow not just the social distancing rules, but basic decency, and take their rubbish home with them.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab) [V]: Data are vital to how we tackle covid-19, and we see that this evening with what has happened in Leicester. Why is it that for 39 days, the Government have not been able to publish the number of people tested for covid-19, and why can the public not know how many people have been tested in their local testing centres, such as the Humber Bridge car park testing centre in east Yorkshire?

Matt Hancock: We are publishing more data on where tests are done and where those positive test results are based in order to understand better the clusters. On the hon. Lady's point about the number of people tested,

there is a long-standing issue in terms of de-confliction, and understanding and making sure we get those data right. We are working with the UK stats agency on resolving the problem, and I hope to have it resolved as soon as possible.

Sir Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): During questions on his statement on 18 May, my right hon. Friend confirmed to me that he was working on measures to support care homes that are in financial difficulties. When will he be in a position to publish those measures? A lot of care homes are facing significant difficulty right now.

Matt Hancock: I am working with my right hon. Friends the Communities Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer on exactly those measures.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: Sir Jeremy Farrar, who sits on the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, has said that in winter we anticipate rebounds and second waves. He said that it was crucial to get to the position that Scotland is in, with low numbers of cases giving a low base from which to tackle local outbreaks. With 901 new cases reported over the past 24 hours, how confident is the Secretary of State of reaching that low base by winter?

Matt Hancock: Clearly, the measures that we have in place are there to bring the number of cases right down. We have been able to do that over the past few weeks, since the middle of April, when we saw the peak. That has been happening across the country. Where we see local outbreaks and that trend going into reverse, we can take action, whether that is at a highly localised level around a single cluster or, as demonstrated tonight, with an outbreak such as the one in Leicester.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I welcome the decisive action taken today and the statement from the Secretary of State. There will of course be some nervousness in the country at large, so will he reassure people that lessons are being learned in real time and passed on to other local areas as they happen, and also that if it is necessary for him to go further to control this virus, that is what he will do?

Matt Hancock: Yes, I can absolutely confirm the point about the lessons being learned and then promulgated in other places around the country, not least because we want to empower local councils to be able to look out for a flare-up themselves and then to escalate that straightforwardly through the process I outlined in my statement. We will shortly be publishing more details on exactly how that process works. I absolutely agree with him and will commit to this House that if further action is needed, whether in Leicester or around the country, we are not enthusiastic about taking that action, but we absolutely will if it is necessary.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Future lockdowns, where necessary, must be decisive and prompt, and they of course depend on public compliance, but in practical terms, can the Secretary of State give us a bit more detail about how they will work? For example, the furlough scheme pays 80% of wages during lockdown, and it is due to be rolled back from

1 August. Can he confirm that in local lockdowns after 1 August, wherever they are required, 80% of furlough support will be available to assist with lockdown compliance, which is so important for public health?

Matt Hancock: Of course, as we move from a national lockdown towards local lockdowns, we are going to have to take more specific action. For the time being and for Leicester, the existing furlough scheme of course exists.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. The majority of this House and indeed the country will be looking forward to some additional freedoms as of this weekend. I myself am looking forward to a pint of Papermaker at Radcliffe Market. The hard work and sacrifice of the British people have got us to this point, so will my right hon. Friend join me in urging everyone out there not only to maintain social distancing, but to stay alert and to make sure that this hard work is not undone and restrictions reimposed?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and speaks with great wisdom. While we are able to lift some of the lockdown measures and while people will, across most of the country, be able to exercise some more freedoms, such as the freedom safely to go to the pub, from this weekend, we have got to be aware—all of us—that this virus still lives in our communities. We must continue to tackle it and we must continue to stay alert, and so control the virus, because that saves lives.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): If we want to make local lockdowns work, we must ensure that people and businesses get the economic support they need to get through a further outbreak of covid. That means making furlough available where it is needed, and, as I hope the Secretary of State will also recognise, providing targeted relief for businesses that are affected. My colleagues in Scotland have this weekend proposed a VAT holiday for tourism businesses affected by covid. Will he speak to the Chancellor about providing similar targeted measures for those sectors that are shut down under a local lockdown?

Matt Hancock: We are providing funding for local support, but I just want to reiterate to those who are in Leicester right now and listening to this debate, that the furlough scheme is in existence and it works now in the same way that it has worked across the country.

James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Ealing Council, which covers my constituency, is one of those concerned about receiving all the data it needs as quickly as it needs it for local outbreak plans to work as well as possible. Will the Secretary of State guarantee that full testing data will be shared with every local authority, GP and director of public health, and commit to there being no time lag between these tests being carried out and the data being shared?

Matt Hancock: Yes, that data was made available last week to all councils, subject to a data protection agreement, which the vast majority have returned.

Mr Speaker: The final question is from Alberto Costa.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for calling me as the MP for South Leicestershire, an area directly impacted by my right hon. Friend's statement this evening. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the funding that he has promised Leicestershire County Council and Leicester City Council will also be split to include the affected district councils such as Blaby District Council? Will he also explain what the impact will be for areas outside the city of Leicester? He keeps mentioning Leicester, but what areas in Leicestershire will be impacted by his statement?

Matt Hancock: Yes, absolutely; we will be publishing imminently the exact details of which wards are included in these measures. That decision is being taken by Leicestershire County Council along with PHE. I understand the call for financial support for district and borough councils as well as for the county council. In the first instance, that funding will flow through the county council, but I will absolutely look at the point my hon. Friend has raised.

Mr Speaker: That completes the statement. Thank you, everyone.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Earlier, during his response to my urgent question, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), stated that there were no confirmed cases of covid-19 among people living in Glasgow hotels. I have a constituent who has been in a hotel in Glasgow city centre and who has had covid-19 diagnosed. Is there a way of putting it on record that the Minister had perhaps had the wrong information provided to him when he said that no people had had covid-19 in hotel accommodation? Mr Speaker, will you be able to ask the Minister to come and correct the record, because my constituent has certainly had covid-19 and has isolated in a Glasgow city centre hotel?

Mr Speaker: Obviously we cannot continue the debate from this afternoon, and this is not a point of order for me, but I think it is a point of clarification for the House, and it is certainly now on the record.

Business without Debate

ESTIMATES (LIAISON COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 145(3)),

That this House agrees with the Report of the Liaison Committee of 23 June 2020:

(i) That a day not later than 5 August be allotted for the consideration of the following Estimates for financial year 2020–21:

Department for Education so far as it relates to closing the disadvantage gap and support for left behind children;

HM Revenue and Customs so far as it relates to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and support for the self employed through the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme;

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy;

(ii) That a further day not later than 5 August be allotted for the consideration of the following Estimates for financial year 2020–21:

Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office so far as it relates to Official Development Assistance;

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.—
(*Maggie Throup.*)

Question agreed to.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Ordered,

That Amy Callaghan be discharged from the Health and Social Care Committee and Neale Hanvey be added.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Dronfield Station:150th Anniversary

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

9.47 pm

Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to be able to speak this evening. It is a pleasure to be able to spend a few minutes celebrating a recent success story, and a real success story, of recent decades in North East Derbyshire: the rejuvenation and rebirth of Dronfield station, which this year celebrates its 150th year of operation. Much of what we debate here in this place is understandably, and perhaps rightly, challenging and difficult: the impossible resolution of an intractable problem; the distribution of finite resources against infinite demand; and the challenge of remorseless change—wanted or not, planned or otherwise, progressive or ill-advised—in the communities that we seek to serve. That is exactly what we are placed here to do in this, the crucible for national debate, and it is what we must focus on most of the time. Yet even in these troubled times, much is left unsaid here of the quiet successes, the unnoticed achievements and the abilities of communities to thrive, rejuvenate and transform. These are just as, if not more, important in the long term. Each of us sitting here sees this on a daily basis in our own constituencies, the places we have the privilege to represent.

That is very true of me in North East Derbyshire, which is a constituency of rebirth and rejuvenation if ever there was one. It is my home, and it is a place that has picked itself up over the past 40 years and transformed itself into an aspirational success story: a can-do, go-getting, keen-to-progress part of the world that looks forward with hope while still celebrating our proud past. That can be seen in each of the 41 communities I represent and in countless individual successes, but none is more obvious than the rebirth of Dronfield station, a once-thriving rail terminus that had been left to decline over the later part of the 20th century and that has sprung back into life since the new millennium. This has happened through a combination of transformative spirit, civic pride and the hard work of countless volunteers who had a vision for what Dronfield could be and, more importantly, were determined to see it through.

Before I talk about the important anniversary we are celebrating this year, first, a word on Dronfield. A small number of Members may not be familiar with North East Derbyshire's largest community, although I think all Members here today other than you, Mr Speaker, are either somewhat familiar with or have heard of Dronfield because I have talked to them about it. I happily know that the Minister knows about the town.

I hope the House will permit me to offer a brief introduction. A historic market town nestled in the beautiful Drone valley, Dronfield is first mentioned in the Domesday Book and is home today to more than 20,000 people, a stunning 12th-century church and the world's oldest football club. Presiding over its high street is a distinctive stone memorial erected in the 19th century to celebrate Robert Peel, as a gesture of Dronfield's thanks for the repeal of the corn laws and to celebrate free trade. We whisper it quietly, because we do not want too many people to know it, but just a few years ago it was named one of the top 10 places to live in Britain, not least because of its fantastic location, its great civic pride and its tremendous community spirit.

For hundreds of years, Dronfield was a hub for the lead trade, for coalmining and for industry, and it was that business and industry that first attracted the Midland Railway in the 1860s to consider it for a new station on a new railway line it was constructing between Chesterfield and Sheffield. Rail had come to the north midlands a few decades earlier with the opening of the North Midland Line almost 180 years ago to this very day in May 1840. It was constructed quickly, and the line, which has been known for much of the time since as the old road, missed out both Dronfield and Sheffield because of the topographical challenges and the steepness of the hills around the town, preferring instead to go through the easier Moss valley to the east towards Rotherham.

The old road, designed by George Stephenson, brought jobs, industry and growth to settlements such as Clay Cross, Killamarsh, Eckington and Renishaw, yet Dronfield just a few miles to the west was forced to wait until it was linked to the network. Fast forward 20 years, and with improved technology, Midland Rail decided it wanted to build a direct railway to Sheffield. In 1864, Sir Joseph Paxton, the MP for the decidedly non-Derbyshire constituency of Coventry, but otherwise better known as the head gardener at Chatsworth, laid a petition before the House of Commons. That resulted in the Midland Railway (New Lines and Additional Powers) Act 1864 and the start of the construction of the new road line, which would finally link Sheffield, and with it Dronfield, properly to the network.

Six years later, on Monday 1 February 1870, the new station in the centre of Dronfield welcomed its first service at 4.55 am to the sound of church bells and a brass band. For much of the next century, Dronfield station was at the heart of a burgeoning and growing town. Through boom and bust, war and peace, goods transitioned to the market yard, the commuter went off to work in Sheffield, and, in times of crisis, it saw the sight of a soldier waved off to war.

The station became indelibly linked with the town, its people, its industry and its ambition, yet mirroring the national story of rail, the station fell on tough times in the post-war period, and Dr Beeching's axe swung as viciously through north Derbyshire as it did elsewhere in the country. Over on the old road, the original railway line through north Derbyshire, the entire line was closed to passengers, eliminating dozens of stations at a stroke. While the new road was reprieved and continued operations, Dronfield itself was determined surplus to requirements and deleted from the timetable. The last passenger service left at 21.41 on Saturday 31 December 1966, with the goods station closing a few years later.

While trains would still thunder through Dronfield on their way to Sheffield, Chesterfield or London, none would ever stop. Dronfield station became a ghost, and that was how it remained for over a decade, until a snowstorm in 1979, combined in true 1970s style with a union strike by the gritters from South Yorkshire, meant that the roads to Sheffield became impassable. For just a short period, British Rail opened the station out of necessity, to literally allow people in and out of the town. Out of nowhere, the platform stations were reported full, overwhelmed by demand from those wanting to use the train for 20p each way to Chesterfield or Sheffield.

Two years later, a local service was reinstated, but services again waxed and waned over the years without any clear plan and perhaps what we would charitably

[Lee Rowley]

call an eccentric timetable. By the early 2000s, the station served only about 30,000 passengers a year on just a few services a day, without the ability, for example, to travel southbound until 1 o'clock in the afternoon.

The true modern renaissance of Dronfield station began 16 years ago, in 2004. Frustrated by a highly intermittent service and a lack of strategic planning, a group of residents led by Dr Peter Hayward came together to push for the restoration of a functioning and regular train service for the town. The first opportunity was via the announcement of the restoration of the Nottingham to Leeds service, which was warmly welcomed throughout the midlands and Yorkshire but which, inexplicably, left Dronfield out of its initial timetable and all its route maps.

The Dronfield Station Action Group was born, and, ably supported by the hard work of previous Member for North-East Derbyshire Natascha Engel, determined to restore services. Natascha told me of a concerted campaign in the town and down here in Westminster, including on the Terrace, to restore Dronfield to the train map, so that a proper service could finally be offered. One of the enduring features of Dronfield is its civic pride and immense community spirit, and the action group had all that in spades, along with a clear objective to improve the service for the long term. That is exactly what happened.

In December 2008, a new modern era was ushered in, with Dronfield receiving regular services once again. In a fitting tribute to its original opening, the first service was welcomed back with a brass band. Over the past 12 years, the station has not looked back. Passenger numbers have climbed from just a few thousand to a quarter of a million a year. Dozens of trains stop each day, rather than thundering through—almost 300 a week now—serving Chesterfield and Sheffield locally, along with the more distant destinations of Liverpool, Norwich, Leeds and Nottingham.

An active and hugely respected Friends of Dronfield Station, supported by local businesses, Dronfield Civic Society, Dronfield Rotary Club and the *Dronfield Eye*, among many others, lovingly supports, tends and promotes the station, and keeps pushing to take advantage of the opportunities that remain. We are all particularly proud and grateful for all the hard work that FODS volunteers put in around the year to keep the station looking so nice and well kept. The cleaning of the station, the tending of the flower beds and the improving of the facilities are done behind the scenes week in, week out. For the past decade or so, FODS has also run an art competition for local schools, proudly displaying that art in the waiting areas for travellers to see and admire.

Dronfield is the very model of how a station can be reborn, and, as Natascha tells me, many in the early years came to see how it had been done. Dronfield is a proud town and proud of its station, the living embodiment of what is possible when residents put their mind to it. Notwithstanding the extremely difficult challenges of recent months, the future looks bright, and together the community is committed to building upon those recent successes. Further improvements to the station are in plan, and FODS continues to campaign for further links and improved frequencies. Together we are keen to

safeguard existing services, to continue improvements in the co-ordination of public transport and to build up the opportunities of Northern Powerhouse Rail and the greater links with London planned for the coming years.

The renaissance of Dronfield station is a metaphor not just for a town on the up, but for an area that is keen to progress. I was born and grew up in north Derbyshire, and in my 40 years the transformation has been immense—a revitalised ambition to seek new opportunities, to grab the possibilities in front of us and to build on our advantages for the long term. As so often happens, history has the opportunity to repeat itself. The renaissance of the new road through Dronfield station now allows us to look at the old road once again.

Dronfield has shown the success of public transport in north Derbyshire in the past decade, and now the other Midland Railway Line closed by Dr Beeching may be stirring into life too. Just a few weeks ago, we won funding from the Government to explore the possibility of reopening stations closed 40 years ago in the next valley. I am extremely grateful to the Minister for his willingness to support us to look at whether we can do that. Dronfield has shown the way and the demand. Our determination is to build on it further in the coming years in Dronfield and elsewhere. History removed both 50 years ago, and it would be a fitting tribute if we could return both the old and the new road to their former glories. A few months ago, FODS kindly invited me, the mayor of Dronfield, local residents and supporters to unveil a plaque at Dronfield station celebrating this milestone birthday. The plaque reads: "The first 150 years." It was a privilege to unveil that plaque and to celebrate the renaissance of a station led by people power and Natascha Engel, an MP who showed me the way in helping our local community.

10 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

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

Lee Rowley: It was a privilege to celebrate Dronfield station, its supporters, their determination and their grit, and their sheer hard work to make a success of a microcosm of Dronfield as a town and North East Derbyshire as a whole.

To everyone who has been involved in the first 150 years, thank you, and here's to the next 150. This is a brilliant example for the Government and the Minister to take note of—a successful community aspiring to do more, and coming together to forge a real and enduring success story.

10.1 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Chris Heaton-Harris): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) for securing this fantastic debate on Dronfield station to recognise and commemorate its 150th anniversary. His speech was a beautiful historical recital of Dronfield's intermittent relationship with our railways. I hope that it will have a very strong relationship with our railways going forward.

I am slightly concerned because this is the fourth Adjournment debate that I have done without the presence of the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I am not sure whether even having an Adjournment debate without his presence is in order.

Mr Speaker: Just to help the Minister, as we know, even the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) cannot link himself to 150 years of Dronfield railway station, hence he is not here. Much as he would love to and much as he may find a connection, I could not put him on the right track for this one.

Chris Heaton-Harris: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have just received a text from him, actually; he has got a strong relationship with Dronfield station and wishes it a happy birthday.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire knows, I am a former Member of the European Parliament, and I represented his constituency in the east midlands for a decade, so I know the town pretty well. I have canvassed there—possibly not quite as successfully as he did in recent elections, but I do know it pretty well. I was going through my diaries to see whether I ever did catch a train from the station. I cannot say I ever have, but I very much look forward to having the opportunity of doing so at some point in the future.

My hon. Friend knows that this is a huge milestone for the town of Dronfield. I should start by congratulating him on his support of the Friends of Dronfield Station, and asking him to thank them on behalf of the Department for Transport for everything they do to improve and love their station and its services. I am sure that those who visit the medieval St John's parish church or Dronfield Hall Barn appreciate the stunning flowers and hanging baskets that adorn the station and how clean it is kept. Until the outbreak of this terrible virus, it was quite possibly one of the cleanest stations on our rail network.

My hon. Friend will know that the Government are investing record levels in rail funding to deliver the biggest rail modernisation programme for over a century. In fact, we are spending £48 billion over what we call control period 6—that is the slightly Soviet terminology for a five-year period of rail spending—which runs from last year to 2024, to improve rail services for passengers and freight customers while maintaining current high levels of safety and reliability.

I was extremely pleased that my hon. Friend mentioned that he had supported a bid to the Restoring our Railway fund to reopen the Sheffield to Chesterfield via Barrow Hill line, which includes Dronfield station. As hon. Members on both sides of the House will know, earlier this year the Secretary of State for Transport invited Members, local authorities and community groups across England to come forward with proposals for how they could reinstate axed local services. Thanks to the Government's £500 million fund, long-isolated communities across the country will benefit from better rail connections that will level up regional economies, boost access to jobs and education, and kick-start the restoration of lines closed more than 50 years ago. So far, we have committed a sum of £300,000 to an ideas fund to kick-start the process to encourage innovative ideas that will be considered for future funding. We are now working with successful bidders, as my hon. Friend said, to agree the scope of the work. We will provide

guidance to help each scheme to get to a point where they can develop a full business case to become part of what we natively call the rail network enhancements portfolio—the big chunk of money that I mentioned earlier.

I know that my hon. Friend is interested in what goes on around his area to help to connect the town of Dronfield and others, and that he is well aware of what is going on in the Hope Valley capacity scheme. That scheme is an important part of the Great North Rail project to transform journeys between the northern powerhouse cities of Manchester and Sheffield by removing a bottleneck on the Hope Valley line. I am pretty sure that he will be pleased to know that we are continuing to look at ways to speed up this work, and I am quite sure that, actually, we might hear quite a lot from the Prime Minister tomorrow about how we are going to speed up all sorts of things when it comes to big chunks of infrastructure in our country.

For example, on this particular line, Network Rail is currently undertaking early signalling design in parallel to the tendering process. This element of the design is very time-consuming and is therefore a significant driver of overall timescales, and we are trying to speed it up. I am pleased to say that this is proceeding to programme, despite challenges posed by the covid-19 pandemic. It is also liaising with train and freight operating companies to secure possessions, where we take control of the whole track and close it down for a period of time, so we can do proper work and agree any changes to the network that may be required during construction. These activities are normally decided once the contract to deliver the scheme has been let, so we are beginning to work out how to improve the network.

I shall turn now to the midland main line upgrade. As Members know, we are investing huge sums of money in the midland main line, which was completed in 1870. It will enable improved long-distance passenger services between Sheffield, Nottingham and London, as well as improved services between Corby, Kettering and London. There will be more seats, faster inter-city journeys, and new fast and efficient inter-city and express trains. For long-distance journeys, we will reduce journey times by up to 20 minutes in the peak and a brand-new fleet of bi-mode trains will be introduced. For journeys from Corby through Luton into London, including from Wellingborough, passengers will benefit from a new and dedicated electric service. From 2021, the trains will be fast—like today, but longer and with more seats. This means more comfortable journeys for long-distance and commuting passengers at the busiest times of the day. These measures will provide over 50% more seats into London in the peak, once the upgrade is complete.

My hon. Friend mentioned a concern to me previously about reducing the direct calls at Dronfield in the existing East Midlands rail service to Manchester and Liverpool. I can assure him, having checked, that I do not know of any such proposals and my officials do not either, so I would like to think that they are safe, at least for the time being.

This has been a celebration of a town and its relationship with the railway. My hon. Friend mentioned the successful campaign led by Dr Peter Hayward and Natascha Engel, the former MP for the area. I know how much they worked together to ensure that the reintroduced Nottingham to Leeds service did actually stop in Dronfield.

[Chris Heaton-Harris]

My hon. Friend also talked about the success of this railway. Railways are very much like “Field of Dreams” moments with Kevin Costner, because when you build it, people do come. They really do use their service, and they fall in love with it. Sometimes it is a love-hate relationship, but they absolutely do love it—because when it disappears, as it had done for a period of time, my word, do we, as politicians, hear about it. As my hon. Friend mentioned, there were just 32,000 people using trains from Dronfield in 2006, going up to a quarter of a million in 2018. It is a fantastic success story.

I am quite sure that with my hon. Friend at the helm and with the amazingly strong campaign by Friends of Dronfield Station, the station has a fantastically bright future in our railways. Dronfield station can feel tremendous pride in this magnificent milestone, and has a tremendous amount to look forward to.

Question put and agreed to.

10.10 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 29 June 2020

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Business Update

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Alok Sharma): The UK's world-class research and researchers play a vital role in delivering local and national economic prosperity but we recognise that some of that research is at risk from a range of income losses as a result of covid-19. That is why the Government are announcing today a package to support universities to continue research and innovation activities.

First, around £280 million of Government funding will be made available to universities and research organisations impacted by coronavirus for grant extensions. The first amounts will be made immediately available and will provide additional resource and flexibility to sustain grants funded through UK research and innovation (UKRI) and the national academies and affected by the covid-19 pandemic, allowing them to continue developing existing ambitious and innovative research projects. This funding includes supporting researchers' salaries and other research costs such as laboratory equipment and fieldwork. UKRI will contact universities and research organisations with details of their grant extension allocation shortly.

Secondly, from the autumn, the Government will demonstrate their commitment to research by providing a package of support to research-active universities, consisting of low-interest loans with long pay-back periods, supplemented by a small amount of Government grants. In sharing responsibility for the future of science and research with our world-leading university system the Government will cover up to 80% of a university's income losses from international students for the academic year 20-21, up to the value of non-publicly funded research activity in that university.

We expect the level of support being provided to go a significant way to addressing reductions in research income. The second part of this package will be targeted towards sustaining research and innovation activity and capacity in universities across the UK. Universities will need to demonstrate that funding is being spent on research activity and on sustaining high quality research capacity and capability, with a particular emphasis on STEM research and areas of research typically funded by charities and businesses. This funding will be available to bolster those universities who are taking their own steps to make efficiencies, in line with the rest of the economy, to protect their research bases.

We recognise that universities will want to use this funding to protect areas of medical research that have been developed in part with support of charities. Charity-funded research has been a distinctive feature of the UK research system and a successful partnership with Government through the charity element of QR. Now is the time to align that partnership as a more sustainable element of the research system.

The support made available to individual institutions through the second part of this package is subject to the conditions set out in the explanatory notes on gov.uk and the final details of the proposal will be subject to business case approval. Government will develop the details of this support package, including further conditions, working with the sector over the weeks ahead.

Our research base helps to deliver higher levels of productivity and anchor research and development-intensive companies to the UK, and we will continue to be a welcoming and world class destination for international students and researchers, now and into the future. Government have already undertaken communications activity to promote UK higher education to international students, appointed Sir Steve Smith as the international education champion and introduced a range of visa flexibilities for current and prospective international students. This is all with a view to ensuring we maintain the UK's ability to attract students from all around the world.

Alongside this, DFE is continuing to work with BEIS, HMT and other Government Departments to develop a process through which higher education providers at risk of closure will be able to apply to Government to access a restructuring regime as a last resort. Government will review providers' circumstances and assess the need for restructuring where there is a case to do so. Where action is required, this will come with attached conditions. The Government will work with the devolved Administrations on this approach. More detail will be made available in due course.

[HCWS322]

EDUCATION

Schools and Colleges: Rebuilding

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson): Today, the Government are announcing a transformative, 10-year school rebuilding programme as part of ambitious plans that will benefit schools and colleges across England.

Investing in our school and college buildings is vital to delivering the world-class education and training needed to get the country back on its feet.

We are committing to a 10-year, multi-wave rebuilding programme for schools. This will replace poor-condition and ageing school buildings, with modern, energy-efficient designs, transforming education for thousands of pupils.

We will start with 50 schools in the most need of repair, supported by over £1 billion in capital funding—with full details of these projects and the wider, long-term programme to be set out following the spending review. We expect construction on the first sites to begin from autumn 2021.

We are also providing £560 million of additional condition funding for the school system this year to help support essential maintenance projects. We will set out details of how this additional capital funding will be allocated shortly. This is on top of the £1.4 billion already provided for school maintenance in financial year 2020-21.

Part of the £1.4 billion funding for 2020-21 announced in April is provided through the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF), to support essential maintenance projects in schools across England. Today, I am announcing the outcome of the 2020-21 CIF bidding round. Over £434 million will fund 1,476 CIF projects across 1,243 eligible academies, sixth-form colleges and voluntary aided schools.

Details of today's CIF announcement are being sent to all CIF applicants and a list of successful projects will be published on www.gov.uk. Copies will be placed in the House Library.

In March this year, the Chancellor announced that we are going to transform FE colleges across the country, investing £1.5 billion of new capital over the next five years, starting in 2021.

Today, we are announcing that the Department for Education will bring forward £200 million of this capital funding to this year. This will enable FE colleges in England to undertake immediate remedial work in this financial year to upgrade the condition of their buildings and estates. We will set out further plans on capital investment to upgrade the FE college estate in England in due course.

[HCWS319]

JUSTICE

Prisons Building Programme

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has previously made clear his focus on tackling crime and last year announced investment of up to £2.5 billion to create 10,000 additional prison places that are decent, safe and secure and support the modernisation of the prison estate.

I am officially today, jointly with my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, reaffirming the Government's commitment to building 10,000 additional prison places by announcing the funding and delivery of around 6,500 of these places through the construction of four new prisons which will provide a much-needed boost to the construction sector as it moves into a post covid-19 world.

This work starts with Full Sutton, in East Yorkshire, where we already have outline planning permission for a new 1,440-place prison. Further work is under way to identify and secure sites for a further three new prisons which we anticipate will each comprise 1,680 places, subject to geographical and planning constraints.

Together, these four prisons will create around 65% of the 10,000 additional places and will build on the design and progress that we have already made at Wellingborough and Glen Parva, as well as on the work we have done to ensure faster, cheaper and more efficient construction for public services, in particular using modern methods of construction.

This demonstrates a clear commitment from the Government to the UK construction sector and its determination to help the country and the construction

market get back on its feet following the covid-19 pandemic by offering a clear pipeline of work and investment.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and I want to take this opportunity to thank constructors around the country for their commitment to keeping construction sites open and operating, and for their innovation enabling sites and associated activities to follow Public Health England (PHE) guidance and adhere to social distancing measures.

The impact of covid-19 on the construction sector has been felt both in the demand for new buildings and the ability to operate safely in line with Government guidance. Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has felt this impact directly at the construction site for the new resettlement prison at Wellingborough in Northamptonshire. HMPPS has worked with suppliers throughout the covid-19 pandemic to ensure that construction has continued safely. Workers are following PHE guidance and the Construction Leadership Council's site-operating procedures.

While no decisions have been made on who will operate these four new prisons, we maintain this Government's commitment to a mixed market in custodial services, and it is our ambition that at least one of these new prisons will be operated by the public sector to support the modernisation of the public prison estate. We have previously announced that the operation of both our new prisons at Glen Parva and at Wellingborough will be competed for via our prison operator services framework in shorter, targeted mini-competitions. Following a successful and robust evaluation of the bids received for the Wellingborough operator competition, we have a successful bidder, which will be announced soon.

[HCWS320]

PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet Committees

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): Today I am publishing an updated Cabinet Committee list. I have placed a copy of the new list in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS317]

TRANSPORT

UK Borders: Self-Isolation Exemptions

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): On 8 June, regulations came into force across the UK requiring people arriving into the UK from outside the common travel area to self-isolate for 14 days, with the exception of those on a short list of exemptions. These measures have contributed to keeping the number of covid-19 transmissions in the UK as low as possible, helping to protect us from a second wave of the virus.

Today I can confirm that the Government will shortly begin to ease the health measures at the UK border, allowing passengers to be exempted from self-isolation requirements in certain circumstances on arrival in the UK. This will apply to international rail, maritime, and aviation.

The joint biosecurity centre, in close consultation with Public Health England and the chief medical officer, has developed a categorisation of countries and territories from which it is considered passengers entering the UK present a lower risk from a public health perspective without a requirement for 14 days' self-isolation. This has been informed by factors including the prevalence of coronavirus within the country and, crucially, the numbers of new cases and potential trajectory in the coming weeks of the disease in the country. This categorisation will inform ministerial decisions about the easing of the current border measures.

I will announce further details including a full list of the countries and territories from which arriving passengers will be exempted from self-isolation requirements later this week. Although people will not need to self-isolate after entering the UK from these countries, they must not be complacent about following the public health advice on hand hygiene and social distancing.

Separately, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is reviewing its travel advice. Further details will be announced later this week.

Throughout this process public safety has been at the heart of our decision making. We have been guided by the science and worked closely with health and policy experts from across Government to ensure the steps we

are taking are gradual and will minimise the risk of new covid-19 cases while helping to open our travel and tourism sector.

[HCWS321]

WALES

Contingencies Fund

The Secretary of State for Wales (Simon Hart): I hereby give notice of the Wales Office's intention to seek an advance from the Contingencies Fund. The Department requires an advance to meet an urgent cash requirement pending parliamentary approval of the main estimates 2020-21.

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, over £1.8 billion of additional funding is included in the main estimate for the Welsh Government as a result of consequential derived from announcements by the UK Government. The vote on account cash limit for 2020-21 is insufficient to meet the additional spending need of the Welsh Government in the period prior to approval of the main estimates 2020-21.

Parliamentary approval for additional non-budget expenditure of £856,557,000 has been sought in a main estimate for the Wales Office. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £856,557,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

The advance will be repaid immediately following Royal Assent of the Supply and Appropriation Bill in July.

[HCWS318]

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**not later than
Monday 6 July 2020**

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Written Statements [Col. 1WS]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
