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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 14 July 2020

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven 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

JUSTICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Domestic Abuse: Supporting Victims

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on supporting victims of domestic abuse. [904674]

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on supporting victims of domestic abuse. [904679]

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on supporting victims of domestic abuse. [904683]

Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on supporting victims of domestic abuse. [904684]

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on supporting victims of domestic abuse. [904686]

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on supporting victims of domestic abuse. [904696]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): My Ministers and I are in regular contact with our counterparts across Government and the sector to ensure the smooth passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill and to provide timely support for victims at this difficult time. We announced £76 million to support the most vulnerable during the pandemic, including survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Andrea Jenkyns [V]: One in six crimes in West Yorkshire are linked to domestic abuse. Lifting the lockdown restrictions may lead to an increase in reporting of this type of crime. What plans are in place to enable courts to deal with these cases swiftly?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend is right to talk about a local aspect to what is a national issue. The courts continue to prioritise cases of the utmost seriousness, which include domestic abuse. On 1 July we published a courts recovery plan, setting out how we are preparing to operate courts and tribunals after the pandemic, which includes priority being given to domestic abuse cases.

Mark Pawsey: I welcome the Secretary of State's remarks about priorities. The fact that courts have not been able to sit because of the covid-19 emergency has led to some hearings relating to domestic abuse being delayed, which is particularly damaging where child custody is contested and access to children is involved. What steps is he taking to ensure that these cases are heard at the earliest opportunity?

Robert Buckland: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. He will be glad to know that we are promoting access to the family courts via video or telephone, as well as through the 157 priority courts that remained open throughout the pandemic for essential face-to-face hearings. Domestic violence protection orders and non-molestation orders continue to be listed for urgent hearings, despite the current restrictions.

Suzanne Webb: On Black Country Day, it is fitting that I pay tribute to Sam Billingham, a constituent of mine who, necessitated by her experience, founded her own domestic violence charity in the west midlands called SODA, which offers support for domestic abuse survivors. What is the Ministry doing to ensure that domestic violence survivors who do not have access to a lawyer can apply for domestic abuse injunctions?

Robert Buckland: I readily join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the work of local campaigners such as the ones in her constituency. She will be pleased to know that we are providing £800,000 of funding to the FLOWS—Finding Legal Options for Women Survivors—project run by RCJ Advice, which provides free legal support to victims of domestic abuse who wish to apply for an emergency protective order from the courts. That funding is used to provide a helpline and email service, where victims can be referred to a legal aid solicitor or receive free advice directly.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Wakefield (Imran Ahmad Khan) is not online, so we will go to Ben Everitt.

Ben Everitt: Will my right and learned hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to grassroots organisations such as MK Act in my constituency, which has worked tirelessly to assist victims of domestic abuse throughout the lockdown? I would like to make the House aware of the Open University open justice team, who have collaborated with the charity Support Through Court to launch free online resources to support those dealing with domestic abuse.

Robert Buckland: I am delighted to hear of the excellent work done by those organisations in Milton Keynes. We fully recognise the role that charities across the country play in providing vital services, which is why we announced £28 million of funding across Government to support domestic abuse charities providing services in safe

accommodation and in the community. I am aware of the collaborative work done between the Open University and Support Through Court. That work was funded, in part, by a Ministry of Justice grant.

Christian Wakeford: I was proud to support the Domestic Abuse Bill in this place last week, which shows that we are tackling this serious crime and protecting victims. Most domestic abuse charities reported an increase in cases during the lockdown and fear a further surge in cases as restrictions are lifted. While I appreciate the money that the Government have made available for charities during lockdown, will my right hon. and learned Friend fight for additional funding to support the expected surge in demand from domestic abuse survivors?

Robert Buckland: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's diligence in this area, and I am grateful to him for highlighting the challenges. He will be glad to know that of the £76 million that we announced in May to help the most vulnerable people in society, £10 million has been allocated for charities providing safe accommodation, such as refuges; £2 million has been allocated for national and other non-local charities providing support to victims of domestic abuse in the community; and £25 million is already being allocated via police and crime commissioners for support services for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence. Finally, there is an additional £3 million specifically to fund independent sexual violence advisers for the next two years.

Criminal Justice System: Support for Children and Young People

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to support children and young people who come into contact with the criminal justice system. [904675]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Lucy Frazer): Fortunately, the number of children coming into contact with the criminal justice system is reducing; offences committed by children have fallen by 76% over the last decade. We have allocated £72 million this year for youth offending teams to provide support for children who have offended, to help them turn around their lives.

Sarah Jones: Following the Black Lives Matter movement, in Croydon we have held a series of quite urgent meetings to look at the system and what we can do to improve things—the police, the youth offending teams and community groups. One of the issues that the youth offending service has identified is that a lot of young people who come into contact with it but just brush the system and do not end up being charged with any offences have significant problems, whether with trauma, abuse or bereavement, and need intervention at that point, before they are criminalised. Will the Minister look at increasing the support given to our young people at that stage?

Lucy Frazer: The hon. Member makes a really important point on both how we ensure that there is not racial disparity in those who enter the criminal justice system and how we divert people away from it. She will be pleased to know that over £220 million has been invested

in early intervention, including £200 million in the youth endowment fund to support those most at risk of being drawn into crime.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The Minister will be well aware that although the number of young people coming into contact with the system has reduced, very often they present much more complex and challenging cases, not least because of the data recently published by the Youth Justice Board showing a large number of pre-existing problems that are there before they come into contact with the system. Given that, does she accept that it is necessary not just to continue the existing measures of diversion, but to pull those together into a much broader, overarching strategy for young people and children in the justice system—not just up to the age of 18, as is the case at the moment, but, given the evidence we have on maturity, beyond that, perhaps into the early 20s or even to 25, as evidence that the Justice Committee has strongly supports?

Lucy Frazer: As usual, my hon. Friend the Chair of the Justice Committee makes a number of important points. He is right to identify that the people coming into custody, because there are fewer of them, have committed more serious crimes—often violent crimes—and are very complex to deal with. He is right to point out the importance of the transition between youth custody and adult custody, and that is something we are looking at very closely. The Youth Custody Service is currently looking at improving the transition in prison from youth to adult custody, and at the feasibility of introducing an integrated healthcare model for young adults based on the system that is currently operated in the youth custody estate.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Over 60,000 children were arrested last year in England and Wales but only 118 parenting orders were issued. That is less than 10% of the figure in 2009. How can a troubled young person turn around their life if the Government are not doing everything they can to help them?

Lucy Frazer: The hon. Member makes a very important point. I was pleased to discuss a number of issues that cross our portfolios yesterday. He makes an important point about looking at the whole system and at where a young person will return to—the parents, the family, the community and the friends that they will return to. If we manage to overcome their issues in custody, we need to ensure that they do not return to crime on coming out. Oasis, the company that is providing the secure schools that we are looking at very closely, wants to ensure that there are places for people to stay when they come and visit their children, but it also wants to work with them when they visit to ensure that there is that support on going out. The hon. Member makes a very important point about parenting orders, which we are looking at.

Human Rights Act 1998: Discussions with Scottish Government

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on proposals to update the Human Rights Act 1998. [904676]

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on proposals to update the Human Rights Act 1998. [904701]

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on proposals to update the Human Rights Act 1998. [904709]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk): We regularly engage with the Scottish Government, as well as the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, on a range of justice-related matters, including human rights. The Government committed to looking at the broader aspects of our constitution, including updating the Human Rights Act. I can assure the hon. Members that, once the work on the Human Rights Act review commences, the implications for the devolved Administrations will be closely monitored.

Stuart C. McDonald [V]: I thank the Minister for that answer. At Justice questions on 9 June, the Lord Chancellor told us that he was working on that independent review into the operation of the Human Rights Act, but given how hugely significant the Human Rights Act is to the devolved settlements of Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, does the Minister agree that any changes to that Act would need full consultation, not just monitoring, and the consent of the devolved Administrations?

Alex Chalk: Yes, of course. Scotland has a distinguished and distinct legal system and of course it would need to be consulted in that way. I do wish, though, to make one point crystal clear: whatever amendments may come to the Human Rights Act, the United Kingdom remains committed to membership of the European convention on human rights. That will not change.

Angela Crawley [V]: Can the Minister outline the relationship between the independent review of the Human Rights Act and the proposed constitution, democracy and rights commission, as well as the terms of reference for the independent review and whether the devolved Administrations, including the Scottish Government, will be consulted about those terms of reference?

Alex Chalk: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. There is a manifesto commitment to look at updating the Human Rights Act, which is now—what?—20 years old or so, but we have yet to set the terms of reference. Of course it is the case that, as we go forward in that process, the implications for the distinguished and distinct, separate legal jurisdiction of Scotland must be taken into account, and that is exactly what we will ensure takes place.

Marion Fellows [V]: Can the Minister confirm what criteria will be used to appoint members to this independent review? Will it include members with expertise in the human rights regime in Scotland, and will civic society organisations from Scotland be able to submit evidence and participate in the review?

Alex Chalk: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. Of course, it is axiomatic that membership of that committee, which has yet to be settled, must include those who have the wherewithal to comment on precisely the points she indicated, including the impact upon Scotland. I would want to see that being the case and, indeed, in respect of the other jurisdictions as well. We have to make sure that, as we go forward, we respect and recognise the differences that exist in the United Kingdom in this most important regard.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Scottish Government have plans to pass a new human rights Act incorporating economic, social, cultural and environmental rights in the devolved areas. Does the Minister agree that it is unfortunate that, at a time when the Scottish Government are working to expand the rights of people living in Scotland, at least in respect of devolved areas, the UK Government are perceived as threatening to diminish human rights protections in respect of reserved matters and across the United Kingdom?

Alex Chalk: Can I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her question? She will, I hope, acknowledge that perceptions are not always borne out by reality. The United Kingdom Government remain committed to the European convention on human rights, and nothing that will take place by way of an update or any proposals that emerge will threaten that fundamental point. We are a nation of laws. We are committed to upholding human rights. That is the way it is going to stay.

Joanna Cherry: I thank the Minister for his answer and I hear clearly his assurance that the United Kingdom remains committed to the ECHR, but of course it is the Human Rights Act that gives people living in the United Kingdom the ability to avail themselves of the rights protected by the convention in the United Kingdom's domestic courts. If, in updating the Human Rights Act, the Government have no intention of abrogating the domestic law that gives effect to the ECHR, why are they allowing the perception that they might do so to undermine the chances of securing an agreement with the European Union on future co-operation on law enforcement and judicial co-operation on criminal matters?

Alex Chalk: The hon. and learned Lady is right that, of course, the Human Rights Act does provide the power for individuals to assert and invoke those rights, but if we are committed to the convention, we are also committed to article 13 of the convention, which is the right to an effective remedy. The courts play an important role in allowing citizens to invoke and assert their convention rights. That will continue.

Radicalisation in Prisons

Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to tackle radicalisation in prisons. [904677]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Lucy Frazer): We take the threat posed by terrorist offenders very seriously. We utilise a range of rehabilitative tools, which include psychological, theological and mental health interventions.

In January, the Government announced a number of additional measures for dealing with terrorist offenders, including increasing the number of counter-terrorist specialist staff in our prisons.

Laura Farris: In the last eight months, we have seen terrorist attacks in Streatham, Fishmongers' Hall and, most recently, Forbury Gardens, where the assailant either had just been released from prison, or was out on licence. What improvements does my hon. and learned Friend think could be made to de-radicalisation programmes to prevent these lone wolf, post-release attacks?

Lucy Frazer: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the tragic incidents that we have seen over recent months. She rightly highlights de-radicalisation programmes. Twenty-two trained imams are doing de-radicalisation programmes in our prisons, but those are not the only measures that we are introducing. We have increased our training for prison and probation officers to deal with terrorism and we are bringing in new national standards for managing terrorists on licence. We want more counter-terrorism specialist staff and we want more places in approved premises as a transition from prison to the community. In addition to that, counter-terrorism police funding is increased this year by £19 million.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): There was much discussion around the inadequacy of de-radicalisation work in prison during the Committee stage of the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill, both in evidence and in debate. We heard that these programmes are not entirely fit for purpose and not always readily available. Clearly, they need a good overhaul—perhaps even more so given the new, longer minimum sentences. The hon. Member for Newbury (Laura Farris) certainly seems to agree with that. Sadly, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), rejected our amendment in Committee to undertake a review to examine the effectiveness and availability of de-radicalisation programmes in prison. Will today's Minister accept that they do need to be improved and launch the review that is needed?

Lucy Frazer: We have increased the number of imams operating the de-radicalisation programmes. We are looked at, and looked towards, by others internationally in relation to the programmes that we operate. Of course, we continually evaluate the programmes that we operate within our prisons.

Support for Victims of Crime

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase support for victims of crime. [904678]

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase support for victims of crime. [904685]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk): We are committed to ensuring that victims of crime receive the support that they need now, during covid, but also in the future. We are recruiting an

additional 20,000 police officers, investing in the Crown Prosecution Service, and rolling out £76 million to support victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse, as well as vulnerable children.

Jacob Young: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Victims of domestic abuse in Redcar and Cleveland are supported and helped by fantastic local charities such as EVA Women's Aid and Foundation. Will he outline how his Department are strengthening support services for domestic abuse and ensuring that they have the funding that they need?

Alex Chalk: I thank my hon. Friend for that excellent question. I also thank the domestic abuse charities, including EVA Women's Aid, for the fantastic work they do in supporting victims of crime. We are committed to ensuring that vital support continues as we ease lockdown restrictions. In response to the pandemic, the Ministry of Justice has distributed £22 million to date as part of the package for charities supporting vulnerable people. As announced at the Prime Minister's hidden harms summit in May, we have also committed to developing a funding strategy for all victims of crime, including domestic abuse, which will look at the longer-term sustainability of funding.

Robbie Moore: Previous figures published by the Department for Education have shown that more than 18,700 suspected victims of child sexual exploitation were identified by authorities in 2018-19. Several grooming cases brought to court have revealed abusers targeting vulnerable girls, particularly those in care, supported accommodation or with learning difficulties. It is gut-wrenching to hear, but the reality is that it is still happening. Will my hon. Friend confirm that he is dedicated to forming a joined-up support approach with police forces, local NHS services and children's services to identify support for these victims, but also with the aim of preventing such abuse?

Alex Chalk: I thank my hon. Friend for that excellent question. Child sexual abuse and exploitation are truly abhorrent, and the Government are dedicated to taking precisely the joined-up action that he urges on us to prevent abuse and provide support for victims. The Government's victims strategy outlines our commitment to improve support for victims of child sexual abuse to help them to cope. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced the most significant reforms in a generation, requiring local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and the police to form multi-agency safeguarding partnerships.

Access to Justice

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase access to justice. [904680]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk): Access to justice is a fundamental right and this Government are committed to ensuring that everyone can get the timely support they need to access the justice system. We have removed the mandatory element of the telephone gateway to support access to advice, and we continue to prioritise work to provide a

new £3.1 million grant that will further enhance legal support for litigants in person. In 2018-19, we spent £1.7 billion on legal aid, and in response to disruption caused by covid we are providing £5.4 million in funding to not-for-profit providers of specialist legal advice.

Richard Graham: I support strongly what the Government are doing in funding law centres and providing much more information online for our constituents, but how does my hon. Friend think we can access the services where needed of an asylum lawyer at the Gloucester Law Centre? Also, will he ensure that the only magistrates court in our county—in his Cheltenham constituency—will be well funded, so that it can operate efficiently for years to come?

Mr Speaker: I think the answer will be yes.

Alex Chalk: The answer is yes—thank you for pre-empting it, Mr Speaker—but first, may I welcome my hon. Friend's support for the Gloucester Law Centre, which does fantastic work? The £3 million grant will allow law centres to increase their capacity to provide advice for those who need it. We are also considering the longer-term sustainability of providing legal aid more widely, including for asylum cases, to which he rightly adverts; my officials are working closely with stakeholders on this. As you rightly trailed, Mr Speaker, on court maintenance, we have announced a tripling of funding for repairs and upgrades to include £30 million for the roll-out of the latest video technology. That will be welcomed in Cheltenham and, indeed, Gloucester.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab) [V]: Legal aid lawyers are being asked, yet again, to carry the can for a decade of mismanagement on the part of successive Tory Ministers. Lawyers are now expected to work extended hours for no extra pay to clear the half a million backlog of criminal cases caused by savage cuts. Legal aid lawyers do not support extended or flexible operating hours, but why would they? Their patience and good will have been stretched too far. Ministers know full well that the underfunded justice system means justice denied, so what—if any—representations has the Justice Secretary made to the Treasury for more funding; or is it simply that he just does not care?

Alex Chalk: Absolutely nothing could be further from the truth. The Government are committed to this. I was a practitioner in 2010 and I well remember when Labour was in government and Labour Members derided the “gray train” of legal aid. We will never do that, because we recognise its importance. This Government have eased the rules on hardship and interim payments to enable the early drawdown of payment for work done, and for solicitors we have doubled the number of opportunities to seek payment on account. This is really important: we are accelerating work on CLAR—the criminal legal aid review—because we want to put between £31 million and £51 million into the profession as soon as possible. That funding will be released before too long.

Lammy Review

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): What progress he has made on implementing the recommendations of the Lammy review, “An independent review into the

treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System”, published in September 2017. [904681]

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): What progress he has made on implementing the recommendations of the Lammy Review, “An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals in the Criminal Justice System”, published in September 2017. [904706]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (**Robert Buckland**): We remain absolutely committed to taking forward every recommendation that falls to Government and to completing the action on all those within our responsibility over the next 12 months. Recently, in February, we provided a further progress report in which we describe the undertakings to which we have committed the Department in relation to the recommendations.

Lilian Greenwood: Black and minority ethnic young people already face discrimination in the jobs market, and those with a criminal record are doubly disadvantaged. By putting barriers in the way of young people who have changed and present no significant risk to others, the criminal records system traps them in their past. The Taylor review recommended reform to ensure that young people are not unnecessarily held back by childhood offences, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) called for a new approach, learning from the system for sealing criminal records adopted in many US states. When will the Government implement Lammy review recommendation 34 and allow young people to demonstrate that they are more than their past?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that question. She will be glad to know that only last Thursday the relevant statutory instrument was laid before the House to remove both the requirement for automatic disclosure of youth cautions and the multiple conviction rule, which cause problems for people who have old convictions, regardless of their nature or the sentence. I want to go further. I have considered carefully the recommendation of the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), and the sentencing White Paper later this year will have further proposals for reform of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

Imran Hussain [V]: Stop-and-search is a misused, overused and discriminatory police tactic disproportionately applied to black, Asian and other minority communities, which results in deep resentment and distrust towards the police and the Government. Will the Government, at the very least, hold their hands up and accept that many black, Asian and other minority men, women and children are stopped and searched not on the grounds of evidence or reasonable belief but because of the colour of their skin?

Robert Buckland: I share with the hon. Gentleman a deep abhorrence of arbitrary use of police powers, including stop-and-search. We have committed—as we should—to a principle of intelligence-led policing. That means police officers acting lawfully, on reasonable grounds, and not profiling or stereotyping any person because of the colour of their skin. There should be no place for that in our society.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): As we have heard, recommendation 34 of the Lammy review said that the criminal justice system

“should learn from the system for sealing criminal records employed in many US states.”

I welcome the Government’s finally responding last week, after 18 months, with plans to comply with the major Supreme Court decision on filtering youth cautions, and the indication that I think the Secretary of State has given on meeting recommendation 34. Will he undertake to consult with Unlock and other groups who have campaigned long on this issue and speak to me in preparation for bringing forward those planned guidelines?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who has always come to this matter with great responsibility and constructive engagement. In that spirit, I am more than happy to continue engaging with him. I will, of course, speak to the charities he mentioned, whom I know well, and other major stakeholders such as Lord Ramsbotham, in pursuance of preparation of a policy that I very much hope will command the support of all corners of the Chamber.

Covid-19: Protection of Prison Staff

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): What steps his Department has taken to protect prison staff during the covid-19 outbreak. [904682]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Lucy Frazer): I take this opportunity to thank our prison staff and those who work in probation for the outstanding job they have done to keep our prisons and those in the community safe. We have taken a range of measures to protect staff from the virus, including reducing the risk of transmission in prisons, led by Public Health England guidance, and making personal protective equipment and testing available. The latest Public Health England advice indicates that the measures we have taken have had a positive impact on limiting the spread of the virus.

Sir David Evennett [V]: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for her response and join her in praising prison staff for all the work they have done during this difficult time. What is the plan to continue to protect prison staff as restrictions start to lift and life goes back to near-normal?

Lucy Frazer: As my right hon. Friend highlights, as restrictions are lifted in the community, so we need to lift restrictions in prisons, too, but we need to do so cautiously to ensure that we do not increase the risk of infection. Where prisons are starting to open up—for example, to introduce visits—adaptations are being made to ensure that the risk of infection to staff and prisoners is minimised.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): On 5 May, the shadow Minister for Prisons and Probation, my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Ms Brown), wrote to the Department regarding concerns about the treatment of cleaners at Petty France during the pandemic. The Secretary of State’s reply on 29 May made it clear that he thought there was no issue in terms of management, access to personal protective equipment, social distancing or sick pay. However, hours of interviews and leaked

emails and text messages confirmed that cleaners were forced into the Department during the lockdown period, denied PPE, offered no support and had medical issues consistent with coronavirus symptoms. Seven outsourced staff on the site have had those consistent symptoms; two are now dead. The Department had to be guilt-tripped into backdating sick pay. Will the Minister live up to the Ministry of Justice’s name by committing to a full independent review as to what happened to those cleaners working in the Ministry of Justice?

Lucy Frazer: As the right hon. shadow Secretary of State has mentioned, these matters have been looked at. I am happy to take on board any further points that he would like to make.

Terror Offences: Prison Sentences

Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase the length of prison sentences for terror offences. [904688]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chris Philp): Protecting our fellow citizens is our most important duty. The Government legislated in February, via the Terrorist Offenders (Restriction of Early Release) Act 2020, to make sure that terrorist offenders no longer get automatically released at the halfway point; instead, they become eligible for parole-board release at the two-thirds point. Via the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill, which comes back for Report and Third Reading next week, we are introducing mandatory 14-year minimum prison sentences for the most serious terrorist offenders and ensuring that other serious offenders serve all their sentence in prison. By doing that, we protect our fellow citizens.

Andrew Lewer: Does my hon. Friend agree that the limited use of terrorism prevention and investigation measures, as amended by the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill that will come back for Report next week, will serve to help to keep my constituents in Northampton South and those elsewhere safe from terror attacks?

Chris Philp: In Committee, we heard extremely compelling evidence from Assistant Chief Constable Tim Jacques, who is one of the national policing leads on counter-terrorism. He explained how, in his professional experience and that of the security services, the changes that we are making to TPIMs will make our constituents and our fellow citizens safer. I hope that Members will pay close attention to the evidence that Assistant Chief Constable Jacques gave when they consider the Bill on Report next week.

Probation Services: Community Links

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): What plans he has to improve links between probation services and (a) local employers, (b) adult education colleges, (c) health authorities and (d) jobcentres. [904689]

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What plans he has to improve links between probation services and (a) local employers, (b) adult education colleges, (c) health authorities and (d) jobcentres. [904690]

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): What plans he has to improve links between probation services and (a) local employers, (b) adult education colleges, (c) health authorities and (d) jobcentres. [904707]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Lucy Frazer): Joining up probation to other community services is critical. The new model for probation will allow us to build on local links that have already been forged. In the future probation system, more than £100 million a year will be spent on specialist rehabilitative and resettlement services, including education and employment.

Taiwo Owatemi: Our recovery from this crisis will require support for all our constituents to get back into well-paid, good-quality jobs. We have to break the cycle of reoffending and ensure that when people leave prison, they have the help and support that they need to get back into work, so that they do not fall back into a life of crime and misdemeanours, which does none of us any good. Will the Minister guarantee that our agencies are linked to provide proper opportunities to turn former reoffenders' lives around? Will she guarantee that the renationalisation of the probation service will not be used as an excuse for any more cuts, and will instead be used to work towards an improved and better staffed, trained and managed National Probation Service?

Lucy Frazer: The hon. Member makes a number of points in her question. I would like to assure her that we are committed to ensuring that people who come out of prison are rehabilitated, get jobs and turn away from crime. We recently launched the New Futures Network, which is dedicated to establishing the links between prisons, prisoners and local employers. In relation to investment in the new probation service, I am sure that she has seen that we are investing an additional £155 million in probation over the course of the year.

Chi Onwurah: I have spent time with Newcastle probation services, and I know just how dedicated the people who work for them are, but they are now being expected to pick up the pieces of the Government's disastrous privatisation of the service, as well as integrating released offenders into a "new normal" of society post covid that is not normal at all. Will the Minister set out exactly how funding will be made available to ensure that there are links with, in particular, further education colleges in Newcastle so that offenders who are released can have a chance of rehabilitation and jobs in a post-covid world?

Lucy Frazer: Like the hon. Member, I pay tribute to the dedicated work of all those who have been working in the community rehabilitation companies across the country and, indeed, the National Probation Service. I welcome the work of the CRC in her area. As I mentioned, £100 million has been put forward for the new scheme—the dynamic framework, which has already been launched—so that local voluntary sector and private companies can bid to provide local services in communities. I look forward to seeing their bids.

Richard Burgon [V]: The Government were warned repeatedly that privatising probation would be a disaster—that it would cost more and leave the public less safe. The Government not only ignored those warnings but spent years ignoring the mounting evidence of their

failed policy. They have practically had to be dragged kicking and screaming to finally agree to reverse this catastrophic privatisation. If they are finally going to properly sort out rehabilitation, is it not time to end, once and for all, the racket of mega-corporations like Sodexo, Serco and G4S profiting from our prisons and probation services?

Lucy Frazer: We believe that we should provide good services, whether that is by the public sector or by the private sector. We have in operation some excellent public service prisons, as we do some excellent private sector prisons. We are very pleased that we are integrating probation into the public service, providing a very important role, but we will continue to ensure that private sector companies and local voluntary sector companies can bid for rehabilitative services through the £100 million dynamic framework.

Inquests: Coroners' Decisions

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): If he will undertake a review of the process of appealing a coroner's decision not to hold an inquest. [904691]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk): We recognise the importance of bereaved families being able to seek an independent review of a coroner's decision. Section 13 of the Coroners Act 1988, as amended, provides for the Attorney General to make or authorise an application to the High Court to consider whether an inquest should be held where a coroner has not held one. Individuals can also bring claims for a judicial review of a coroner's decision. The Justice Committee has recently opened an inquiry into the coroner service, and we will consider its report and recommendations.

Derek Twigg: The new senior coroner for Merseyside has agreed an inquest into the death of Laura Higginson in my constituency. The family's request for an inquest under the previous coroner was turned down, despite new evidence being available. If the original decision had not been changed, then the family's only option would have been to resort to a judicial review. Will the Minister look again at repealing section 40 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 to see whether we could have a much easier and less expensive way of families being able to challenge coroners' decisions?

Alex Chalk: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his campaigning work in this regard. He is absolutely right that Mrs Higginson's sad death in 2017 is now subject to an inquest, for the reasons that he indicated. I thank him for the parliamentary questions that he has submitted on this issue. It is not absolutely right to say that the only option is a judicial review. For the reasons that I indicated, people can petition the Attorney General, and indeed the Solicitor General, for that to take place. But he raises an important issue, and of course we keep this under consideration. I cannot tell him that there are immediate plans to do as he suggests, but we will of course consider it.

Reoffending Rates

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): What plans he has to reduce reoffending rates. [904692]

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse):

As we have heard this morning, the Government are committed to reducing reoffending rates across the board, not least because it is a specific target of the crime and justice taskforce set by the Prime Minister. We will be bringing forward a number of plans over the next weeks and months to do so, not least the reinvigoration of integrated offender management, on which I will be leading across the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office.

Elliot Colburn: The Chris Donovan Trust is an amazing local charity set up by a local couple, Ray and Vi Donovan, whose son tragically lost his life through unprovoked violence. Carshalton and Wallington residents recognise the incredible work of the trust to raise awareness of restorative justice and other victim programmes after Ray and Vi Donovan met their son's killers. What further steps will the Department take to expand restorative justice programmes to help to reduce prisoner reoffending?

Kit Malthouse: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing this organisation to my attention, not least because I read Ray and Vi Donovan's booklet last night, "Understanding Restorative Justice", and their very moving testimony of what happened to them. They have an incredible capacity for forgiveness, having forgiven their son's killers, who perpetrated an appalling act, depriving them of the life of their child. They found it in themselves to forgive those three criminals, as they were then, and to move on with their lives. I will be more than happy to consider what more we can do in this area as we move towards our plans on rehabilitating offenders, and I would be honoured to meet Ray and Vi, if my hon. Friend was willing to bring them to Westminster when normal life resumes.

Topical Questions

[904734] **Matt Vickers** (Stockton South) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): Covid-19 presents one of the greatest peacetime challenges that the United Kingdom and the justice system have ever faced, but throughout the crisis, we have kept courts open, we have kept cases flowing through the system and justice has been delivered, especially for the most vulnerable victims and with regard to dangerous offenders. We are ahead of comparable systems around the world and we should recognise the hard work that has allowed that to happen. Technological innovation has accelerated throughout the system, with over 14,000 cases heard remotely. Jury trials have safely restarted, with 48 Crown court centres now hearing trials, and Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service has published a plan that clearly outlines the next steps. We are not there yet and we are continuing to work on increasing available court capacity, ensuring that technology can be more effectively used throughout the system and exploring all necessary and appropriate options. This comes together with the biggest increase in the court maintenance funding structure for over 20 years.

Matt Vickers: In green spaces across my constituency, litter picks used to result in us picking up cans, bottles and crisp packets, but now, more and more, we are finding numbers of nitrous oxide canisters. There is an

increasing number of youngsters putting their health and lives at risk using this psychoactive substance. Will my right hon. and learned Friend look at this with colleagues across Government so that we can get a grip of this growing and dangerous issue?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. He can be reassured, first of all, that nitrous oxide is a psychoactive substance classified under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, and it is an offence to supply it if someone knows, or is reckless as to whether, it will be used for its psychoactive effect. The most recent assessment of the drug was in 2015, when the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs concluded that there is evidence that the use of the drug can cause harm, but I would be more than happy to discuss the matter further with him.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): A decade of underinvestment and savage cuts to legal aid critically weakened the criminal justice system long before coronavirus. Time and again, month after month, the Bar Council, the Law Society and so many others have warned the Government about the dire predicament faced by legal aid practitioners up and down the country, but the Government's much delayed review of criminal legal aid is nowhere in sight. Will the Secretary of State commit to expediting the criminal legal aid review and provide a deadline by which it will report?

Robert Buckland: I am surprised by the right hon. Gentleman's characterisation of the criminal legal aid review. Indeed, we have completed part 1 and the consultation has been completed, and we are proceeding with all expedition to implement the accelerated requests of the Bar and the solicitors' professions. We are moving into part 2 and I want to get on with it. The right hon. Gentleman knows that I had over 20 years as a legal aid criminal practitioner; and I saw, shall we say, a Government of which he was a member sometimes revelling in cuts to legal aid. We need to work constructively together on this now to help the professions that we both support.

[904735] **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): May I wish you a very happy Black Country Day, Mr Speaker?

Our prisons are primarily a place of punishment and deprivation of liberty, but maintaining and supporting family links are important for rehabilitation and for offenders' lives after release. What progress is being taken on allowing prison visits to start again so that those links can be preserved?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend is right to ask about the plan that we issued in June to clear a pathway for the easing of restrictions in our prisons gradually and cautiously, always guided by public health advice and designed to keep staff and prisoners safe. We are now seeing prisons start to open up, including prison visits in places such as HMP Humber. I pay tribute to everybody who has worked so hard to make that experience a safe one. So far, around half of all our prisons have begun to ease some restrictions. Progress is being made.

[904736] **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): We have already heard a response on legal aid, but may I push the Lord Chancellor a little further? Restoring legal aid for early legal advice from a solicitor would help to resolve more

cases before they reach court, speed up cases that proceed to trial and get rid of the backlog. As we have just heard, our justice system is only as good as the access to it for everybody. Will the Secretary of State please consider restoring legal aid, at least for early advice?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady brings together two issues. With regard to criminal trials and the like, of course legal aid remains available, subject to the means test. That is absolutely essential—from the police station onwards. With regard to more general legal advice, she will be glad to know that £5 million was allocated for the extra provision of early legal advice. That is a deep commitment of both me and the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk). We are working with our officials to ensure that that is applied intelligently, in a way that diverts and prevents litigation, rather than exposing people to what can be a lengthy and burdensome process.

[904737] **Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): Meuras, Mr Speaker. What steps is the Department taking to support victims of crime specifically in Cornwall?

Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend always speaks with passion on behalf of victims of crime in North Cornwall. He knows that the county of the Duchy sits within the Devon and Cornwall police and crime commissioner area, which has received over £2 million of funding to support victims of crime this financial year. The Ministry of Justice provides £510,000 of funding directly to five sexual violence support providers in the PCC area through the rape support fund. We have allocated another £439,000, which has been distributed to local providers via the PCC, to support victims of domestic and sexual violence. An additional £195,000 of covid-19 extraordinary funding has been distributed to rape support centres in the Devon and Cornwall PCC area through the rape support fund.

[904739] **Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): Kinship carers ensure that children who cannot live with their parents can stay safely within the family network. They are nothing short of heroes, yet many end up paying thousands in legal fees just to secure the right to look after those vulnerable children. Will the Lord Chancellor pledge urgently to bring forward legal aid reforms for special guardians in private law cases, and go further to ensure that kinship carers are not left out of pocket for doing the right thing?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that specific point. It deserves closer scrutiny, and I would be happy to engage directly with her on the issue.

[904738] **Suzanne Webb** (Stourbridge) (Con): On Black Country Day, what measures is my right hon. Friend taking to reduce the backlog of court hearings that have arisen from covid-19?

Robert Buckland: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for that nudge. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) for not joining in the celebrations for Black Country Day. I will not attempt the accent. Some people think I am not a bad impersonator, but we will move on swiftly.

Recovery continues each week thanks to the hard work of professionals right across the system. More than 150 courts remained fully open throughout the pandemic and we now have over 300 courts and tribunals fully open. As I said in my initial remarks, we are developing and opening new court capacity. I urge providers and interested parties in the Black Country area to come forward and make suggestions to Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service for suitable buildings we can use to ensure that we ramp up court capacity and deal with the caseload.

[904740] **Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): People working in the criminal justice system in Cambridge tell me that because of the current measures there is limited court time available and backlogs are building up. However, when they suggest moving to available suitable premises—nearby arts premises and so on—they get very little response. Will the Secretary of State talk to the Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service to get some action on this and get justice moving in Cambridgeshire?

Robert Buckland: I listen with interest to the hon. Gentleman's observations. I am extremely keen for local initiative to flourish. We are seeing that in other court centres right across the country. If there are further blockages, please come to me directly, because I am champing at the bit to make sure we can expand capacity as quickly as possible.

[904746] **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What initial response do Ministers have to the latest report from the Joint Committee on Human Rights on children whose mothers are in prison? What progress has been made in accordance with the Government's announcements of March and April this year for the early or temporary release of some low risk mothers during the coronavirus crisis while visiting restrictions are in place?

Robert Buckland: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, who is a member of the Joint Committee on which I served in a previous Parliament. I am grateful to the Committee for its report on human rights and the Government's response to covid-19 in that respect. We will respond very shortly. The early release processes continue, with Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service continuing to consider eligible women for release on a rolling basis. A number have been released. In response to an earlier JCHR report about mothers and babies, we began a fundamental review of the operational policy with regard to mother and baby units. A report summarising our key policy reforms will be published in due course.

[904741] **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): As we heard earlier, the Scottish Government plan to legislate to secure economic, social, cultural and environmental rights in devolved areas. Will the Lord Chancellor commit to match that legislation with a Bill that would take those rights right across the UK?

Robert Buckland: I think it would perhaps be a little reckless of me to commit to more legislation. I already have a very full legislative agenda, but I am certainly happy to engage further with the hon. Gentleman on that specific issue. I want to make sure that our great four nations stay as one undivided Union wherever possible.

[904747] **Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): Children do not instantly turn into adults on their 18th birthday, yet our justice system often treats them as though they do, despite a huge amount of evidence that neurological development continues well into the 20s. Will my right hon. and learned Friend look into ways the entire criminal justice system can better reflect the increased knowledge about maturity, perhaps starting with the sentencing Bill his Department is currently working on?

Robert Buckland: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his previous service as a member of the Sentencing Council and his work in the youth justice sphere. He is right to recognise that the 18 to 25 cohort have distinct needs relating to maturity and development. In his constituency, excellent work goes on with regard to the neurological challenges that he mentions at Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution Aylesbury. I will, of course, further engage with him and others on this issue as we develop the White Paper.

[904742] **Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): Ministry guidance is clear that a positive whistleblowing culture can save lives, jobs, money and more, yet unions consider the current procedures to be unfit for purpose and are calling for urgent changes, starting with a single dedicated hotline for reporting concerns. Will the Secretary of State listen to his staff and take action to protect them?

Robert Buckland: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman. We already have the reporting wrongdoing integrity hotline, which is in place to allow HMPPS staff to raise any concerns they may have. Relevant guidance for employees and managers is available through the internet and the myHub service. HMPPS is reviewing and updating the policy. We very much hope it will be published later this year, following close liaison with the trade unions.

[904751] **Gordon Henderson** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): Following on from that answer, does my right hon. Friend accept that there are grave concerns among prison staff about the inadequacies of the current whistleblowing system? Will he undertake an urgent review to satisfy himself that it is fit for purpose? If it is not, will he set up a new whistleblower hotline which staff can use with the confidence that it is truly confidential?

Robert Buckland: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his assiduous representation of the many hundreds of prison officers in his constituency, and he is right to draw my attention to those concerns. I repeat the assurance that we are reviewing that policy. I want to get it right; I want whistleblowing to be a safe and meaningful exercise for all staff, and I am happy to undertake that review, which will be completed later in the year.

[904743] **Fleur Anderson** (Putney) (Lab): The new Civil Legal Aid (Remuneration) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020, which came into force on 8 June, set a standard fixed fee that will make legally aided complex asylum and immigration work financially unviable. Will the Secretary of State commit urgently to assessing the impact of that fixed fee and to funding a system that

pays a fair wage to legal aid lawyers, to ensure that access to justice is not denied to some of the most disadvantaged people in our communities?

Robert Buckland: The hon. Lady will be glad to know that I have already committed to the second stage of the consultation to do that, to reflect fully the nature of the work undertaken by immigration practitioners. Our aim in the first stage was to quickly bring forward increases to reflect important work on skeleton arguments—it was always a first stage. I have made that commitment and we are going to get on with the consultation, as we always planned.

[904753] **Paul Bristow** (Peterborough) (Con): My constituency contains HMP Peterborough, a privately operated prison. What reassurances has my right hon. and learned Friend been given by prison operators about their handling of covid-19, and what support is available from the Ministry?

Robert Buckland: I know that my hon. Friend takes a great interest in the work of the staff at HMP Peterborough. It has been a difficult time for all prisons, whether publicly or privately managed. The staff are hidden heroes, and I know he would join me in applauding their dedication to public service. We have worked closely with our privately managed prisons throughout this period. As with the public sector, the staff have responded with care and compassion to support prisoners through the pandemic, helping them to maintain family ties and providing them with in-cell materials, exercise, distraction, activity packs and reading matter.

[904744] **Sarah Jones** (Croydon Central) (Lab): We have the lowest rates of children in custody for years, which is great, but nine of the 10 children currently in custody in Croydon are black. That is a small statistic, but I suspect there is underlying discrimination and racism. One month on from the Prime Minister's announcement of a commission to investigate racial inequality, can the Secretary of State give us any intelligence as to when it will be set up, who will chair it, what its terms of reference will be and whether we will see some action?

Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. She is right to highlight the tremendous success in the reduction of the number of children in custody, but the disproportionate number of black, Asian and minority ethnic children is of real concern. There are issues, identified in the Lammy review, among other things, relating to how legal advice is tendered and to engagement with the system. She will know that already, as a result of that review, we have started the "Chance to Change" pilots on different ways of dealing with allegations against black and minority ethnic youngsters. As for the wider work of government, I do not have those details at the moment, but I will make sure she is furnished with them as soon as possible.

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 suspending the House for three minutes.

12.33 pm

Sitting suspended.

UK Telecommunications

12.37 pm

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Oliver Dowden): Digital connectivity is an increasingly vital part of our lives. During this period of global crisis, it has brought home the profound importance of a reliable connection. The 4G technology has enabled rapid internet connection over mobile phones: alongside superfast broadband at home, it has allowed people to do everything from Zoom calls to downloading movies. But the Government need to look to the future. That means developing world-class, next-generation digital technology through 5G for mobile and gigabit-capable for fibre. It is only by doing this that we will remain at the forefront of the technology revolution.

In order to realise the full benefits of those technologies though, we have to have confidence in the security and resilience of the infrastructure on which they are built. Keeping the country secure is the primary duty of Government to their people. This consideration precedes all others. There is, of course, no such thing as a perfectly secure network, but the responsibility of the Government is to ensure that it is as secure as it possibly can be. That is why we conducted the telecoms supply chain review to look at the long-term security of our 5G and full-fibre networks.

The review set out plans to implement one of the toughest regimes in the world for telecoms security: one that would shift from a model where the telecoms industry merely follows guidance to a model where standards would be enforced by legislation; one that would require all operators to raise security standards and combat a range of threats, whether from cybercriminals or state-sponsored attacks; and one that gave the Government the necessary powers to keep our approach up to date as the technology develops.

A critical aspect of that was how we address so-called high-risk vendors—those which pose greater security and resilience risks to the UK's networks—so in January we set out to the House our conclusions on how we would define and restrict high-risk vendors, keeping them outside the network's core and away from critical infrastructure and sites. We have been clear-eyed from the start that Chinese-owned vendors Huawei and ZTE were deemed high risk, and we made clear that the National Cyber Security Centre would review and update its advice as necessary.

Clearly, since January, the situation has changed. On 15 May, the US Department of Commerce announced that new sanctions had been imposed against Huawei through changes to the foreign direct product rules. This was a significant material change, and one that we had to take into consideration. The sanctions are not the first attempt by the US to restrict Huawei's ability to supply equipment to 5G networks. They are, however, the first to have potentially severe impacts on Huawei's ability to supply new equipment in the United Kingdom. The new US measures restrict Huawei's ability to produce important products using US technology or software.

The National Cyber Security Centre has reviewed the consequences of the US actions and has now reported to Ministers that it has significantly changed its security assessment of Huawei's presence in the UK's 5G network. Given the uncertainty that this creates around Huawei's

supply chain, the UK can no longer be confident of being able to guarantee the security of future 5G equipment affected by the change in US foreign direct product rules. To manage the risk, the NCSC has issued new advice on the use of Huawei in UK telecoms networks.

This morning, the Prime Minister chaired a meeting of the National Security Council. Attendees at that meeting took full account of the National Cyber Security Centre's advice, together with the implications for UK industry and wider geostrategic considerations. The Government agree with the National Cyber Security Centre's advice: the best way to secure our networks is for operators to stop using new affected Huawei equipment to build the UK's future 5G networks. To be clear: from the end of this year, telecoms operators must not buy any 5G equipment from Huawei. Once the telecoms security Bill is passed, it will be illegal for them to do so.

However, we also recognise the range of concerns voiced in the House regarding Huawei's role in our 5G network. I have listened carefully to those concerns, and I agree that we need clarity on our position and to take decisive action. I have previously set out our plans to safely manage the presence of high-risk vendors in our 5G network, and of course our ambition right from the beginning was that no one should need to use a high-risk vendor for 5G at all, but I know that hon. Members sought a commitment from the Government to remove Huawei equipment from our 5G network altogether. That is why we have concluded that it is necessary, and indeed prudent, to commit to a timetable for the removal of Huawei equipment from our 5G network by 2027. Let me be clear: this requirement will be set out in law by the telecoms security Bill. By the time of the next election, we will have implemented in law an irreversible path for the complete removal of Huawei equipment from our 5G networks.

We have not taken this decision lightly, and I must be frank about the decision's consequences for every constituency in this country. This will delay our roll-out of 5G. Our decisions in January had already set back that roll-out by a year and cost up to £1 billion. Today's decision to ban the procurement of new Huawei 5G equipment from the end of this year will delay that roll-out by a further year and will add up to £500 million to costs. In addition, requiring operators to remove Huawei equipment from their 5G networks by 2027 will add further hundreds of millions of pounds to the cost and will further delay the roll-out. That means a cumulative delay to 5G roll-out of two to three years, and costs of up to £2 billion. That will have real consequences for the connections on which all our constituents rely.

I have to say that to go faster and further beyond the 2027 target would add considerable, and indeed unnecessary, further costs and delays.

The shorter we make the timetable for removal, the greater the risk of actual disruption to mobile telephone networks.

The world-leading expertise of NCSC and GCHQ has enabled us to publish one of the most detailed analyses of the risks to the 5G network. The UK is now acting quickly, decisively and ahead of our international partners. Our approach reflects the UK's specific national circumstances and how the risks from the sanctions are manifested here in the UK. It has not been an easy decision, but it is the right one for the UK's telecoms networks, for our national security and for our economy, both now and in the long run.

[*Oliver Dowden*]

We also need to look at other networks. Although they are fundamentally different from 5G, they need to be as secure and resilient as our new mobile technology, as many Members of this House have pointed out in the past. Reflecting again the advice of the National Cyber Security Centre, we will need to take a different approach to full-fibre and older networks—one that recognises they are different from 5G in their technology, security and the vendors supporting them. Given that there is only one other appropriate scale vendor for full-fibre equipment, we will embark on a short technical consultation with operators to understand their supply chain alternatives so that we can avoid unnecessary delays to our gigabit ambitions and prevent significant resilience risks. That technical consultation will determine the nature of our rigorous approach to Huawei outside of the 5G networks.

All of those things have implications for the telecoms security Bill. I am fully aware of the commitment I made in this House in March to introduce it before the summer recess. As I am sure Members will appreciate, today's decision will substantially change what is in the Bill. We will introduce the Bill to the House in the autumn. It is in all our interests for the legislation to be introduced and passed as soon as possible, because—this is the key point—we have to ensure that our telecoms security advice is on a secure statutory footing.

As the House knows, one reason we are in this situation is a global market failure. Put simply, countries around the world—not just the United Kingdom—have become dangerously reliant on too few vendors. We have already set out a clear and ambitious diversification strategy. That strategy will include wide-ranging action in the short, medium and long term, with the aim of driving competition and innovation to grow the market and deliver greater resilience across all our networks.

The strategy will focus on three core elements. First, we need to secure the supply chains of our incumbent non-high-risk vendors by putting in place measures and mitigations that will protect supply chains and ensure there is no disruption to our networks. Secondly, we need to bring new scale vendors into the UK market by removing barriers to entry, providing commercial incentives and creating large-scale opportunities for new vendors to enter the UK markets. Thirdly, we need to address the existing structure of the supply market by investing in research and development and building partnerships between operators and vendors that will mean operators using multiple vendors in a single network will become the standard across the industry.

Success will require a shared commitment between Government and industry to take the necessary steps to address this issue. We are already engaging extensively with operators, vendors and Governments around the world to support and accelerate the process of diversification. We recognise that this is a global issue that requires international collaboration to deliver a lasting solution, so we are working with our Five Eyes partners and our friends around the world to bring together a coalition to deliver our shared goals.

In addition, I know that many Members of this House have considered the Government's policy on high-risk vendors in the context of the United Kingdom's wider relationship with China. Let me assure Members that this Government are clear-eyed about China. We have

been robust in our response to the imposition of new security laws in Hong Kong, including through our generous offer to British national overseas passport holders. We want a modern and mature relationship with China based on mutual respect where we can speak frankly when we disagree, but also work side-by-side on the issues where our interests converge. Today's decision, however, is about ensuring the long-term security of our telecoms network, specifically in the light of those new US sanctions.

The security and resilience of our telecoms networks is of paramount importance. We have never compromised, and will never compromise, that security in pursuit of economic prosperity. It is a fact that the US has introduced additional sanctions on Huawei, and as the facts have changed, so has our approach. That is why we have taken the decision that there can be no new Huawei equipment from the end of this year, and set out a clear timetable to exclude Huawei completely by 2027, with an irreversible path implemented by the time of the next election. Telecoms providers will be legally required to implement this by the telecoms security Bill, which we will bring before the House shortly. This important decision secures our networks now and lays the foundations for a world-class telecoms security framework in the future. I commend this statement to the House.

12.50 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for giving me advance sight of his statement. All sides of the House agree that the first duty of any Government is to protect their citizens, and we have confidence in our national security services, which go to such lengths to keep us safe. It has been clear for some time that there are serious questions over whether Huawei should be allowed to control large sections of our country's telecoms networks, yet the Government refused to face reality. Their approach to our 5G capability, Huawei and our national security has been incomprehensibly negligent. The current Education Secretary was sacked as Defence Secretary for leaking parts of the security services' advice on Huawei, yet the Government went on to ignore large parts of it. In January, the Foreign Secretary said in a statement to the House that the Government would legislate at "the earliest opportunity" on high-risk vendors. They then refused to work with us and their own Back Benchers to enable that to happen. Will the Secretary of State tell us when he will bring forward the legislation on high-risk vendors, including the robust regulatory and enforcement powers required to limit or eliminate their part in our network? "As soon as possible" and "shortly" will not wash any more.

Will the Government publish the security advice on which today's decision has been taken? What new information have they been given that was not available to them when the initial decisions were made? I would also like to ask the Secretary of State what discussions he has had with the Foreign Secretary and the Trade Secretary on likely retaliation. Where else are we dependent on Chinese suppliers—for example, in our nuclear sector—and how are we working with our democratic allies, including but not limited to the United States, to develop alternatives in these areas? The Secretary of State says that this change is being made in response to US sanctions, but in the past he has emphasised how closely

he was working with the United States, so were the sanctions a surprise? Is our security policy being led by the US? Did the very visible human rights violations by the Chinese in Hong Kong and against the Uyghurs play no part in the decision?

The reality is that the original decision on Huawei was made because, over the past decade, this Government have failed to deliver a sustainable plan for our digital economy. Almost exactly a year ago, the “UK Telecoms Supply Chain Review Report” was published. It stated:

“We will develop and pursue a diversification strategy—including by working with our international partners—to ensure a competitive, sustainable and diverse supply chain.”

Now the Secretary of State claims to have set out a “clear and ambitious diversification strategy”. This will come as a surprise to anyone who has looked at the Government’s statements. I would like to ask the Secretary of State: what are the actions to implement the strategy—which has effectively been set out somewhere and which I have not seen—and can he tell me where it is set out?

This is a car crash for our digital economy, but one that could have been visible from outer space. BT and other vendors have put the cost of this decision in the billions. The Secretary of State says £2 billion. What is the basis for that estimate, and how will he ensure that the cost is not passed on to consumers? Today’s announcement refers to 5G, but what are the implications for our emergency services network—a saga even longer than this one, in which BT was planning to use Huawei?

Open standards such as open RAN limit dependence on any one supplier; what is the Secretary of State doing to mandate such standards and open our networks to UK companies such as Cambridge company ip.access and the north-east company Filtronic? Crucially, what proportion of the additional money that is spent will go to UK companies and how many jobs will be created here? The Government recently announced a £500 million investment in bankrupt American satellite broadband provider OneWeb; are similar investments planned for 5G or 6G companies?

Labour has repeatedly offered constructive ideas to get the UK out of the Huawei hole; we have consistently argued to end our national dependence on all high-risk vendors and improve corporate responsibility for global supply chains. This entire saga has shown that the Government cannot sort this mess out on their own. We need a taskforce of industry representatives, academics, start-ups, regional governments and regulators to develop a plan that delivers a UK network capability and secure mobile network in the shortest possible timeframe. Will the Secretary of State commit to that and return to the House regularly to update on progress?

Will the Secretary of State get a grip, get a plan and secure our critical communications infrastructure, our digital economy and our national security?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Lady raised a large number of questions and I will address as many as I can.

The hon. Lady asked when the Bill will be brought back. I do not know if she was listening to my statement, but I said that would be in the autumn and that remains the case. Will we publish the security advice? Yes, we will publish a summary of the security advice; that will contain the essence of it. She asked what was new; the new fact was the US sanctions imposed post-January.

That is why we sought the advice from the NCSC. She asked whether we would consider wider relations with and responses to China; of course, the National Security Council considered those matters, but she would not expect me to go into detail on that on the Floor of the House. She asked about working on alternatives; we are already working with all our Five Eyes partners on those alternatives.

The first thing we need to do is ensure that we protect the other two vendors in this market, Nokia and Ericsson. Secondly, we need to get new suppliers in; that starts with Samsung and NEC. My hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman), the Minister with responsibility for digital infrastructure, who is sitting next to me, has had constructive discussions with them, and we are now at the stage of having engagement at a technical level with their officials.

Of course the hon. Lady is entirely right to point to the future, which is an open RAN network. There is currently only one open RAN network in the world, and that is in Japan, and that was in a situation where it started the network from scratch. There are big barriers to doing this, but of course that is the objective we are working towards. That means working with our partners through international institutions to set the right common standards on which we can have an open RAN network, and it means working with the telecoms providers to provide the right incentives for them to switch from a single vendor to the open RAN network. But in the end an open RAN network is going to provide the opportunity for UK providers, alongside providers from other allies and other countries around the world, to start providing that telecoms infrastructure.

I must say however that I find it extraordinary that the hon. Lady spoke for several minutes but still has not said whether she supports the decision; will she be backing it, yes or no? She says that we were negligent, but I would gently remind the hon. Lady that it was the Labour Government that opened the door to Huawei in the first place; it is this Government who are closing it. It was the Labour party that left us reliant on a small number of suppliers; we are diversifying it. And indeed it was the Labour party, as late as 2018, which was advocating for high-risk vendors to be in the network; we have stopped that.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): May I say that I broadly welcome the tone and content of this statement? After what could be said to have been a significant false start, the Secretary of State has outlined a much more tenable position; after all, our collective security trumps—so to speak—economics. Having said that, we still have a major job to upgrade our digital security infrastructure. Will the Secretary of State make clear what extra measures he will take to ensure that we do not fall further behind our competitors with 5G and gigabyte-capable broadband as a result of disruption caused by the decision, and what it will mean for consumers? Can he assure the House that his decision today is a final one, a future-proofed one, and one that cannot be reversed by any future Government?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend’s point is absolutely right: how do we ensure that this is future-proofed? The first thing that we have said throughout all this is that we will depend on advice from the NCSC and keep our security situation under review. In terms of the irreversibility

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of the decision to remove Huawei from the 5G network, first, it will be in the Bill, so it will be set out in statute. Secondly, by the end of this Parliament the flow of Huawei equipment into 5G will have stopped, and we will be well through the path of the stop, because we have set out the path to the end of 2027. Unless the Opposition are going to say that they will come into office, immediately repeal all this legislation and instruct all telecoms providers to almost exclusively procure from Huawei, we have dealt with Huawei in the 5G network through this announcement.

John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP) [V]: Well, well, well. Here we go again—another screeching handbrake turn. When we debated this in January, SNP Members warned the Government that Huawei could not be trusted with our 5G mobile network. Security experts were clear: we should not open up the central nervous system of our modern society to a company owned by the Chinese Communist party. With that characteristic combination of error and overconfidence, the Foreign Secretary opined that I had got my analysis wrong “on all counts”, but it seems not: less than six months later, we are witnessing yet another of the volte-faces that are fast becoming a hallmark of this Government. Small wonder, then, that Ministers and Back Benchers are reluctant to be wheeled out in defence of a Government policy on Monday, knowing that they could be required to argue the polar opposite on Tuesday.

Of course it is right that Huawei should be banned from the UK’s mobile networks, but that is a decision that should have been taken long ago. As I said to the Foreign Secretary in January, had the Government acted in 2018 as the Australians did, our mobile operators’ 5G roll-out plans would have been in an infinitely healthier place. As it is, we will now pay the price for the Government’s ineptitude. We know it, the Secretary of State knows it and increasingly restive Tory Back Benchers know it, so how was it that the Prime Minister thought that China and Huawei could be trusted, or at least managed, in January, but not now in July? Was it that a Brexit Britain was too weak and isolated to upset the world’s second largest economic powerhouse, but that the Government have now been forced to acknowledge that they cannot sacrifice our national security even for Brexit?

Countering the intelligence threat posed by China will require more than just the phase-out of Huawei. It will involve a rethink of our investment in native companies. We must now also work to protect our 999 emergency services network from the fall-out of this decision. Will the Secretary of State outline how exactly he will do so?

We welcome this climbdown. What will the Secretary of State now do, after all the Government’s mistakes, to help us to catch up?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Gentleman talks about the January 2020 advice. That advice was based on advice from the National Cyber Security Centre, which was working with GCHQ. With all respect to the hon. Gentleman, I think that those organisations are probably a better source to rely on than he is. As a result of that advice, we were absolutely clear-eyed about the threat from Chinese vendors; that is why we deemed Huawei

and ZTE high-risk vendors, why we banned them from the core of the network, and why we imposed a cap and banned them from the most sensitive elements.

It is, though, a fact that the United States has imposed sanctions on Huawei. The consequence of these sanctions, as we have been advised by the NCSC, is that we can no longer rely upon Huawei equipment. It is therefore in the security interests of the United Kingdom to ban any further use of that equipment by ruling out further purchases of it. That is the right thing to do in the national interest. If the facts change, we change our policy, and that is exactly what we have done. We will then enshrine it in law through the telecoms security Bill.

The hon. Gentleman talked about investment in other companies, and those are important points. We are addressing that through the national security and investment Bill, which will also come before the House. Throughout all this, we have been completely clear-eyed about the threat posed by Chinese companies and taken appropriate steps in relation to it.

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement, but as a result of this decision, we are reliant on just two companies for most of our mobile telecommunications equipment. Along with the delay to 5G that he talked about, this reflects a long-term failure of UK telecoms strategy to anticipate what the country will need and to prepare for it. Is it still his view that, as he said in March, the UK can develop new supply chain capacity “in this Parliament”? Will he come to my Select Committee next week to discuss how he will do it?

Oliver Dowden: Of course, I would be delighted to come to my right hon. Friend’s Select Committee and outline in further detail the steps that we are taking. In essence, those are to secure the existing supplies and then get new ones in, and we are making good progress on that. Ultimately, it is the Open RAN solution, which means doing things such as launching a flagship Open RAN test bed with mobile network operators and establishing an Open RAN systems integration expert centre through the national telecoms lab. We have a whole range of measures that I am happy to talk to him about at length.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): When I was in China with other MPs a couple of years back, our delegation leader, Ken Clarke, kept going on about how this was a golden era for relations between our two countries. Obviously this is another U-turn, along with school dinners, face masks and the NHS surcharge. Could the Government now apply some consistency to their risky regime standards and stop the UK export of telecommunications spyware and wiretaps to Bahrain, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates—or did taking back control actually mean handing it over to Trump to settle his old scores and being special relationship poodle?

Oliver Dowden: I think the hon. Lady knows that we have appropriate export controls in relation to all the things that she mentioned.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend share my concerns after recent coverage of Huawei and security apparatus in the province of Xinjiang,

where human rights abuses are taking place against the Uyghur? What strategies or incentives are in place to support domestic telecoms equipment supply capabilities, to ensure that we have home-grown alternatives to Huawei?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend is right to raise the appalling human rights abuses against the Uyghur in Xinjiang province. The United Kingdom has led in the condemnation of that, working with other countries. She talked about the importance of diversification, which several Members have raised. I am happy to report regularly to the House—indeed, I appear before the House for DCMS questions every month—and update it on the progress of all these measures.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I suspect many folk will be wondering, if the Government are banning a Chinese tech company from our telecommunications industry on the grounds of national security, how come it is safe for them to participate in building a nuclear power station?

Oliver Dowden: The advice that we have received today relates to the impact of the US sanctions. The US has imposed sanctions specifically on 5G. We have analysed the impact of those sanctions. It has undermined the reliability of Huawei equipment, which is why we are now advising, and then will set out in statute, that mobile network operators can no longer purchase that equipment.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): I welcome the Government's announcement and the fact that they have listened to Members across the House. It is right that they have taken action from the US approach and its implementation of sanctions. But if the Government are going to be clear-eyed about China, they must also be clear-eyed about the human rights violations reportedly being undertaken by Huawei and its use of slave labour. It is not acceptable for a global Britain to be involved with a company that is perpetually using slave labour in its supply chains. Will my right hon. Friend work with me and Members across the House to ensure that we can bring forward the 2027 date?

Oliver Dowden: I thank my hon. Friend for his support, but I think there are slightly separate questions about the timings and the issue of human rights abuses. He is absolutely right to raise the issue of human rights abuses, and that is something we are addressing through the modern slavery Bill. We should not be having any companies operating in the United Kingdom relying on slavery, so we have introduced the modern slavery Bill. Indeed, there is an amendment that will be considered in the Lords very shortly which deals precisely with that issue, and we are working with peers to address that.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): I, too, welcome this screeching U-turn. It is ultimately the right decision on the grounds of national security, human rights and British industrial strategy. Does the Secretary of State agree that the best way to mitigate the risks of relying on just two vendors is for the Government to invest in the development of the open radio access network and to open the market to newer smaller entrants. If he does, when will he publish a strategy to achieve that?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Of course, in the medium to long run, open RAN is the solution. I just have to caution that that is not available immediately, so that is why, in the shorter run, we are also working on trying to introduce further existing vendors into the United Kingdom, principally Samsung and NEC.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): Can I also welcome the Secretary of State's statement, but will he commit the Government to further financial support for research and development to enable the UK telecommunications industry to move fast so that we can fill the gap as quickly as possible?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. Of course the Chancellor was at the National Security Council when we were discussing this, clearly in order to facilitate the open RAN solution that will require investment from the Government, but that will be a matter for the Chancellor at a future fiscal event.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): The Secretary of State has been particularly clear that Huawei will not be asked to deliver the UK's 5G network, but he has been conspicuously quiet in relation to when the 5G network will now be complete across the UK. So can he clarify for me and for Members across the Chamber: when will 5G be delivered across the United Kingdom, and at what cost?

Oliver Dowden: We set out our position in the manifesto, but as a consequence of these decisions things have changed. I have been very frank and up front with the House about this. The consequence of the decision to stop the flow of Huawei equipment into 5G and to set a very firm date for 2027 and the pathway to that will add two to three years to the delivery time.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): The Chinese Government have of late struck an increasingly aggressive posture against countries such as Australia and India, and also against this country, effectively tearing up the Sino-British declaration and imposing draconian laws on Hong Kong. When it learned of calls from this place for the exclusion of Huawei from our national telecoms infrastructure, its ambassador threatened this country with unspecified consequences. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that threat confirms not only the close connection between Huawei and the Chinese Government, but the fact that the right decision has been made today?

Oliver Dowden: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. This Government will not be cowed by the comments of any other country, and indeed this decision has been made in the national security interests of this nation. He is absolutely right to raise the abuses in Hong Kong and the Foreign Secretary has dealt with that extensively.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) [V]: The National Institute of Economic and Social Research says that removing Huawei from 5G infrastructure will lead to higher prices and, as the Secretary of State has already said to the House, also a delayed roll-out, so what will his Department be doing to ensure that this

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decision does not increase the digital divide that exists in this country, and what conversations has he had or will he be having with local authorities about the impact of planned infrastructure work?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Member is absolutely right to raise the point about a digital divide, and that is something that my Department is working on extensively—for example, in ensuring that there is more handheld equipment and all those sorts of things for people who do not currently have mobile phone technology. We have invested a lot of money in relation to that.

On his point about local authorities, our manifesto commitment set a highly ambitious target of full fibre roll-out by 2025, which is creating huge investment across the country. Indeed, a telecoms provider recently announced 10,000 new jobs. There is lots of potential for new jobs in this area.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Significant disruption to either mobile or broadband services could have a disastrous impact on essential services, so will the Secretary of State assure the House that everything possible is being done to mitigate and manage the risk resulting from Huawei's continued involvement in our telecoms infrastructure?

Oliver Dowden: Of course, we continue to manage and mitigate that risk, which is why we announced in January the cap and exclude measures, which we are reinforcing with a pathway to having zero Huawei in our 5G by 2027. We will continue to work on the security risks around Huawei, particularly through the Huawei evaluation centre in GCHQ.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): The Secretary of State has twice referred to the Five Eyes partnership, and made a more oblique reference to wider alliances. He has made no reference to the D10 alliance—the G7 countries, Australia, South Korea and India—that was trailed five weeks ago. Has that alliance been established, does it exist, is there a unity of purpose, and are the other members of the proposed alliance at one with us on the decision made today?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the D10 alliance, which was proposed not by the UK Government but, I believe, by the Atlantic Forum. We are working with all the D10 countries on this, and with Japan, South Korea and others, where we have a lot of interest in that.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): There could be offsets to the delay and cost if, as a result of this, we design and manufacture many more of the components we need here at home. What exactly can the Government do to make that more likely to create jobs and technology?

Oliver Dowden: My right hon. Friend is right to raise the point, which is the opportunity created by open RAN technology. It will take a very long time, were the UK minded to do so, to create a new mobile vendor like Ericsson, Nokia or indeed Huawei, but with open RAN we can get UK technologies into the provision of telecoms infrastructure, and that can sit alongside contributions

from other like-minded countries around the world. That is how we will create jobs and provide a long-lasting solution.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Basically, the Government's mobile telephony strategy is in tatters. What is particularly sad is that it was not only predictable; it was predicted, by dozens of Members of Parliament who kept saying to the Government that this was where we would get to in the end. I just wish they sometimes would listen to their own Back Benchers, and obviously Opposition Back Benchers as well. There is unity in the House on this matter, and there has been for some time.

The Secretary of State is like St Augustine: "make me chaste—but not yet." All he is offering us is a path towards getting rid of these some time in 2027, after the next general election. He will not even tell us when autumn is. Will he tell us precisely when he will publish his Bill, when it will be enacted and why he cannot bring forward the date from 2027?

Oliver Dowden: As ever, the hon. Gentleman is very good at false indignation and theatrics, but in reality it is this Government, unlike the last Labour Government, who have, for the first time, set out a clear date, which will be enshrined in statute, to remove Huawei equipment, and we are stopping the flow into the networks. To do all that, we have to bring forward the telecoms security Bill, which I have said will happen in the autumn. I believe that autumn falls in the months of September, October and November.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): May I ask humbly that we distinguish between the people of China and the Communist regime? It is the latter that for years we have tried to appease in the hope that it would mature into a global citizen, and that clearly has not happened. President Xi seeks superpower status, but now with a competing vision of world order. I therefore very much welcome the announcement today. Has the Secretary of State shared it with the Five Eyes community and, indeed, our US friends?

However, we should also expect repercussions from China, and to that end I strongly believe that this must be the start of a wider strategic foreign policy reset. Tactical announcements about sending carriers to the South China sea are all very well, but they must form part of a wider international collective western resolve to defend our values and our standards, in which China is very much welcome to participate and I hope the UK will play a leading role.

Oliver Dowden: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. He is absolutely right to distinguish between the people of China and the Chinese Government. China is a wonderful country; I have very much enjoyed visiting it on occasions in the past, and there are some very warm people there. The difference is the Government of China and some of the abuses, particularly of the rule of law and human rights, that we have seen there. In the context of telecommunications security, we have an opportunity to work with our allies. If we can develop this open RAN technology of the future, it will provide an opportunity not just to benefit us but to benefit them, and indeed to further secure our infrastructure and make it more resilient.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab) [V]: There were severe warnings from network providers over the weekend that stripping Huawei equipment out of our networks too quickly could lead to signal blackouts. Our national security must of course come first, but the Government promised a levelling up of network infrastructure, which certainly would not be consistent with blackouts. What assurances can the Minister give my constituents that they will not have to endure that kind of disruption?

Oliver Dowden: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise the risk of that kind of disruption and blackouts. That was one of the reasons that led us to the timetable that we have set out. Put bluntly, the shorter the timetable for the removal, the higher the risk of that happening, but I can tell the hon. Lady, her constituents and people up and down the country that this risk will not materialise in relation to the proposals that we have outlined today.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and his willingness to take tough decisions, particularly when, as the China Research Group believes, they are in the national interest. With the EU President recently having had to take Beijing to task over its cyber-attacks on EU hospitals treating patients for coronavirus, does this action from the Government not send the message loud and clear to the Chinese state that our future relationship must be based on trust, and our trade on a fair and level playing field?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the issue of cyber-attacks. I caution, though, that cyber-attacks will not be prevented by removing Huawei equipment from the system. There are vulnerabilities across the network, and indeed one reason that we are introducing the telecoms security Bill is to start to address some of those. We have seen—it is in the public domain—that hostile Russian actors, for example, have already been able to attack our networks. With regard to the wider position on China, we need to have a full and frank relationship with China, and we have done that, but this announcement is principally about the US sanctions.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP) [V]: No matter how hard the Secretary of State tries to disguise it, this is a humiliating U-turn by a Government being forced to admit that they got it wrong in January. What assessment has been made of the additional damage to the economy, the additional cost to public finances in the UK, and the additional cost to devolved nations of the UK, of this Government taking the decision today that everyone knows they should have taken six months ago?

Oliver Dowden: I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that he cannot simultaneously urge us to take a faster course, which the SNP did previously, and attack us for the consequence of that in terms of cost. One thing leads to the other.

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): I very much welcome today's announcement. The Government committed in their manifesto to improving mobile connectivity in rural constituencies like mine. Will my right hon. Friend comment on how this decision will affect plans for improving rural networks in Derbyshire and elsewhere?

Oliver Dowden: This announcement should not impact rural networks and the way that, as my hon. Friend describes, we have made huge advances by signing the deal for a single rural network, which will help places like Derbyshire.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): The UK has great science start-ups—indeed, Warrington is considered the second-best start-up location in the UK, and we are proudly a key engine of growth for the northern powerhouse. What proportion of the additional money spent to take Huawei out of our networks will go to UK companies? How many jobs will be created here? Will that investment be seen across the regions and nations of the UK?

Oliver Dowden: The commitment we have made for full fibre throughout the country, with an ambitious target of 2025, will cause huge amounts of investment up and down the country, including in the hon. Lady's constituency. In addition to that, as we seek to develop an open RAN solution, there will be opportunities for universities and others to contribute to that solution.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The Secretary of State's announcement is a delicate balancing act between security, economics and geopolitics, and it shifts the supply of "Made in China" equipment from Huawei to "Made in China" equipment from the 25,000 Nokia and Ericsson employees there, creating a new duopoly of 5G telecoms provision until such a time as there is a credible Anglo-Saxon alternative. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, as one of the goals in respect of leaving the EU was for a new global Britain to develop deeper relations with growth nations, including in Asia, we must continue to find space to work closely with China on issues of mutual benefit, as well as to confront her on issues in respect of which our values require it?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to distinguish between confronting on issues such as human rights and having an open commercial relationship with China, clearly subject to the rule of law. That is the approach that we continue to pursue, notwithstanding this announcement.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The diminishing number of people in Scotland who still vote Tory tend to live in remote and rural areas, so I am sure they will be delighted that by the Government's own admission they are breaching their manifesto promise to roll out 5G—and as a result of decisions that they have taken. It is therefore not illegitimate for us to ask about the consequences in terms of the delays to the infrastructure and the costs. What discussions, if any, has the Secretary of State had with Scotland and the other devolved Administrations about the impact of today's decision?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend the Minister for Digital Infrastructure, who is sat next to me, will be having exactly those further conversations with the devolved nations. I did not hear him say it at the time, but I would have thought the hon. Gentleman would have welcomed our announcement of the shared rural network, which was a groundbreaking deal that brought Government money together with the telecoms networks

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to massively improve connectivity—particularly in Scotland, where it had not been the case previously—up to well over 90% coverage. That is an amazing achievement.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, which I welcome. Does he agree that now is the time to invest in our own domestic 5G capacity to support our future critical communications infrastructure? To that end, I urge him and his ministerial colleagues to consider seriously the Staffordshire proposal for a 5G connected region growth deal, which would establish both the first regional commercial 5G network in the UK and a wide-area test-and-innovation network to support our future aspirations in this policy area.

Oliver Dowden: As ever, my hon. Friend is a robust advocate for his constituency. Exactly those conversations are going on now.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): The Huawei Cyber Security Evaluation Centre was first set up by the National Cyber Security Centre some 10 years ago. Huawei has been considered a high-risk vendor by three Prime Ministers, so why has decisive action taken so long? Many of the European alternatives to Huawei manufacture parts in China; are the Government looking at the security implications of that?

Oliver Dowden: We look at the security implications of whole supply chains, which is exactly what the National Cyber Security Centre has been doing—and that applies not just to Huawei but to the other vendors. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight this issue. Simply removing Huawei from 5G networks does not deal with all the security risks, which is why we need to bring forward the telecoms security Bill as part of our efforts to enhance security.

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): I welcome what the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister and the Government have done, putting national security in front of profit and telling the world that this sovereign nation will not be pushed around by any country. Will the Secretary of State reassure me that we will still be able to work at breakneck speed to roll-out a 5G network throughout the country with credible, trustworthy partners? We should also recognise that as technology moves on, a lot of this stuff will be done through software, not necessarily through hardware.

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend makes an important point about software versus hardware; indeed, that goes to some of the wider discussions around open RAN. We will of course always put national security first, which is what we have done with this statement today.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC) [V]: The Secretary of State said that countries around the world have become reliant on too few vendors. That included the UK just half a year ago. Are his Government in any way to blame?

Oliver Dowden: There has been a failure of successive Governments both in the United Kingdom and around the world in ensuring that we have sovereign capability not just in telecoms vendors but in other areas of

emergent technology. That is precisely why we are bringing forward an investment security Bill to greater empower the Government to take decisions to protect our national interest in relation to investment in companies.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): We know that the few existing vendors rely on component parts from China, and I suspect that will continue for some time. To make our move successful, other countries in the west must come into line with us. What guarantee can my right hon. Friend give that other countries will follow us and thereby ensure that Huawei and Chinese influence is completely out of whatever network we set up?

Oliver Dowden: As my hon. Friend will be aware, the US and Australia have already taken such decisions, the Canadians have a similar analysis to us but have yet to take a decision on it, and New Zealand has a slightly different process. Each country around the world is looking at how best to protect its telecoms networks, but also—crucially—how to develop its own domestic alternatives. The way to address that is by working co-operatively such as through open RAN.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP) [V]: In January, the Government announced that Huawei would be limited to 35% of the network but crucially not be in its core. While I welcome the U-turn, I must point out that Huawei is already in the core of EE's 4G network—5G, of course, is layered on top—and BT has said that it will take years to remove it. How will the Secretary of State mitigate the risk posed by Huawei's continued presence in the core of EE's network?

Oliver Dowden: The first point is that all that equipment will have been approved by the Huawei cell in GCHQ. In addition, that is why we introduced the ban on Huawei from the core, and we have now set out the path down to zero.

Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): It is clear that the latest US sanctions have changed the landscape, so it is reasonable for the Government to change their approach on Huawei. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be naive to believe that the only threat to the UK telecommunications network will come from Huawei equipment, or even solely from China, so the appropriate response is to ensure that the whole network is secure, wherever the threat may come from?

Oliver Dowden: As ever, my right hon. and learned Friend, and predecessor, is correct. It is just the reality that telecoms networks will always be vulnerable, particularly to sophisticated hostile state actors, so we are bringing forward a telecoms security Bill to seek to address that. We should not kid ourselves into thinking that there is a panacea and that with one silver bullet we remove the risk by banning Huawei.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: The Secretary of State focuses on delays and costs, but he also knows that Huawei has contracts in the Xinjiang public security bureau to deliver digital surveillance that oppresses a million Muslims. It also benefits from the slave trade. Does he agree that in any major public procurement contract, there should be due diligence on human rights? Why has he not done so in this case?

Oliver Dowden: It is not actually the UK Government who are procuring from Huawei; it is the mobile network operators who do so. However, the hon. Member's point about modern slavery is correct, and that is why we brought forward the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Of course, such considerations are undertaken for public procurement.

Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con) [V]: Given that successive British Governments since the early 2000s have worked to encourage Huawei and other private companies from China to invest in the UK, what message do we feel this change will send in terms of consistency as a long-term reliable international partner? Has it been examined as part of wider strategic policy for Britain's place in the world post Brexit?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this point. The United Kingdom prides itself on the rule of law, a rules-based system and consistency, and that will remain the case, and of course we will welcome Chinese investment and investment from around the world. What has changed here are the US sanctions, and, as a result of those sanctions, we can no longer rely on Huawei equipment. Therefore, it is in the national interest to introduce this ban on new purchases from the beginning of the year.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I welcome the decision to eradicate Huawei from the 5G system, but I think that the Secretary of State can do it quicker than he says. I was listening to the "Today" programme the other day, and the head of BT said seven years, yes, but it could be done in five. Let us bring it forward to five, and make sure that it happens quickly. There is no reason why that cannot be done. The key point I want to make is that there are two contradictions in the Secretary of State's statement. Having said that he is getting rid of Huawei in 5G, it is apparently fine for it to continue in 4G and 3G; it can go on for as long as anyone. It will be upgraded in software upgrades for the next decade. If it is a risk in 5G, why is it not a risk to us generally? Secondly, on human rights, we know that Huawei has lied in its declaration under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 that it has had no involvement in slavery. We know that now from Xinjiang Province. If we can prove that and are able to demonstrate it to this Government, will this Government ban Huawei altogether?

Oliver Dowden: My right hon. Friend raises the distinction between 4G, 3G and 5G. First, 5G is the new technology. It is the successor to 3G and 4G. Indeed, as he said to this House previously, the reality of the 5G network is that it is fundamentally different, and it is a recognition of that fundamental difference that we are imposing these rules in respect of 5G. Of course, over time, 5G will be the replacement network and then, in turn, 5G will be replaced by 6G and, in all of that, Huawei will be absent.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con) [V]: I welcome the statement, but the report of the Huawei Cyber Security Evaluation Centre Oversight Board says that there are existing cyber security risks to the Huawei network in the UK, which the company has no credible plan to remedy. What will the Secretary of State be doing to seek to address those existing cyber-security risks in the network before 2027?

Oliver Dowden: Obviously, the most blunt way of doing that is to ban the flow from the beginning of the year and then address the stock to 2027. In advance of that, we will also be imposing much tougher conditions on all of the mobile network operators through the telecoms security Bill. Essentially, that will shift the balance from the Communications Act 2003, whereby it was up to the mobile network operators to determine how best to ensure security, to this legislation that will involve the Government setting out those requirements, and they will address those sort of issues.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm that the problem is not with Huawei's hardware, but with its software? As part of his open RAN solution, might an alternative be to mandate the use of open-source software rather than proprietary software in the 5G network?

Oliver Dowden: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to make the point about open-source software, and we will certainly encourage that to happen. That greater transparency will help as we roll out the open RAN networks. It is the case that the Huawei evaluation centre in GCHQ does look at both hardware and software issues.

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): With regard to our other networks, people in the telecoms industry have suggested to me that it is not actually as difficult to replace the equipment as the representatives of the industry suggest. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, in his technical consultation about supply chain alternatives, he will push them to distinguish between things they prefer not to have to do and things that are genuinely impossible?

Oliver Dowden: My hon. Friend raises an important point. Of course we will do that. It is just worth bearing in mind with all of this that it is not just one decision, but the cumulative impact of all those decisions. We imposed restrictions in January. We are imposing further restrictions on banning the procurement and then we are imposing further restrictions again in 2027. We will just get to a point on the deliverability of this.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): I welcome the decision inasmuch as it is progress of a kind, but let us not be so myopic as to think that the victory is complete; it is not. As long as Huawei continues to have its tentacles in other key elements of public infrastructure and academia in our universities across the country—it is giving huge sums to outfits such as the London School of Economics—we still have an issue. Has the myopia really come to an end? Is the decision part of a broader strategy to get Huawei out of places it ought not to be?

Oliver Dowden: Today's announcement relates principally to the imposition of sanctions by the US Government and the consequences of that. The wider points the hon. Gentleman raises are likely to be addressed through the investment security Bill, which will come before the House.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I add my voice to the welcome for this vital decision in the interests of national security. Building on the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher),

[Greg Smith]

although for many of my constituents in rural Buckinghamshire 5G will be game-changing, to put it bluntly, any reliable mobile signal will be life-changing. What assurance can my right hon. Friend give me that the incredible shared rural network can be pushed up the agenda and delivered faster than currently scheduled?

Oliver Dowden: As my hon. Friend knows, we signed the deal for the shared rural network just a few months ago. That was incredible progress and we will continue to challenge it to go further and faster. In addition, I am aware when we talk about getting full fibre to the premises that many people are still struggling with getting superfast, so we also need to make sure we get superfast to the remaining 4% of households in the UK.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Security of our telecoms network is the vital issue here. That is why I supported the Government's announcement earlier this year on Huawei. They have caved in to pressure from the United States and their own Back Benchers. Some of those Back Benchers who were in government during the golden years of the relationship with China and said nothing then about human rights have now found their conscience. In the telecoms Bill, the Secretary of State is going to ban Huawei, but if the United States changes its position, can we take Huawei out of the legislation? Will we ban Nokia and Ericsson from using components manufactured in China, as they do now? Will he be honest with the public? It is not about the hardware; it is about hacking and the software. That is what we should be concentrating on, not this.

Oliver Dowden: The right hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the wider risks to the network. As I have said repeatedly, both previously and today, we would be

exceptionally naive to think that just by removing Huawei, we remove that risk. Sophisticated hostile state actors can of course infiltrate our networks. That is why we are toughening up considerably the security of our networks through the telecoms security Bill, and I think that is the correct approach.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I welcome much of what the Minister has said and am grateful to him for coming here. This does look like a long, slow goodbye to Huawei, but does he understand the concerns of some Members that seven years is a very long time in politics and it would be better were it to be done sooner? Also, does he understand that perhaps the lesson from all this is that for a host of reasons—economic, security, geopolitics—high-risk vendors should not be in our critical national infrastructure?

Oliver Dowden: I thank my hon. Friend for his constructive comments. I genuinely understand the concerns about speed expressed by him and other Members. That point was considered extensively by the National Security Council, and in the end we made a balanced judgment. We believe that by having 2027 as the target, by the end of this Parliament we will have put in law an irreversible process for removal. The risk of going faster relates to the integrity of the network and the challenges in that respect. I would rather we got to a point where we had got it out completely by 2027, and I think that is a realistic timetable for doing so.

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

1.44 pm

Sitting suspended.

Coronavirus Update

1.47 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about coronavirus.

Thanks to one of the greatest national efforts in peacetime, this deadly virus continues to diminish. Yesterday's figures show 530 new cases, down around 90% since the peak, while 162 patients are currently in mechanical ventilator beds with coronavirus, down around 95% since the peak. The latest number for deaths recorded in all settings across the UK is 11—the lowest figure since 13 March. According to today's Office for National Statistics data, for the third consecutive week, total deaths are lower than normal for this time of year.

Due to this substantial progress, we have been able to restore freedoms and carefully and methodically restore the fabric of this country. However, we cannot let our progress today lead to complacency tomorrow, so we must remain vigilant to keep this virus under control. Our strategy is to protect the NHS, get the virus down and keep the virus down, while restoring as much of normal life as possible. Our tactic is to replace national lockdown with ever more targeted local action as we work hard to defeat this virus once and for all.

Our NHS test and trace system gets stronger all the time. Since launch six weeks ago, 144,000 people have now been asked to self-isolate who otherwise simply would not have known that they had to. Where we find clusters or outbreaks, we take local action, tackling over 100 incidents a week. Mostly these are small, in an individual care home, pub or factory. But we are prepared to take action on a wider basis if that is what it takes, just as we did in Leicester. Four permanent test sites and 10 mobile testing units have been deployed across the city, meaning that Leicester now has the highest rate of testing in the country. We have launched one of the biggest communication programmes that Leicester has ever seen, including targeted social media posts, website banners, radio ads, billboards and even bin stickers. We have been working closely with all parts of the local community, including community leaders, local businesses and the local football and cricket clubs to get the message out. We have also established a process for making decisions to lift the lockdown, with the first decision point later this week.

Local action is one way in which we can control the spread of the virus while minimising the economic and social costs. Another is to minimise the risk as we return more to normality. In recent weeks we have reopened retail and footfall is rising. We want to give people more confidence to shop safely and enhance protections for those who work in shops. Both of those can be done by the use of face coverings. Sadly, sales assistants, cashiers and security guards have suffered disproportionately in this crisis. The death rate of sales and retail assistants is 75% higher among men and 60% higher among women than in the general population. As we restore shopping, so we must keep our shopkeepers safe.

There is also evidence that face coverings increase confidence in people to shop. The British Retail Consortium has said that, together with other social distancing measures, face coverings can

“make shoppers feel even more confident about returning to the High Street.”

The chair of the Federation of Small Businesses has said:

“As mandatory face coverings are introduced, small firms know that they have a part to play in the nation's recovery both physically and financially, and I'm sure this will be welcomed by them.”

We have therefore come to the decision that face coverings should be mandatory in shops and supermarkets. Last month, we made face coverings mandatory on public transport and in NHS settings, and that has been successful in giving people more confidence to go on public transport and to a hospital setting when they need to, providing people with additional protection when they are not able to keep 2 metres from others, particularly people they do not normally come into contact with. Under the new rules, people who do not wear face coverings will face a fine of up to £100 in line with the sanction on public transport and, just as with public transport, children under 11 and those with certain disabilities will be exempt.

The liability for wearing a face covering lies with the individual. Should an individual without an exemption refuse to wear a face covering, a shop can refuse them entry and can call the police if people refuse to comply. The police have formal enforcement powers and can issue a fine. That is in line with how shops would normally manage their customers and enforcement is, of course, a last resort. We fully expect the public to comply with these rules, as they have done throughout the pandemic.

I want to give this message to everyone who has been making vital changes to their daily lives for the greater good. Wearing a face covering does not mean that we can ignore the other measures that have been so important in slowing the spread of this virus—washing our hands and following the rules on social distancing. Just as the British people have acted so selflessly throughout this pandemic, I have no doubt they will rise to this once more. As a nation, we have made huge strides in getting this virus, which has brought grief to so many, under control. We are not out of the woods yet, so let us all do our utmost to keep this virus cornered and enjoy our summer safely. I commend this statement to the House.

1.53 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. After days of ministerial muddle, we finally have a decision. I have long warned that this virus exploits ambiguity and that mixed messaging in a pandemic is so damaging. On Friday, we had the Prime Minister saying he favoured face masks. On Sunday, we had the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster saying he did not favour face masks. Yesterday, the Justice Secretary, unsure what to say, had to say in the end he was perhaps in favour of face masks.

It did not have to be this way: we did not have to have this confusion. We have long known about airborne transmission via aerosols. The Secretary of State has long warned about asymptomatic transmission. The Royal Society and the World Health Organisation have long recommended wearing face masks. Even Donald Trump now wears a face mask, although admittedly it is because someone told him he looks like the Lone Ranger. The former Chair of the Health Committee has long warned about wearing a face mask. The Secretary of

[Jonathan Ashworth]

State's own advice, published on 11 May, advised in favour of wearing face masks. So why has it taken two months for him to make this advice mandatory, and why will it take another 11 days for the measure to come into force? The World Health Organisation has said throughout this pandemic, "Act with speed", but yet again this Government appear to be in the slow lane.

All we need and want is clarity, so may we have it in other areas? What now is the position on workers returning to offices? Do the Government want them to return to offices, yes or no? Will the Health Secretary offer greater clarity to the people of Leicester, who are now in the 17th week of lockdown in my city? What metrics will be used to judge whether Leicester can ease out lockdown later this week? When will he make that decision? How will he communicate that decision to the people of Leicester? Will he clarify why the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), has ruled out extra support for Leicester businesses and employers, contradicting the indications that the Health Secretary gave to the people of Leicester? When people are worried about their jobs this mixed messaging is the last thing they need.

On the other parts of the country that have been identified as being of concern, will the Secretary of State instruct the Health and Safety Executive to inspect all factories, meat packing plants, distribution centres and large employment sites as a matter of urgency?

On testing, local authorities still need specific data that can facilitate action. [Interruption.] The Health Secretary disagrees, but they still need person-identifiable data, not just postcodes. They need not just positive test results, but the negative results, so that they can understand the overall infection prevalence, and they need contact tracing data, so that they know who has been asked to isolate by Test and Trace and can follow them up. They need this data daily. The virus does not wait a week, so why should local directors of public health have to wait a week? I note that in the financial statement £10 billion has been allocated to Test and Trace. Can the Health Secretary itemise what that £10 billion has been spent on? Can he rule out spending more on private outsourced companies, and invest more in NHS labs and testing instead?

Finally, today we have a report from the Academy of Medical Sciences warning of a new wave of infection this winter. The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies has also warned that the transmission of the virus

"could be elevated under UK winter conditions".

Yet missing from last week's financial statement was any increase in NHS England's revenue budget. Instead we have a mooted NHS reorganisation, with suggestions that Public Health England could be abolished and speculation that a new centre for disease control could be set up in its place instead. NHS staff need certainty, now more than ever, so will he ensure that the NHS and the social care sector get the winter funding they need to prepare for a second wave? People want to do the right thing. Muddled messaging hinders that. As George Osborne said yesterday, people just "want answers". Can the Health Secretary give our constituents answers today?

Matt Hancock: I can certainly answer some of the genuine questions that were under there. The tone of constructive engagement that the hon. Gentleman used to engage with was a better one for him.

We clearly follow the evidence on face coverings, and I set out some of the reasons why now is the right moment to introduce this policy. Trying to turn this into a party political football ill behoves the hon. Gentleman, not least because when his colleague the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) was asked yesterday whether he knew what Labour's policy was on face masks, he said:

"On that specific detail...I don't...I would like to know...if we are going to call for clarity...it would be good to have clarity on our own policy."

So we can take the criticisms from the Opposition Front-Bench team with a pinch of salt.

I come to the specific substantive questions that the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) asked. I have set out that there is a process for whether changes can be made in Leicester. The process is that we will look at 14 days of data, and today it is 14 days since the measures were introduced. We will look at that on Thursday of this week and make a public announcement as soon as is reasonably possible about whether any changes can be made to the situation in Leicester.

Thankfully, the numbers have been coming down in Leicester and we have put in that extra testing, but the number of positive cases in Leicester is still well above the rest of the country. I will not prejudge the decision that we will take on Thursday, and we will take into account all the data. The hon. Gentleman asks for specific metrics. We will not set out specific thresholds. Instead, we will look at all the data—both the level and the rate of change—and make the appropriate decision in consultation with the local authorities.

The hon. Gentleman asks about health and safety inspections. There are risk-based health and safety inspections on all the types of facility that he mentioned, and that absolutely needs to be based on risk. For instance, we have seen across the world that meat-packing factories have a much higher risk of outbreak, so we have targeted inspections on them.

The hon. Gentleman asks about data. Patient identifiable data is available to local authorities when they sign a data protection agreement. Of course, there has to be a data protection agreement, and, as he knows, we plan to publish more and more of that as open data.

We will continue the work to control the virus. We will continue to bring in measures as they are appropriate, and I look forward to a return to the spirit of constructive engagement for which the hon. Gentleman is so well known.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): I congratulate the Health Secretary on the impressive resilience that he has shown throughout the coronavirus crisis, but as we both know, the joy of his job is that winter is always around the corner. One of the most sobering statistics in this morning's report from the Academy of Medical Sciences is that the number of people every day over winter who have covid symptoms will increase from 100,000 to 360,000. It is obviously vital to know which of them have coronavirus and which just have regular winter flu. The report states that it is essential to have a massive ramp-up of testing and tracing capability before then, so what are my right hon. Friend's plans are to do

that, and when he does it, will he be able to do what not just Sir John Bell, but Sir Paul Nurse and many other distinguished scientists are calling for, which is routine testing for NHS frontline staff?

Matt Hancock: I take very seriously the royal colleges report. We are engaged in a massive ramp-up of testing and of the contact tracing that my right hon. Friend has long championed. The scale of the ramp-up of testing will be big enough to cope with the sorts of figures that are described in the royal colleges report—that is even on the current testing technology. If there is a breakthrough so that we can get testing technology that is even easier to roll out, where it can be done at the bedside in the community rather than having to be sent to a lab, we will be able to have an even bigger roll-out.

On my right hon. Friend's final point, as he and I have discussed in this Chamber, we have put in place a programme of regular testing of NHS staff that is advised by clinicians. That insists on regular testing that is, again, risk-based, and as we further ramp-up testing above and beyond the current 300,000-a-day capacity that we have now achieved, which is one of the highest in the whole world, we will of course continue to expand that effort.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: I thank the Secretary of State for his statement; it represents a welcome step towards preparing for any potential new second wave of coronavirus infections this winter. The virus has not been eliminated, so as we lift lockdown and people increasingly interact with one another, we need to use every tool we have to reduce the risk of a second wave.

A report commissioned by the UK chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, has concluded that July and August must be a period of intense preparation for a potential winter resurgence of the virus, with R potentially rising to 1.7 by September. The report's worst-case scenario forewarns of an estimated 119,000 associated hospital deaths between September and June—more than double the deaths we saw during the spring wave. This outcome, of course, does not take any account of likely actions that the Government may take. I sincerely hope that an elimination strategy is adopted as part of that.

The move to compulsory face coverings is a welcome and helpful intervention, but I am in no doubt that effective uptake will require consistent and effective public messaging. So far, we had the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster saying on Sunday that face coverings should not be mandatory, the Justice Secretary saying that they perhaps should be, the Prime Minister saying that he is looking at the evidence and, thankfully, the Health Secretary today saying they will be mandatory. Will he confirm the implementation date? Press speculation has suggested 24 July. When the head of the World Health Organisation said yesterday that mixed messaging from leaders is one of the worst challenges in tackling covid-19, who do we think he had in mind?

The chair of the British Medical Association said that

“each day that goes by adds to the risk of spread and endangers lives.”

While I welcome the UK Government's falling into line with Scotland and 120 other countries worldwide on mandatory face coverings, they need to be one component

of a wider elimination strategy, not just about keeping the virus down. I hope the Secretary of State will take this opportunity to commit to an elimination strategy.

Matt Hancock: I certainly agree that the UK has throughout the virus moved largely in lockstep but for a few days in some cases, owing to the implementation and timings of these sort of decisions. That is a good thing, because we are far stronger when we work together as one single United Kingdom. I welcome the Scottish Government's support for the decision we have taken.

I add only that suppressing the virus is absolutely critical. As all countries around the world have discovered, elimination is extremely difficult. Those countries that thought elimination was achievable are finding that cases pop up again. The correct approach, which we are following right across the United Kingdom, is local action whenever we see cases, clamping down on them as much as possible in order to suppress the virus, while lifting those national measures.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): I praise my right hon. Friend. It is great that this is the third week of a lower than average number of deaths across the country, which shows that we are really getting a grip on the virus. We have seen real reductions in rates in the north-east as well.

However, as the economy opens back up, confidence is absolutely key for my local community and the local economy, particularly for those coming back from shielding in August. Also key is the confidence that, when there are local outbreaks, as there has been in my constituency in the last 48 hours, track and trace is there for people. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House how many people have already been tracked and traced across the country, to help give people confidence that the system is working?

Matt Hancock: There are 144,000 people who have been asked to isolate who simply would not have known that they were at risk before the large-scale track and trace programme was put in place. It is vital that we have the resources to act and that we have plenty of resources for testing and tracing. For a while, we faced criticism that we had too many people with not enough to do, but as shown by the royal colleges report released this morning, and as my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt)—the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee—said and as my hon. Friend just alluded to, it is vital that we have that capacity, so that whenever we need to trace an outbreak of the virus, we can get right in there and take the action that we need to take.

Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Every covid-19 death is a tragedy—a family changed forever. The tragic but inescapable truth is that the UK Government's response to this pandemic resulted in one of the worst death tolls in the world. However, adjusted for age, the death toll in England is 81.9 people per 100,000, compared with 67.6 in Wales. Commons Library research indicates that excess deaths across the pandemic period have been 15% higher in England than in Wales, despite a significantly greater proportion of the Welsh population living with long-term limiting illnesses. What does the Secretary of State believe explains that disparity, and what lessons

[*Beth Winter*]

can his Department learn from the Welsh Government's response in preparation for further local outbreaks and a potential second wave?

Matt Hancock: I have been engaged positively with the Welsh Government throughout, and where we have concerns—for instance, about the outbreaks the Welsh Government were handling in Wrexham or on Anglesey—we have been in communication about it, especially where there is an issue on the border. I would caution slightly against the sorts of comparisons the hon. Lady draws, but what I will say is that this exercise is best conducted together, and that is why we take the approach that we are tackling this virus together across the whole United Kingdom.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con) [V]: Why was the new policy on face coverings announced in the media last night, rather than to Parliament first?

Matt Hancock: I have come to Parliament to explain it at the first opportunity.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): The Academy of Medical Sciences is very clear: prepare now for a winter covid-19 peak. We must grasp this chance to learn from past mistakes such as PPE shortages and a Welsh Government gazumped by the British Government on testing equipment. Will the Secretary of State commit to a rapid review, not to point the finger of blame, but to stand ready to implement what we have learned before winter is upon us?

Matt Hancock: This attempt to divide us is very unfortunate. The UK Government have put testing capacity into Wales that is bigger than NHS Wales's own capacity, and we do that in Scotland as well with the same effect. We are working together in partnership across the United Kingdom, and, absolutely, we are making the preparations for winter, as the right hon. Lady and every other Member of this House would expect.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): If test and trace is to work effectively and people take the advice they are given via that service, some of them will find it difficult, because they will be earning no money; there is a choice to be made between self-isolating and being able to pay their bills. So will the Secretary of State look once more at the issue of sick pay for those, especially in local lockdowns, who are asked to self-isolate on behalf of all of us?

Matt Hancock: Yes, of course we keep this under review. The evidence shows that the most important difference that we can make to get yet more people into the test and trace system is for everybody who has any symptoms at all to get a test if in doubt. That is where the biggest gap is, and that is partly due to the number of cases where people have no symptoms, when of course they would not know that they need to get a test; finding them is incredibly important and is done through contact tracing. We must make sure that if anybody has coronavirus symptoms, and therefore needs a test, they come forward and get a test: if in doubt, get a test. It is of course an important consideration to make sure that people are supported if they need to isolate, and we are working closely with business to ensure that happens.

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): The experience of this virus in Barrow and Furness is that it has hit most those with underlying health conditions or who live in areas of deprivation. Surely a lasting legacy from coronavirus should be a move towards early intervention, so we can lift people out of health inequalities and deal with issues before they become intractable problems. Will my right hon. Friend share his views on this approach?

Matt Hancock: I strongly agree with the point of view so eloquently expressed by my hon. Friend. It is critical that, as well as tackling coronavirus and the economic consequences of the action that we have had to take, we tackle the deep-rooted health inequalities that have exacerbated this disease and its impact on many people. This is a critical part of the levelling-up agenda. Issues such as obesity in particular clearly have an impact on how badly people are affected by coronavirus, and we need to take action in order to ensure that people get more equal life chances across this country.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Transparency and trust are crucial to any public health crisis, but public health directors still need household data on infections, not just postcode data. Wakefield Council told me this afternoon that it is still not getting the household data on positive tests, even though we have had outbreaks at Forza meat processing factory and at Urban House asylum accommodation. The public also need proper weekly cases information, not just at the local authority level, which itself is hard to get hold of, but also at town level and constituency level. Will the Secretary of State not now publish for everybody across the country that more local data, at constituency or town level, on the weekly cases each week?

Matt Hancock: The information that the right hon. Lady has requested is available to directors of public health in upper-tier local authorities, and we are extending that further. In addition, I want to see much more data published as open data, and I have requested that that happens. I am sure it will happen soon, but the truth is that, following a request from directors of public health right across the country, we have extended a huge amount of data to them. Those who have signed data protection agreements in upper-tier local authorities and who have the statutory responsibilities for dealing with this have got the data down to the personal details that she requests.

Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): On a conference call with the North Yorkshire resilience forum yesterday, I discovered that while the borough of Scarborough had experienced 561 cases in total, apart from one isolated case on 3 July, we have not had an infection since 23 June. Will the Secretary of State join me in paying tribute to the people of Scarborough and Whitby not only for so assiduously following the Government guidelines, but for applying liberal quantities of Yorkshire common sense?

Matt Hancock: Absolutely. The people of Scarborough have been well represented and well led by my right hon. Friend. They are doing a great job in following the social distancing rules and making sure that they take appropriate precautions, and as a result, the disease has been suppressed in Scarborough. I am sure that the people of Scarborough will be able to enjoy summer safely.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP) [V]: [*Inaudible.*]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Lisa, we cannot hear you. We will come back to you at the end. We will try to sort out the technical problem.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): Will the Secretary of State please outline what is being done to enhance procurement resilience within the NHS? Also, what is being done to ensure that British companies get orders for PPE, not just China?

Matt Hancock: I am absolutely determined to see that happen. Many British companies have stepped up to the plate to deliver PPE, and a very significant proportion of our PPE will be manufactured in the UK by the end of the year. It is a very important part of our global resilience.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The much-loved author of “Don’t Put Mustard in the Custard”, Mr Michael Rosen has broadcast very eloquently on the BBC about his experience of excellent healthcare in the local Whittington Hospital. However, what he has also expressed very eloquently on Twitter is the sequelae or after-effects of covid. What urgent steps is the Minister taking to address having tailor-made, experienced, proper healthcare in the community for those who are still suffering months after they have had covid?

Matt Hancock: The hon. Lady raises an incredibly important question for the small but significant proportion of people who have long-term detrimental effects from coronavirus. I am glad that Michael Rosen got such excellent care at the Whittington, and I can assure him and the hon. Lady that we are putting in place NHS treatment for people with long-term impacts and research to make sure we understand as much as possible about those long-term impacts, because they are still little understood.

Mr Deputy Speaker: We will try one more time to reach Dr Lisa Cameron.

Dr Cameron [V]: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for disability, I have been hearing concerns from those who may be exempt from wearing face masks but are fearful of being confronted because not all disabilities are visible. Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating East Kilbride’s Hannah Kelsall on developing free “chase the rainbow” carry cards that explain this exemption? Ultimately, no one should ever be challenging vulnerable people outside. It takes a lot of courage for many to leave their homes, but these innovative cards are providing reassurance for many across my constituency and beyond.

Matt Hancock: It is very important that, as a society, we look out for the most vulnerable, especially through this epidemic. The initiative that the hon. Lady describes is just one way in which we can all support people who have particular circumstances, and it relates directly to the introduction of the mandatory use of face coverings in shops, because there are important exemptions. It is important that people are able to express that they have an exemption because of their medical condition requiring them not to wear a mask, so that they can still shop.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend update the House on the “NHS is open” campaign, to make sure that members of the public in Dudley, Gornal, Upper Gornal and Woodsetton, Sedgley and beyond know that if they need to seek medical help, they can do so?

Matt Hancock: Yes. I want to reassure people in Dudley and beyond that the NHS is open. If people need NHS treatment, they should go to the NHS. In the first instance, they should go to their GP by phone or telemedicine, or call 111 or go to NHS 111 online. If people are asked to go to hospital or into a surgery, they absolutely should, and it is safe for them to do so.

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): The only way that directors of public health can properly tackle covid-19 is through an integrated approach to testing, tracing and outbreak management. Currently, the Government are treating each of those separately, with little regard to how they are interconnected. Does the Secretary of State accept the limitations of this system, and will he reallocate resources so that regions can develop integrated approaches for coronavirus test, trace and management?

Matt Hancock: It is vital that all those things are brought together at both a national and local level, and they are. The actions that have been taken under the NHS test and trace programme, whether national or local, and the interaction of the two, are testament to the fact that we are increasingly integrating national and local work and ensuring that the best high-quality data available is shared.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): In the unlikely event that there is a local outbreak in a town or village in Cornwall in the summer, could the Secretary of State outline what a local lockdown might look like for local people and anyone holidaying in Cornwall?

Matt Hancock: Yes. Local action can be anything from action in an individual business premises, an individual farm, as we saw in Herefordshire over the weekend, or an individual GP surgery, up to a group of organisations or, if necessary, a whole city. The approach we take is that, for an individual premises, that is largely a decision for the local director of public health to take, but of course, once we get up to the level of a whole city, that has to be a decision taken nationally by the Government. We will publish more details of this escalation procedure in due course.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): A report from the Academy of Medical Sciences states today that July and August are critical months for “intense preparations” for a possible second surge. What specific measures is the Health Secretary taking to stress-test the PPE supply chain during that period, as the report recommends, given that recent improvements to supply have not taken place in worst-case scenario conditions? Furthermore, will he be responding to calls from Care England and the Relatives & Residents Association to provide PPE to adult social care, free of charge, as an important public health intervention ahead of a second wave?

Matt Hancock: Of course we are doing that work to stress-test the delivery of PPE and to rebuild the stockpile. We had a huge stockpile at the start, but the distribution

[*Matt Hancock*]

of that stockpile was extremely difficult for a couple of weeks while we fully sorted it out, got the supplies flowing back in from abroad and built up domestic supplies. Lord, Paul, Deighton has done a remarkable job in putting together the logistical effort. It is exactly as the hon. Lady says. Over the summer, we are doing the work to ensure we are ready for winter.

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con): I welcome the Government's announcement that the immigration health surcharge will be exempt for health and social care staff. As set out by the Home Secretary just this week, we will launch a health and care visa, providing an exemption to the health surcharge upfront for either themselves or their dependants. There are, however, some in social care who will not be caught by that exemption. Can my right hon. Friend therefore please update the House on how he plans to ensure those social care workers will be exempt from paying the health surcharge?

Matt Hancock: Yes, I can. I can announce today that all employees working in health and social care will be exempt from the immigration health surcharge and that all employees in health and social care who have paid the immigration health surcharge on or after 31 March will be eligible for a reimbursement. We value enormously the work that people do right across the NHS and all across social care, and I am glad that we have been able to make this announcement.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for his update. The media have highlighted the role of carers and those they look after, and inquiries to my constituency office reflect that. Has he considered allocating additional funding to respite services for carers, bearing in mind that many carers have been caring intensively for their loved ones without a break for 15 weeks? Many of them are on the brink, and I sincerely believe they need time to rest.

Matt Hancock: Yes. That is a really important subject and I am very happy to talk to the hon. Gentleman about it to ensure we get in the best possible support. It is obviously very difficult and I pay tribute to all those who have been caring for loved ones in difficult circumstances. When we clap for our carers, we clap, too, for those unpaid carers who give so much.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for his statement. Will he join me in reiterating that, while face coverings can help to reduce transmission in some circumstances, face masks worn as part of PPE for healthcare and other workers should be reserved for those who need it? Will he also confirm that wearing a face covering is not a substitute for social distancing and that we should do both?

Matt Hancock: This point is incredibly important. A face mask can reduce the risk of transmission, and in particular, it protects others should someone be positive and transmitting the virus, especially when they are asymptomatic and do not know it. However, it can only be effective as part of a broad measure of social distancing measures, and it is not a substitute for social distancing and washing hands. It is easy to forget that washing our

hands, as well as keeping surfaces clean, is one of the most effective protections against the transmission of the disease.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Nightingales sat empty while the Secretary of State's Government's guidance allowed people to die needlessly in care homes. With 120,000 extra deaths predicted this winter, when will he be making changes to that guidance?

Matt Hancock: The Nightingales project was one of the most successful projects in the history of the NHS—building the Nightingales in nine days was something that many people in this country thought would be impossible—but the Nightingales were designed very specifically for intubated patients who were not conscious. They were not built to be effective and useable for people who are, and there are some very practical reasons for that. I understand the hon. Lady's call to use the Nightingales for other reasons, but they were built with a specific intention in mind; they met that intention, and they were a great success.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The pandemic has inevitably led to a backlog in other treatments, which is causing anxiety among my constituents. Can my right hon. Friend give an assurance that the Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust and the two clinical commissioning groups that serve my constituency will have the additional resources that they need to meet the backlog?

Matt Hancock: It is vital that we deal with the backlog of cases that is building up because of the absolutely necessary requirement, in the peak of the crisis, to pause a lot of activity. I can absolutely assure my hon. Friend that we will continue to support and protect the NHS, including with increased resources.

That point brings me back to something that the hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) said at the start and that I should have responded to. He seemed to complain about the £1.5 billion of capital funding that we have put into the NHS recently, but of course it is also very important that we take forward measures to ensure that there is capacity there, too.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): Of course the whole House hopes that in the coming months a vaccine will be developed that can be rolled out, possibly early in the new year, but in the meantime—I know that this issue is close to the Secretary of State's heart—there are 58 million people across the UK and the US, up 7.7 million since the outbreak, who have joined anti-vax Facebook pages. Tech companies, mainly Facebook, have made more than \$1 billion from supporting and advertising anti-vax sites, including those that sell fake cures and discourage the public from getting any medical support when showing signs of covid. As we move towards finding a vaccine, may I press the Secretary of State to look into putting more investment towards ensuring that we tackle those anti-vax sites? As they have been described by many, they are simply an ideological dirt bomb waiting to go off.

Matt Hancock: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. He and I are passionately of one voice on this—as, I think, is the whole House. The Government will recommend a vaccine only when it is known to be safe

and effective. We will then need to administer that vaccine, and for people to have confidence in it. People who propagate untrue myths about vaccines are putting lives at risk—that is true of the measles jab and other jabs, and it is true in this case too.

The social media companies have an important responsibility. They have taken some action already, and I pay tribute to them for that; in fact, I have a meeting later this week with a Mr Nick Clegg, who is in a position of responsibility at Facebook, but it is not only Facebook and Instagram that have taken action. We will be discussing what more action can be taken to make sure that people who are propagating lies about vaccines do not manage to spread those lies.

Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): Nobody has worked harder than my right hon. Friend to try to save lives and protect people throughout this pandemic, but I know that he, like me, would like a safe and fast economic recovery, so can he please clarify something for my constituents? I have wedding events organisers and business meeting organisers who are genuinely asking what the difference is between a restaurant, which can safely socially distance with perhaps 60 covers, and a wedding, which is allowed only 30 people, who are also socially distancing with all the motivation to do so. Is there some health reason for that, or is it simply a straightforward matter of trying to reduce the return to economic activity?

Matt Hancock: No. This is essentially a judgment about ensuring that people have the appropriate social distancing, with, of course, the maximum possible return to economic and social life. There is a judgment to be made about where such restrictions are put; they are the sort of restrictions that nobody would ever want to put in place, but the problem is that the virus thrives on exactly the sort of social contact that people want to undertake when they are celebrating something like a wedding.

We cannot negotiate with the virus; all we can do is try to have the right balance of measures to keep the spread of the virus down while allowing the restoration of economic and social life. Ultimately, the rules we put in place are judgments, and they are the best judgments we can make with the information available. We keep them under constant review—as I hope my right hon. Friend has seen, for instance, with the reopening of nail bars and beauty salons this week—just as we keep the data on the spread of the virus under review.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Secretary of State gave a statistic in his statement that retail workers have a far higher than average chance of being infected with covid-19. If that is the case, and mandatory face masks is about saving lives, why has it taken so long to take action to make them mandatory, and why is the reported implementation date 24 July?

Matt Hancock: The implementation of this will be on 24 July to ensure that shops and businesses have time to put this into place and to ensure that the implementation can be done in an orderly way.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Nothing would make me less likely to go shopping than the thought of having to mask up. Was there consultation

with the police force, and particularly the chief constable of Hampshire? For it is she who will have to enforce this monstrous imposition against me and a number of outraged and reluctant constituents.

Matt Hancock: The need to restrict the spread of the virus while allowing the ancient liberty of a gentleman to go shopping is a difficult balance to strike. We have made the judgment that the best way to strike it is to allow a gentleman to go shopping but require him to wear face mask. Of course, enforcement for the police, but I think enforcement will largely be undertaken by the British people, who have been remarkable in their fortitude, sticking with the rules even while they may be a frustrating imposition.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab) [V]: Wirral Council has led the way in recognising the importance of the work that care workers do by making funding available for providers to pay them the real living wage for this financial year. However, the scheme is not mandatory and not all care homes currently pay it. The Government have taken £7.7 billion out of adult social care budgets since 2010, and the care sector faces real challenges. When will the Government step up and fund social care properly to ensure that all care workers earn at least the real living wage?

Matt Hancock: I am incredibly proud to have supported the introduction of the living wage. We brought that in, and it has had a bigger impact on care workers' salaries than on pay in almost any other sector. The introduction of the living wage is a real testament to the fact that the Government support the lowest paid workers to get the support they need. That is true in social care across the board. The hon. Member says it is not mandatory. It absolutely is mandatory, it is in force, and we are putting the living wage up.

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): I, like many colleagues across the House, pay tribute to my right hon. Friend and his team for driving down infections across the country. One of the lessons we have learned in the pandemic is that, while it is easy to impose restrictions, it is much more difficult to lift them. Could he therefore explain the criteria that will be used for lifting mandatory face masks while people go shopping?

Matt Hancock: In the same way that these are judgments on the way in, they are judgments on their way out. We will have to make that judgment according to the spread of the virus and, in particular, the risk level imposed by people catching the virus. We will keep all these things under review.

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab) [V]: The data currently has an in-built delay, but the ability to do test, track and trace effectively and with the greatest success requires the shortest time between testing and local action. Put simply, the more local control, the quicker things will happen. The more handovers there are, and the more time it takes, the less successful it is. So I would like to ask the Secretary of State why he does not trust local systems, including the NHS. There are those who think that this is an attempt to discredit NHS labs.

Matt Hancock: On the contrary, NHS labs have done an incredibly important job. We have expanded the NHS labs enormously and we have brought in the drive-through centres. This is a massive team effort, and trust among the team is an incredibly important part of getting this right. The hon. Member is absolutely right about concatenating the time taken from the suspicion of someone having covid through not only to getting the test and the result—those times are all coming down—but to the action being taken based on the result, whether that is isolating the contacts of the individual or taking wider action if it is part of a cluster or there are indications that there might have been an outbreak. I entirely agree with the premise of that part of her question. That is a huge and important piece of the work of NHS Test and Trace at the moment. As for the second part of her question, all I would say is that we are doing everything we can to bring the system together, with the support of all those involved.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Most covid deaths in hospitals are now understood to be due to sepsis as a complication. In the light of the former CMO's concerns about increased antibiotic use during the pandemic, can my right hon. Friend reassure me, first, that the data on covid-19 are granular enough to identify the mode of death of patients in hospitals and, secondly, that the Government will support the NHS if it is challenged when making prescribing decisions in these unimaginably difficult times?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend asks an important medical question, and we know that he has a deep personal interest in sepsis. All I can say is that we are constantly learning all the time. I will not try to answer the clinical part of his question—I will leave that to more qualified clinical and medical colleagues—but it is an incredibly important question, and my view is that as much data as possible should be available for research. I have put in place the regulations—and, indeed, a direction—necessary to allow for the research to be done in a much more effective way than was available in the past.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab) [V]: Italian doctors are once again warning us, this time of the threat of coronavirus resulting in a series of life-limiting illnesses that can affect anyone who has had even the mildest infection, including the Secretary of State and other Members of this House. Sometimes the illness returns only many months later. The advice from Italy is that everyone who catches the virus faces a long-term threat to their health. Can we listen to their advice this time? This is about so much more than mask in shops and the completely inadequate test and trace system.

Matt Hancock: The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point and it is a shame that he uses such adversarial language. The test and trace system is getting better and better, and masks in shops are important, but the underlying point that he makes is absolutely right. The long-term impact of this on some people can be very significant; there is growing evidence of that. I have put in almost £10 million of research funding to try to understand that better, and the NHS has built an NHS service for people in those circumstances. He is quite right to say that the long-term impacts can affect anyone, no matter how mild the initial illness. Thankfully,

I do not appear to have any long-term effects that I know about. So far as I can tell, I am fine, but I am grateful for his interest. What I would like to do is work alongside him to try to understand this as well as possible. We are absolutely listening to the evidence from right around the world on this vital question.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): In a short space of time, King's Mill Hospital in Ashfield has gone from an inadequate rating to an outstanding rating from the Care Quality Commission. During the pandemic, the hospital has been fantastic in providing brilliant care in Ashfield and in supplying PPE to care homes, funeral directors, chemists and anyone else who needed it.

Would my right hon. Friend please say a big thank you to all staff, including the chief executive, Richard Mitchell, hospital cleaner Paula Whetton, porters Michael Thorpe and Colin Ford, Scott Cairns in mattress decontamination and critical care nurse Tracy Hague, who represent the very best of Ashfield, and will he please come to visit the hospital the next time he is in Nottinghamshire?

Matt Hancock: I would love to visit Ashfield Hospital in person and to be able to thank every single person who is there and has worked so hard during this pandemic, from the chief executive to the porters and the nurses: all those who have played their part as part of the team. The hospital in Ashfield does not regard itself as separate from the rest of the community. It is deeply embedded in the community and works across primary care, the community trust and with the mental health trust, too. It is part of a system. That is the future of the NHS: people working together, rather than in the silos of the past.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): Unfortunately, my written parliamentary question dated 5 June regarding PPE for urgent dental care centres in my constituency of Stockport, Greater Manchester remains unanswered, but I will try my luck with another question if that's okay. It seems likely that we will have to live with covid-19 for a long time. Data from care homes shows that the rate of infection is higher when staff do not receive occupational sick pay. When will the Secretary of State ensure that social care staff receive a proper pay rise—at least the living wage set by the Living Wage Foundation—to reflect the unbelievable work they have done during the pandemic, and when will the Government legislate for occupational sick pay for all social care workers?

Matt Hancock: Can I, through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, note to the House that we have been incredibly busy in the Department of Health and Social Care? We will get back to the hon. Member's written question as soon as we possibly can, but we have been inundated with questions and it has been all hands to the pump to try to respond to the virus, so I hope he will understand why sometimes our responses have been a bit slower than they would in normal times. I will get right across that. I take it very seriously—it is very important—but we do, if I may, pray in aid mitigating circumstances. We will get back on top of it.

On the hon. Member's substantive point, the increases in the living wage are very important for social care staff, and as I said in response to an earlier question, I am very proud that we introduced it.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): My constituents will be keen to know what progress has been made with the vaccine trials. Can my right hon. Friend update the House on the progress of vaccine and treatment testing in the UK?

Matt Hancock: The vaccine programme is getting all the possible support we can give it, including attention right across the top of Government. It is being led by Kate Bingham, who is doing the job brilliantly as chair of the vaccines taskforce. The best answer I can give is: no news is good news. We are trying to prove a negative: that, if someone has the vaccine, they do not get the virus. So the longer we go on without hearing there is a problem, the better. We are working to a reasonable best-case scenario of getting the vaccine in at some point this year, but I stress that that is the best-case scenario. The central scenario is somewhat later, and there is a chance that no vaccine will ever work. We need to work for the best and give our vaccine programmes the best possible support, but we should also be cautious about whether one will ever come off.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab) [V]: A former director of public health who lives in my constituency has been in touch to express serious concerns about the real possibility of a second wave of coronavirus and his fear that lessons have not been learnt from the Government's response to the pandemic. What plan does the Secretary of State have to get an independent body to conduct an accelerated review of the Government's response to covid-19 so far, so that we do not make the same mistakes again?

Matt Hancock: We are looking at all the evidence and take very seriously all the academic, professional and medical studies into the pandemic and the response to it, both here and around the world.

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): Further to today's announcement regarding the mandatory wearing of face masks in shops, is it anticipated that similar may yet need to apply in pubs and bars?

Matt Hancock: We do not anticipate that at this point. We, of course, keep all things under review but, in the first instance, the proposal—in the same way that we brought this in on public transport and in the NHS last month—is to bring this in in chunks.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am going to be cheeky, Mr Deputy Speaker. I think I can help the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) with his problem about wearing a mask. He is a knight of the realm, so he should just consider it a visor.

But to the serious question that I want to ask. It is very clear from the way that covid has rolled out that lots of people are going to have brain injury-like conditions and there is going to be a substantial need for long-term rehabilitation. This mirrors the work that needs to be done for those who have had traumatic brain injuries and stroke, many of whom have not had the support this year, for obvious reasons, but are desperate for it. I understand the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is setting up a cross-departmental ministerial group, which will meet before the end of this month. Will the Secretary of State make sure that the rehab for people with brain injury, whether from covid or from anything else, is in place?

Matt Hancock: We are working on exactly that. This is part of a number of questions that rightly have been asked about the long-term impact of covid and making sure we have the NHS treatment available for it.

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): Asymptomatic workers in care homes are now tested every week. Asymptomatic workers in hospitals are not. Why not?

Matt Hancock: The programme that we have in hospitals is a risk-based one, according to the risk of the individual. It is much harder to put that risk base in place in care homes. Both of these proposals, while seemingly different, are based on the same clinical advice.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I would like to thank the Secretary of State for the statement today.

Points of Order

2.51 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. As we are heading into another recess, with the ongoing pandemic and a potential second wave, as we have heard today, on the way, do you have any suggestions or provisions for how hon. Members can scrutinise effectively during that period what the Department is doing, given the challenges we have, which the Secretary of State has already alluded to, in terms of responding in a timely fashion to correspondence?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I am grateful to the hon. Member for her point of order and for giving me notice of it. While it is not for the Speaker or me to advise individual hon. Members or Select Committees how they may wish to carry out their work during recess, we may be able to help by emphasising again what the Speaker has said about the importance of correspondence from hon. Members receiving prompt replies. I agree that this will be of particular importance during the recess, while the country is still facing a major public health challenge. I hope that Ministers will give careful consideration to how they can support all hon. Members carrying out their duties during this recess by providing prompt and helpful replies to correspondence.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Thank you for that answer. You will be aware that 72 people tested positive in my constituency this weekend. I did apply for an urgent question. I put my name down to be on the call list today. Could I ask you to gently thank Mr Speaker for all he has done to make our hearings possible, but to make sure that constituency cases can be heard by the Minister, because I have tens of thousands of migrant workers in my constituency who probably need to be tested as well?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Thank you for that point of order. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care is still sitting in his place and will have heard that point of order.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would be very happy to meet my hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin), who is an assiduous representative for his constituency, and to make sure that his concerns are taken into account. He is right to raise them. I have been working on them all weekend, and it is very important. I can reassure him that, as far as we know, the outbreak has been confined to the farm in question, but we absolutely will be looking into it in great detail.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am just grateful that I could be so effective in creating this meeting so quickly. *[Laughter.]* It was a very important point of order, though, and I am extremely grateful for it and extremely grateful to the Secretary of State for his response.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I think this is important, as we look towards the autumn and winter

times, when flus become more common. As one of those who gets a flu jab every year as a diabetic, I am very aware of the demands that there may be on the health service, and we are going into recess. Is it the intention of the Health Secretary and his Department to come to this House and make a statement on the preparations that will be in place so that when it comes to the autumn and the winter we are in a position to respond quickly and effectively?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for his point of order. Clearly, that will be a matter for the Secretary of State. We still have a few days before we go into the recess. However, I re-emphasise the response I gave on behalf of the Speaker and the other occupants of this Chair to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) at the beginning.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Now that you are being so effective, I raised with you last week the issue of how important it would be for many of us to be able to raise constituency issues in Westminster Hall, and I just wondered whether you have got anywhere yet.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Not at this moment in time. However, I am really hopeful that, as we go into September, after the recess, sufficient progress will have been made that we can then start to normalise the proceedings in this Chamber. I fully appreciate that the way that we are currently operating is not how we would all like it to be, but we have to do this at a rate of progress that is safe for all Members and staff here. I do hope that we will make sufficient progress.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. In ministerial correspondence, the response repeatedly comes back from civil servants and not the Minister themselves, which is a trend that I have noticed more often recently. If I have written to a Minister, I find it uncourteous for the Minister not to respond. I am worried about going into a recess and receiving more civil servants' responses that do not provide the political context that is often needed. Could you advise me on how I could encourage Ministers to respond directly?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have been a Member of Parliament for 28 years, and the vast majority of replies I have had have always been from Secretaries of State or the relevant Minister. I know that those on the Treasury Bench will have heard the hon. Gentleman's point of order, and I hope that the matter will be fed back into the system.

The House is suspended for three minutes.

2.57 pm

Sitting suspended.

BILLS PRESENTED

NON-GENDER-SPECIFIC PASSPORTS BILL

3 pm

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Christine Jardine, supported by Daisy Cooper, Sir Edward Davey, Caroline Lucas and Stephen Farry, presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to

make non-gender-specific passports available to non-gendered, non-binary and other people who do not identify as, or exclusively as, male or female.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 13 November, and to be printed (Bill 161).

DOMESTIC PROPERTIES (MINIMUM ENERGY PERFORMANCE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir David Amess, supported by Sir Graham Brady, Sir Roger Gale, Duncan Baker,

Selaine Saxby, Peter Aldous, Mr William Wragg, Stephen Timms, Lilian Greenwood, Sir Edward Davey, Wera Hobhouse and Tim Farron, presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to ensure that domestic properties have a minimum energy performance rating of C on an Energy Performance Certificate; to give the Secretary of State powers to require persons to take action in pursuance of that duty; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 September, and to be printed (Bill 162).

Disabled Facilities Grants (Review)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

3 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to review the Disabled Facilities Grants system; and for connected purposes.

I am pleased to be able to present this Bill today and to speak on the subject of the disabled facilities grant. The Bill has its origins in discussions in the all-party parliamentary group for muscular dystrophy, which looks at the difficulties faced by many people with a progressive muscle-wasting or muscle-weakening condition, of which there are about 60. I heard from Muscular Dystrophy UK that for many people, including adults, children and young people, the cost of adapting the home to meet their needs are increasing year on year, and can easily exceed the current cap on the disabled facilities grant of £30,000 a year in England—a figure set in 2008. In Wales, the figure is £36,000, while in Northern Ireland, it is £25,000. In Scotland, there is a scheme of assistance similar to the disabled facilities grant.

This is not just a question of costs. Having the correct adaptations to homes means that people with disabilities and many older people living in their own home have independence to do the things we all take for granted in and outside their home. The foreword to the 2018 report on accessible homes by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission set out the position very clearly:

“Decent housing is a basic human right that helps people to have independent, fulfilled lives. Everyone should be able to live in an area of their choosing, cook and wash for themselves, avoid falls, make the choice not to live in residential care, go out to see friends and have them over. In essence, they should be able to lead a dignified life as part of a community. This is our vision for all disabled people in Britain who are currently being denied their right to live independently—something that many of us take for granted.”

We know that disabled people are frustrated by the housing system, and with good reason. The numbers speak for themselves. Research from charity Leonard Cheshire shows that 67% of councils report disabled people not having crucial home adaptations completed within the 12-month deadline; 23% of councils report disabled people waiting over two years for completion of works; and demand for home adaptations through disabled facilities grants rose by 27% between 2015 and 2019. Last week, the latest English housing survey, for 2018, was published. It reveals that only 9% of homes in England have the four accessibility features key to their being deemed to be visitable, and even that is an increase from 5% in 2005; and 57% of wheelchair users are living in adapted homes. Those figures underline the importance of accessing the disabled facilities grant, given that so many homes are inaccessible.

Habinteg Housing Association estimates that over 400,000 wheelchair users live in homes that are neither adapted nor accessible. That is simply not good enough. We need an urgent review of the disabled facilities grant in order to make homes truly accessible and to improve people’s quality of life. When we think about the words I quoted from the EHRC, we see that improving access to, and the level of, disabled facilities grants is essential to meeting individuals’ needs. Although many disabled

[Liz Twist]

facilities grants are comparatively modest and do not involve massive structural change, it is vital that the cap should not prevent those who need more major changes from accessing them.

Commenting on the English housing survey last week, Habinteg chief executive, Sheron Carter, said:

“Whilst it’s encouraging to see the proportion of homes with basic accessibility features increasing to 9% from 5% in 2005, it’s clear that the total proportion of homes which are accessible is still woefully inadequate.”

The current situation is simply not good enough. We need an urgent review of the disabled facilities grant in order to make homes truly accessible and to improve people’s quality of life. We also need to build more accessible homes, and to find ways to ensure that that actually happens.

Last week, I met the Minister for Housing, the right hon. Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher), together with Kerry Thompson, a Habinteg resident living in an accessible home in Milton Keynes. We discussed the proposed and long-delayed Government consultation on accessible housing and highlighted the lack of accessible housing. I was happy that the Minister agreed to meet us, but it is obvious that much more needs to be done. Kerry, a wheelchair user, spoke only last week of her experience of living in an accessible home:

“Living in an accessible home myself, I know first-hand how vital they are for a disabled person like me. Accessible and adapted homes help alleviate pressures on health and social care services and budgets. They enable greater independence at home and speed up hospital discharges. This is crucial at a time when our NHS and social care provision is already under enormous strain.”

When we are all spending more time at home than ever before, having a home that is fit for purpose is very important. The Department of Health and Social Care recently announced that £505 million will be made available for the disabled facilities grant in 2020-21—the same as the previous year. That is not good enough to meet the challenge of adapting our existing housing stock. With an ageing housing stock, higher numbers of people over 65, an increase in working-age adults with long-term disabilities and more families with disabled children, the need for essential home adaptations continues to rise, and so does the need for funding. It does not have to be this way, and it should not be this way.

What can we do? The Bill calls for a review of how some aspects of the disabled facilities grant operate. In particular, the Government should look at reviewing the disabled facilities grant cap every year, using inflation-based indices to accurately and consistently set it. Furthermore, a disabled facilities grant registry should be created to enable increased transparency on the

number of disabled facilities grant applications and the amounts requested. While the disabled facilities grant cap was last raised in 2008, the cost of adapting homes has gone up, constraining the adaptations that can be made. We must ensure that the grant covers proper, professional building support that will stand the test of time, and we must recognise that we need to develop and fund the best solutions for individuals. On top of that, the Government must review and address the barriers to installing adaptations in the private rented sector. More and more people rent privately, and experience shows that private landlords are often unwilling to allow changes to their properties, even for accessibility purposes.

However, there is another aspect that we need to look at. As smart technology develops and provides real benefits for people with disabilities, we must look at how the disabled facilities grant can be used to take advantage of those developments for housing stock. Smart homes enable older and disabled people to easily operate things around their homes, to stay connected socially and to feel safe and supported—and they enable independence. Recent research shows that cost and poor digital cabling are major barriers to accessing smart home technology, so, where it is assessed as being helpful, the disabled facilities grant should also cover the costs of the installation of cabling and other home modifications to improve digital connectivity.

Of course, we need to move to a position where more of the new homes we build are fully accessible. An insight report by Habinteg last year revealed that just 1% of homes to be built outside London by 2030 are set to be wheelchair accessible. Less than half of all planning authorities have set requirements for new homes to meet the higher accessibility standards.

We cannot continue to kick the can down the road on this issue. That is why we need the consultation on accessible housing that I mentioned. Until we have a real commitment to building that housing, we will continue to rely on the disabled facilities grant to adapt our current inaccessible homes. We need to adapt the scheme and make it better fit the needs of people such as those with muscular dystrophy, who need essential adaptations to make their homes fit their needs and provide the independence that they are entitled to expect.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Liz Twist, Mary Glindon, Steve McCabe, Andrew Gwynne, Grahame Morris, Yvonne Fovargue, Bambos Charalambous, Jeff Smith, Rosie Duffield, Kate Osborne, Matt Western and Barbara Keeley present the Bill.

Liz Twist accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 27 November, and to be printed (Bill 163).

Parliamentary Constituencies Bill

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 1

ELECTORATE PER CONSTITUENCY

‘After rule 2(1) of Schedule 2 to the 1986 Act, insert—

“(1A) Notwithstanding rule 2(1), where it is necessary to take account of the factors listed in rule 5, the electorate of any constituency shall be—

(a) no less than 92.5% of the United Kingdom electoral quota, and

(b) no more than 107.5% of that quota.”—(Cat Smith.)

This new clause seeks to instruct the Boundary Commission to aim for 5% above or below the electoral quota calculated in accordance with Schedule 2 rule 2(3) of the 1986 Act; but widens the permissible range in a constituency’s electorate up to 7.5% above or below the electoral quota in difficult cases where it is necessary to do so to take proper account of all the considerations in rule 5 of Schedule 2 to the 1986 Act. It will be at the Boundary Commission’s discretion whether to apply the wider flexibility in specific cases, in order to comply with the rule 5 considerations such as to maintain local and community ties, or to prevent the division of wards.

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.12 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): With this it will be convenient to consider the following:

New clause 2—*Allocation of constituencies*—

‘(1) Rule 8 of Schedule 2 to the 1986 Act (the allocation method) is amended as follows.

(2) After rule 8(5) insert—

“(6) Notwithstanding the allocation of constituencies according to the allocation method set out in rule 8(2)(5), there must be a minimum allocation of constituencies as follows—

(a) Wales must be allocated at least 40 constituencies (including the protected constituency);

(b) Scotland must be allocated at least 59 constituencies (including the two protected constituencies);

(c) Northern Ireland must be allocated at least 18 constituencies; and

(d) the allocation of constituencies must be adjusted accordingly.”

This new clause seeks to protect representation in the devolved nations by securing a minimum number of constituencies in each of the devolved nations.

New clause 3—*Definition of “electorate”*—

‘In rule 9(2) of Schedule 2 to the 1986 Act, for “whose names appear on the relevant version of a register of parliamentary electors” substitute “who are estimated by the Electoral Commission to be eligible to vote in an election, were they to register”’.

This new clause would change the definition of ‘electorate’ to include all potential electors, both those who are on an electoral roll and those who are not.

Amendment 1, page 2, line 19, leave out clause 2.

This amendment aims to maintain the status quo of parliamentary oversight within the boundary review process.

Cat Smith: It is a pleasure to speak again on the Bill, as it gives me the opportunity to put on the record the Labour party’s support for the boundary review in

time for the next general election. I would like to start by thanking all the right hon. and hon. Members who served on the Bill Committee—in particular my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), who regrets that he cannot be with us this afternoon.

Our current constituencies were drawn up on electorate data that is now nearly two decades old; we cannot go into the next election with constituencies based on data that will, by then, be a quarter of a century out of date. Our country and our communities look very different, and the review will take into account new electors as well as significant demographic shifts. A review is urgently needed, and the Opposition do not stand in the way of that.

Throughout the Bill’s passage, we have worked constructively to improve it for the good of our democracy, and there have been areas of distinct improvement along the way. The size of the House of Commons has varied massively over the centuries. The largest Commons, in 1918, came in at 707 MPs—they really would have struggled with the social distancing measures we are adhering to. However, certainly in the last two centuries, we have not dropped below 615 MPs. Reducing the number of MPs while maintaining the size of the Executive was always an affront to democracy, and I welcome the Minister’s U-turn on that matter. Given our departure from the European Union and this Government’s chaotic handling of the current pandemic, it is clear that there will be plenty of work for 650 MPs.

We supported and welcomed the amendment in Committee to use the March 2020 register for the new boundary review. It is important that we use the most accurate snapshot of our country to draw up our electoral boundaries. The inclusion of Ynys Môn as a protected constituency is something that the Labour party has long campaigned for, although I was surprised to see the Minister support it in Committee, given her party’s previous firm opposition to it. But then I remembered that the Tories may have an alternative motivation for suddenly recognising the island’s unique status. I welcome that recognition all the same.

3.15 pm

I wish to raise two remaining crucial areas of concern in the legislation. New clause 1 and amendment 1 are crucial for the betterment of the Bill and I encourage all right hon. and hon. Members to support them. Amendment 1, tabled in my name and that of the Leader of the Opposition, addresses the central problem at the heart of the Bill: ending parliamentary oversight will fundamentally undermine the democratic integrity of the boundary process for years to come.

To quote a written answer to a parliamentary question tabled in the other place:

“Prerogative business made on the advice of the Privy Council by Order in Council is not subject to parliamentary procedure and relates almost exclusively to the affairs of Chartered bodies.”

The process is therefore not a normal procedure, and the Opposition have concerns about its use in the Bill. The process is reserved for things such as when the University of Westminster changed its name, or when the Trading Standards Institute became the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, and so on. Changes of that type required Orders in Council, which raises the important

question of whether this is the right procedure to use for the adoption of new parliamentary constituencies. It seems to me that the answer is clearly no.

The new reports will be approved automatically by Order in Council, without debate or approval by either House of Parliament. The Government argue that the change will allow for the reviews to be passed “without interference or delay”, but this is quite simply not the case. As Professor Sir John Curtice said in evidence to the Bill Committee, if the Administration at the time did not like the review, it would be

“perfectly possible for a future House of Commons”

to say,

“‘Actually, we should delay it’, and all they need to do is to introduce a quick piece of primary legislation to overturn it.”—[*Official Report, Parliamentary Constituencies Public Bill Committee, 23 June 2020; c. 94, Q176.*]

The change is a dangerous step that would by definition grant any Government unequal and undue influence over the boundary review process. A Government have the power to shape and manipulate the rules that govern the boundary review process. Although the commissions are fundamentally independent, they work to the advice and instructions given by Government; the question of a 600-seat or 650-seat Parliament is an example of how the Executive can determine the outcome of the process.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I have been listening intently to what the hon. Lady has been saying, and at the very beginning of her speech she lamented the fact that it has been so long since we implemented the recommendations of a boundary review. The explanatory note to amendment 1, to which she is now speaking, says that the amendment

“aims to maintain the status quo”.

Does what she said not prove that the status quo has not been working, hence why we have brought forward this Bill?

Cat Smith: Quite the opposite: I am arguing that under the status quo the only blockage to the passing of a boundary review has been the Government, and they would, under this Bill, still have the power to put up the same block as they have the past two times that a boundary review has failed to go through this House. It is worth noting that if it was not for parliamentary oversight, we would have a 600-seat Parliament today. Perhaps that is an example of parliamentary scrutiny at its best.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): My hon. Friend is getting to the nub of the issue. The reason why the Government failed to put the past two boundary commission reviews to the House of Commons was that their stubbornness in sticking to 600 seats meant that they would not be carried. The fault lay with the Prime Minister rather than with the House of Commons. That is the real problem.

Cat Smith: My right hon. Friend made some thoughtful and interesting contributions in Committee and continues to do so on Report. The points he raised are entirely correct. The Government would do away with Parliament’s role in the process—a role that Parliament has always had. In short, the Bill removes the power from Parliament and hands it to the Executive. The Government’s justification for the change simply does not stack up. The Minister says that her Government are removing

Parliament from the process to prevent delay and interference from MPs, but according to Professor Sir John Curtice—and who are we to challenge him?—delay and interference by the Executive will still be “perfectly possible”.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I apologise for interrupting the shadow Minister’s train of thought, but she keeps repeating this “fact”, which is not a fact at all. The Bill actually takes away power from the Executive; it does not give the Executive more power, because it removes the reserve powers of Government to amend the boundaries. The hon. Lady needs to set the record straight; otherwise, she risks misinterpreting the Bill for a wider audience.

Cat Smith: I thank the right hon. Lady for her intervention, but I am afraid that I quite simply disagree. This Bill takes power away from the whole of Parliament and hands it to the Executive. After all, they are the ones who can table primary legislation and choose to bring forward or not to bring forward the report for a vote. The power has been in their hands, which is why we are in the mess that we are in today with boundaries that are 20 years out of date, and looking to be a quarter of a century out of date by the next election if we do not make progress with this Bill.

In her speech on Second Reading, the Minister stated that the removal of parliamentary oversight and approval would quicken the process, thereby avoiding wasting public time and money. If she is so concerned about wasting public time and money, why did she allow the commissioners to carry on with their sixth periodic review and then not bring it to Parliament for a vote?

New clause 1, which stands in my name and in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, is a pragmatic and constructive amendment. I very much hope that Members will consider supporting it. It seeks to alleviate the inevitable break-up of communities resulting from the too narrow 5% quota. While the commissioners should always aim to hit electoral quota, in some particularly challenging cases this new clause would allow them to have a greater flexibility of 7.5%. This 5% variance from electoral quota was first introduced at the sixth periodic review, and it was introduced alongside reducing the number of constituencies to 600. That is important because, at 600 constituencies, a 5% variance is approximately 4,000 electors either side of quota, but at 650 constituencies, which is what we have before us today, a 5% variance narrows and is approximately just 3,500 electors either side of quota, making it even more difficult to keep wards whole and communities together. The 5% variance needs to be adjusted in line with the number of constituencies. When we consider that the average urban ward in England is around 8,000 electors, we can appreciate the significance of needing at least 4,000 electors either side of quota to prevent the breaking up of wards and communities.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): A further point about the need for this 7.5% is that it would particularly help seats in Wales, where the geography of seats, including my own, covers three or four valley communities. The extra flex would allow communities to stay together, especially where the physical geography means that people cannot travel from one valley to another without going up and down the other. These sorts of changes,

therefore, really do make a difference in lots of rural and ex-industrial communities that have, shall we say, not-flat land masses.

Cat Smith: My hon. Friend makes a very good point about the particular geography in the Welsh valleys where the mountains prevent communities being drawn across those mountain ranges when there are issues with the transport links.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): The hon. Lady talks about keeping communities together and about breaking up wards. Why does it matter if a ward is broken up? Surely communities are created through small building blocks. By discarding this almost obsession the Boundary Commission has had with entire wards, huge changes could be avoided and communities could stay together. Will she not support the idea that smaller building blocks are the way to create better constituencies that are community based, rather than artificial communities based on entire wards?

Cat Smith: I would argue that the wards, which are obviously drawn by the Local Government Boundary Commission, do actually reflect communities to a great extent. If we are to go down the path of splitting wards, we will end up with the ridiculous situation, like we did at the previous review, where constituencies such as Port Talbot had a shopping centre in one constituency and the high street in another constituency. My new clause seeks to minimise the chances of such ridiculous situations occurring again. Under the current Bill, the Commission will struggle to respect the factors laid out in rule five, which, of course, Members will know, are the existing constituencies, local government boundaries, local ties and geography.

During the evidence sessions of this Bill, the secretariat for the Boundary Commission for England spoke about the difficulties caused by this small tolerance, which makes it

“much harder to have regard to the other factors...such as the importance of not breaking local ties, and having regard to local authority boundaries and features of natural geography.”

He said:

“Basically, the smaller you make the tolerance, the fewer options we have...The larger you make it, the more options we have and the more flexibility...to have regard to the other factors”.— [Official Report, *Parliamentary Constituencies Public Bill Committee*, 18 June 2020; c. 7, Q3.]

So while the Government keep saying the boundary commissions will listen to the views of communities in the drawing of the boundaries, some communities will literally be wasting their time putting forward those arguments if the restrictive quota will mathematically prevent the commissioners from respecting their views and the community ties.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): The hon. Lady raises the case of Port Talbot in a previous review. Does she not accept that this was actually one of the reasons why it should be easier for the boundary commissions to split wards, because the whole point of the Port Talbot proposals was that they have to come to those combinations because they are working with entire wards?

Cat Smith: I think in the case of Port Talbot it was the 5% quota that meant that that decision had to be reached. When we are talking about quotas, we know

that internationally a larger quota is used and promoted as best practice for securing fair representation. Indeed, the Council of Europe's Venice Commission's code of good practice in electoral matters recommends allowing a standard permissible tolerance of an average of plus or minus 10%.

As the Minister knows, there is a consensus amongst respected experts such as David Rosser and Professor Charles Pattie who agree that the 5% rule causes significant disruption to community boundaries.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): We have heard from the other side a suggestion that we should use polling districts as the building blocks, not wards, but is there not a problem with deviating from wards? Wards are agreed by an independent commission, whereas polling districts are decided based on the location of the local church hall for use as the polling station. Surely we need independent commissions that create the building blocks of wards that then form the building blocks of constituencies. The only way to do that is with the 10% or 7.5% variance.

Cat Smith: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the legal standing of polling districts. Wards that are drawn up by the local government boundary commission have that independence in terms of the boundaries that they represent, whereas polling districts are for administration of elections done by local councils and, as he says, can be decided basically on their proximity to a church hall.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) mentioned Wales earlier, and this restrictive quota will disproportionately impact Wales. I know that many more Welsh colleagues will express their concern about the geographical challenges that the quota will throw up in Wales. With mountains and valleys dividing communities, the task of creating constituencies that make sense to those communities becomes extremely difficult.

I shall conclude by highlighting the fatal flaw in the Government's arguments on the 5% quota. Throughout the Bill's progress, the Minister has argued that a robust boundary review with a 5% quota will magically ensure that every vote carries the same weight. But the Government's central argument turns on the ludicrous suggestion that the 5% quota will achieve parity of representation for all electors across the United Kingdom. On what planet does every vote count equally in this country? Leaving aside the fact that there are so-called safe seats, which effectively disenfranchise huge swathes of the population at every election, it simply is not true that every vote would count equally as a result of the Bill. At any given election, in the region of 9 million eligible voters are incorrectly registered and lose out on their chance to vote, and millions more will join them with the Government's voter ID plan set to lock more people out of democracy simply for not having the right form of ID.

The new boundaries will not be based on the reality of the British electorate, with millions of eligible voters missing from the register, so can the Minister stop rolling out the line that somehow a 5% quota will revolutionise our electoral system and suddenly make every vote count equally? The truth is that she knows exactly what measures will make our electoral system more equal, because 11 months ago the Electoral

[Cat Smith]

Commission made clear recommendations, including encouraging the introduction of automatic voter registration. The Government still have not responded to those recommendations, meaning that the electoral register to be used as the basis for these boundaries is incomplete and patchy at best. When will the Government start to prioritise democratic engagement?

It is clear that the Government's central argument about making every vote count falls at the first hurdle and that their secondary argument about the removal of Parliament's role preventing delays to the process just does not hold water. As Professor Sir John Curtice pointed out, the Government can easily delay the process. The Labour party fundamentally rejects the Government's attempt to end parliamentary approval for new constituency boundaries, and we ask that Members think hard and long about the impact of removing Parliament from the process. In its current form, this Bill is an insult to the House.

3.30 pm

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to contribute in this debate and to speak about some of the proposals that were discussed in Committee and that have been tabled on Report.

I wish to begin by paying tribute to the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), who has responded positively on Second Reading and in Committee to the concerns and challenges highlighted in respect of the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011. As we all know, this is an extremely important Bill that goes to the heart of our democracy, requiring and demanding fair play at each and every stage. She has responded to concerns from Members from across the House in a fair, balanced and pragmatic way. Despite the warm tones from the shadow Minister at the outset of the debate, the new clauses and amendment that have been tabled are nothing short of wrecking proposals. Despite seemingly suggesting that they were in favour of the Bill, Opposition Members are doing everything possible to stop it. We all know that equalisation and fairness are at the heart of the Bill, yet the Opposition are determined to table amendments to provide for wider variation. This Bill seeks to reduce such variation, and the Opposition proposals would leave us with less fair outcomes.

Equalisation has not been pursued in the purest form, as it would be unfair. Naturally, there is that 5% variation that we have already heard about, which this and the previous Bill allowed for, in order to make things practical and to enable local variations to take place where necessary. I commend the Minister for the way in which she responded in Committee to the unique circumstances of Ynys Môn to protect the integrity of representation of the island community, constituency and authority area. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), who introduced the amendment on this issue in Committee, presenting such a strong argument that it has been recognised by the Minister, to whom I pay tribute for the way in which she responded.

We are all familiar with the data showing that Wales currently has a disproportionate number of smaller

constituencies, so equalisation will naturally have an effect, but this also ties in with the enhanced role and powers of the National Assembly. There is a logic behind the Bill and the Minister's thinking. This approach follows the precedent that Labour pursued when the Scottish Parliament was established, with equalisation of constituencies between Scotland and England. It is logical that Wales follows suit, particularly given that the Assembly has become a Parliament with tax-varying powers. However, the 2011 Act and the earlier draft of this Bill left an anomaly, in the form of Ynys Môn. As an island community, it was being treated differently from the Isle of Wight, Orkney and Shetland and the Western Isles. I can appreciate that the fundamental part of the 2011 Act was to reduce the number of MPs from 650 to 600, which left less scope to answer the Ynys Môn argument. However, this Bill providing for 650 MPs has enabled the Minister to respond positively.

After all, this argument has been supported on both sides of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) has been pressing the case from the very first day that she came to the House. She has pushed, encouraged and debated in favour of the special case that is Ynys Môn and has presented such a strong argument that even my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke decided to pursue it in Committee, which obviously won support from the Minister.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Could the right hon. Member tell the House whether he argued this case in the past and voted that way?

Alun Cairns: I am grateful for the right hon. Member's intervention. I looked through *Hansard* to see what the standing of the Labour party on this debate was, and it took a considerable time to find that the predecessor of my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn, Albert Owen—a friend of the right hon. Member and a friend of mine—did raise it, but it was quite a long time before that became a debate, so I think the right hon. Member overstates his support of the argument.

We should recognise that not only is Anglesey—Ynys Môn—an island and its own constituency, but it also has its own local authority. When local government boundaries were being considered as part of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994, the case for Ynys Môn was recognised, creating Ynys Môn as its own authority in its own right, in spite of the challenges of having a smaller population than others. Clearly the responsibility to meet all the obligations of all local authorities would be challenging for such a small community. The 1994 Act recognised the importance of the island's make-up, which is further recognised in the Bill before us. The amendment that the Minister has accepted recognises that too.

As I mentioned, there is cross-party support for this amendment. I recognise the strong case that my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn has made for its status, and I also recognise that her predecessor, Albert Owen, made a similar case at a late stage of the Bill. The Bill goes to the heart of fairness in representation and will ensure that communities are respected. Accepting and responding to calls from my hon. Friend shows that. I commend the Minister for the way she has responded

to the debate and to the case made by my hon. Friend and welcome her acceptance of the amendment.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns). I have to say, I found it quite strange hearing a man whose job in the last Government was to stand up for Wales in the Cabinet give such full-throated support to a Bill that will see Wales lose eight seats. Someone whose job in Cabinet was to be the voice of Wales has just stood up and said that he is quite content to see Wales lose seats, but that is a matter for him.

I rise to speak to new clause 2, which is in my name and those of my hon. and right hon. Friends. I want to start by thanking again all Members with whom I served on the Bill Committee, which I admit I probably took an unhealthy amount of joy and pleasure from. I suspect that I was not the only one—the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) had a “Rain Man” effect on some of us quite a few times. It was a meeting of minds for parliamentary geeks and psephologists, and in my view, it did not last long enough. All members of the Committee were thoughtful, engaging and good-natured. In particular, I enjoyed my exchanges with the Minister and the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith), who led for the Opposition. Remarkably, this is the first time that all three of us have managed to get out of a boundaries Bill Committee without gaining extra offspring—that said, the Bill has not had Royal Assent yet, so we will not count our chickens.

On Second Reading, I made it clear that the Scottish National party will not oppose the Bill, not because it was in any way perfect—far from it. However, we genuinely welcomed the Government’s U-turn on cutting the number of constituencies from 650 to 600. I was delighted to see clause 5 in the Bill, and I was probably the only Member who spoke to it with such enthusiasm in Committee. I think that some Conservative Members found it quite difficult to speak in support of clause 5, which reversed what they had enshrined in law through the 2011 Act.

I wholeheartedly agree with the Minister that our exit from the European Union means that there will be more legislative work for hon. Members to undertake, and therefore, cutting the number of MPs would be a very silly move, but I will return to that point later.

Before I turn to my concerns about the Bill, I want to welcome the amendment that we passed in Committee in respect of Ynys Môn, which will finally be a protected constituency, joining the Isle of Wight, Orkney and Shetland, and Na h-Eileanan an Iar. Anglesey, on which I have certainly enjoyed a holiday, was first established as a constituency in 1536—probably around the point when the current Leader of the House was colouring in “Erskine May” as an enthusiastic toddler. In all seriousness, there was unanimous support in Committee for the proposal to protect Ynys Môn and I am glad that we achieved at least one change in our deliberations on the Committee Corridor. However, I bitterly regret the fact that the Government did not compromise on more issues because, as I said on Second Reading, the Government might have a majority in this House, but they certainly have no monopoly on wisdom. There are still aspects of this Bill, even as amended, that trouble me deeply, and I will outline them now.

First, there has rightly been much discussion about the controversial issue of automaticity. I was remarking to my friend the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood earlier this week that we do not actually know whether automaticity is a word, but it was certainly coined and used over and over again in Committee. We heard lots of evidence on both sides of the argument concerning Parliament’s role in having oversight of the Boundary Commission’s recommendations. While many of the points made by witnesses and Government members of the Committee were thoughtful and sincere, I am still not persuaded of the merits of this provision. We were repeatedly told during the Brexit process that Parliament is taking back control and that Parliament is sovereign. In my view, this move does exactly the opposite, with Parliament ceding its role of parliamentary oversight. Clause 2 of the Bill would enshrine this blatant power grab in statute, and therefore my party will support amendment 1 if my friend the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood chooses to divide the House.

Secondly, I am in favour of Labour’s new clause 1, which deals with the electoral quota. The Scottish National party supports a wider tolerance and we feel that moving to 7.5% is a reasonable compromise that would give boundary commissioners more flexibility in drawing up more manageable constituencies, which would be welcome. Certainly, the evidence we heard in Committee is that they are looking for as much flexibility as possible, and I think that it is incumbent upon us to respond to that. If my pal from Lancaster and Fleetwood puts new clause 1 to the vote, we will support Labour on that as well.

Thirdly—this is the nub of the matter for me—the Bill is absolutely rotten for the devolved nations, which is why I and my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) have tabled new clause 2, which we will seek to divide the House on. I want to outline to hon. Members precisely why we have chosen to focus on new clause 2 on Report and why I feel so passionately about this, but, more importantly, why I believe that others should too.

As I made clear on Second Reading and in Committee, bluntly, I do not want to see any Scottish seats in this House. Constitutionally, I do not want Scotland to be a part of the United Kingdom at all, because Scotland is a nation, and nations are best served when they govern themselves. However, I am a democrat and I accept that until the people of Scotland vote by a majority for independence in a referendum, we must continue to participate with diligence in the proceedings of this House and give Scotland a strong voice in accordance with the mandate delivered by our constituents, regardless of which party we represent.

As I have said repeatedly, Scotland’s current representation in this House, and indeed that of Wales, must not be diminished or reduced in any boundary reform. However, the reality of the Bill is that Scotland will lose three seats and Wales will lose eight. That is far from the Westminster respect agenda that people in Scotland were promised in the wake of our 2014 referendum result. Indeed, it is a democratic outrage and it is not one that we will stand for.

It is not just nationalists in this House who should be concerned about diminished representation in the House of Commons for the devolved nations. Surely every Union flag-waving, “Rule Britannia” singing Member in the Scottish Conservatives should be able to see that

[David Linden]

Scotland's voice being diminished in Westminster is bad for the harmony and integrity of their precious, precious Union. What we see in the Bill is a blatant power grab of seats from the devolved nations, with them being given directly to England—[*Interruption.*] The right hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan seems to suggest that he is unhappy about that. He can challenge it if he wants to, but that is the reality in the Bill. It is a power grab of seats from the devolved nations—the devolved nations that he was meant to stand up for in Cabinet. They are being taken away from countries such as Wales and given to England. That is a fact, and if he cannot stand up and refute that, I am afraid that it is on the record.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the primary purpose of this legislation is to ensure that votes have equal weight, and if he does accept that will he therefore also accept that his amendment would drive a coach and horses through that basic principle, because votes will count for far more in Wales and Scotland than in rest of the United Kingdom?

3.45 pm

David Linden: I would make two points on that. First, the primary purpose of this Bill is, I suspect, to reverse the mess made by the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011, which sought to reduce the number of seats in this House from 650 to 600. That is the whole point behind clause 5, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman has read assiduously. Secondly, if Members want to talk about fairness in the voting system, we should start by looking at the broken first-past-the-post electoral system, where we have Members who have majorities of nearly 40,000. So if the hon. Gentleman wants to talk to me about equal voting, we can absolutely do that, but we must not ignore the elephant in the room that is the broken first-past-the-post system.

One thing that is even more illogical about this is the fact that legislation once made in Brussels is soon coming back to Westminster as a result of our exit from the European Union. Scotland, which used to have six Members of the European Parliament, has lost that representation, and it is now expected to lose further representation in this place when legislative powers return from Europe. That is wrong; even Unionist Members in this House must recognise that.

So when the Division bell rings tonight and hon. Members decide how to cast their vote on new clause 2, they must ask themselves if they still believe that Scotland should lead the United Kingdom, as we were told in 2014, or was that in fact just hollow words in the heat of a referendum campaign to pull the wool over the eyes of the people of Scotland? Voting to affirm reduced or diminished representation for the devolved nations in this place is an unforgivable act, which will only seek to reinforce the view that Westminster does not care what the devolved nations think and we might just be better with independence after all.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am sure colleagues can see that there is a lot of time pressure in this debate. I urge Members to stick to

a maximum of six minutes, rather than having me impose a time limit at this stage. If Members can do that, we will see how we get on.

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): First, I thank the Minister and her team for their hard work on this Bill. There are a select few of us in this House who can get excited about boundary reviews, and most of us are here today, and I thank her for indulging my psephological exuberance throughout.

I will speak about the merits of the Bill before turning to the amendments. At its heart, the Bill is about fairness; it is about recognising that everybody in this country should have an equal voice in our democratic process. Fundamentally, it is about saying that no one person's vote should count more than another's. There will be some in this Chamber who believe that that is the case already, and no doubt we will hear a series of eloquent speeches about that to one effect or another, but the crux of the matter is that there are some parts of the United Kingdom where just 56,000 people can send the same number of representatives as 100,000 in another.

Before this is hand-waved by Opposition Members as a ploy to make the electoral geography somehow better for one party or another, we need to understand the basic principle of electoral equality. This idea is not new; it was not cooked up in some trendy centre-right think-tank over on Millbank the other day. It started with the Chartists back in 1838, who, in the "People's Charter", called for this measure to be introduced as an essential cornerstone of our democracy.

As I mentioned in the Bill Committee, we do not need to look far for extreme examples of disparity. Greater Manchester, where I am an MP, has 27 MPs whose electorates range from 63,000 to 95,000. How can that be fair or right? My own seat, Heywood and Middleton, is around 111% of the electoral quota. Why should my constituents' voices count for less than those of voters in Wirral West or Preston?

The issue is not just about apportionment within regions or counties, however—far from it. Using the December 2019 figures, we arrive at an electoral quota—the number of voters per seat—of about 72,431. That should be the average size of every seat in every region, but it is not. In Wales, it is a shade over 57,900; in the south-east, excluding the Isle of Wight, it is nearly 78,500. As a tenet of fundamental fairness, we simply cannot turn a blind eye to such disparity.

I accept that, historically, there are good reasons for that malapportionment—to ensure that the four nations of our Union could all have a voice in this place—but Scotland now has a Parliament that is the most powerful devolved legislature anywhere in the world, Wales has the Senedd and Northern Ireland has its Assembly. Outside London, there is a patchwork of uneven devolution settlements in certain counties and metropolitan areas, none of which comes close to those devolved legislatures.

David Linden: This is an argument I considered perhaps in response to the hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson). What the hon. Gentleman is missing here, of course, is the fact that we have English votes for English laws in this House under Standing Order No. 83W. English votes for English laws rather negates the idea that the imbalance in terms of devolution can be worked out under the Bill.

Chris Clarkson: The hon. Gentleman makes an eloquent point, but I disagree with him fundamentally. At the end of the day, there is no devolved legislature for England. This is a temporary fix that could be addressed by introducing a level of electoral fairness. I am more than happy to have a discussion about constitutional reform with anybody, but that is not what this debate is about. I am a Unionist to the tips of my toes, but I do not think that the Union will be reinforced by giving unfair or special treatment to one country at the expense of another.

Turning to some of the new clauses and amendments that have been tabled, new clause 1 seeks to change the variants of the electoral quota to 7.5%. That is, in effect, 15% between the smallest seat and the largest. In practice, that is a difference of about 10,860 voters, give or take. The argument put forward in Committee was that it would lessen the disruption needed to bring 650 seats into quota. Of course, that entirely ignores the fact that there will be a high level of disruption regardless. By its very nature, correcting 20-year-old boundaries and ensuring a fair distribution of seats in every nation and in every region will result in some disruption. I demonstrated that in Committee by pointing out that of the 10 Conservative seats represented, just one would have remained unchanged with a 7.5% variance. In fact, so many electorates have now deviated from the mean, it seems improbable that there will be minimal change.

The other argument put forward was that a 7.5% variance would avoid splitting communities or needing unusual combinations of wards from multiple authorities. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke)—sadly, he cannot be with us today and has expressed his disappointment at not being able to—quite sensibly put it, that could be addressed by splitting wards. The Boundary Commissions for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland already do that. The Boundary Commission can do that in England, but it prefers not to for the sake of ease. This should not be about doing what is easiest, but what is best.

James Grundy (Leigh) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the solution Labour proposes in new clause 1 is somewhat crude and inelegant? It does not properly address the concerns many Members have regarding the creation of coherent constituencies and it undermines the core principle of carrying out a boundary review—equalising electorates. Does he furthermore agree that a better model is the extant one used by the Boundary Commission for Scotland, which splits wards into their component communities where necessary to create coherent constituencies, rather than ones that merely meet the narrow requirement of electoral quotas?

Chris Clarkson: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, which is, as always, well-considered and eloquent. I completely agree with him. The Boundary Commission for Scotland has already demonstrated that it is perfectly capable of splitting wards using postcode data. There is nothing in the legislation that prevents the Boundary Commission from doing that; it is simply a choice not to act, and that cannot be a good enough foundation.

Andrew Rosindell: I totally agree with what my hon. Friend is saying. The absurdity of entire wards making constituencies that divide communities, particularly in

places such as Greater London, where we have huge wards in my constituency of 10,000 or 12,000, means that changing that involves massive upheavals and breaking up communities, so he is absolutely right that the Boundary Commission must be more flexible on this point.

Chris Clarkson: Certainly, in some of the larger metropolitan boroughs, there is what I call the martini paradox, where three wards is not quite enough and four is too many.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I am listening to the hon. Gentleman's speech with great interest. I wonder if he agrees with me, as an advocate for democracy, that we should have automatic voter registration. That would genuinely ensure that everybody gets an equal voice.

Chris Clarkson: If the hon. Lady will bear with me, I will come to that point when I address new clause 3.

I do not support new clause 1; I think that it is intended to undermine the concept of electoral equality and that it would cause further exponential disruption in future reviews as seats get further and further away from the mean, exacerbated by the large deviation permitted

New clause 2 is unconscionable. Setting a minimum quota for each nation would ultimately lead to one of two outcomes: either the malapportionment that we currently have, whereby some votes count for nearly twice as much as others, or the situation that developed in Canada, which has minimum quotas for areas and where rafts of new seats had to be added to Parliament to ensure some level of electoral equality. Under that approach, if Wales were to maintain its 40 seats, Greater Manchester alone would have almost as many MPs and the south-east would have well over 100. When we have one eye on the overpopulation of the other place, it strikes me as frankly bizarre that our nationalist friends should seek to pack this one, too.

David Linden: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have a lot of time for him, but he will recognise that the rule in the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986 was introduced under the Government of Margaret Thatcher. The number of seats in Scotland was then amended from 73 to 59, in recognition of devolution. It is a well-established process that the devolved nations have that protected constituency; indeed, it was a Tory Government who put it in place.

Chris Clarkson: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have a lot of time for him, too. I am not here to blindly say that I agree with everything that my party has ever done; I think that using an electoral quota is a much fairer way of doing it.

As I say, it strikes me as frankly bizarre that when we are concerned about the overpopulation of the other place, we should be trying to pack this place out. The hon. Gentleman played an extremely constructive role on the Bill Committee, with some very sensible proposals—he is one of us! [*Interruption.*] I mean an electoral geek, obviously. It is just a shame that his new clause 2 does not follow that lead, so I will give it “D minus—must try harder.”

Let me move on to new clause 3, which I think our Liberal Democrat friends might find a bit disappointing, too. Although on some level I have sympathy with the

[Chris Clarkson]

idea of including those who are not on the electoral register, we have to use the fairest and most consistent data available to us, which is the electoral register. If some people choose not to be on it, that is their choice. Similarly, some people will not qualify, and it is unfair to try to guess who those people might be. In either case, I do not think that adding additional people to the register will improve any electoral chances.

Lastly, I turn to the concept of automaticity, which is covered by amendment 1. I hardly need—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order.

Chris Clarkson: Shall I wind up, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Chris Clarkson: Okay. Somebody else can deal with automaticity.

Madam Deputy Speaker: We are not really doing very well so far, are we? We will have another go at trying to stick to six minutes. John Spellar, I am sure, will do that.

John Spellar: I shall certainly try, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Can we be frank? Boundary changes are a real nuisance, but a necessary nuisance. We all accept that they have to happen, even though they are a problem for Members of Parliament, and indeed for political organisations and often for constituents. Everyone accepts that; what people do not accept is gratuitous disruption, which is what we have had over the past 10 years.

Let us be clear about what the Bill is trying to do: it is trying to clear up the mess from the shoddy, squalid deal between David Cameron and Nick Clegg, into which they both put exercises for party political advantage. The Lib Dems thought that they would get proportional representation; the Tories thought that they would rig the redistribution process; and neither worked. One of the reasons why there was such opposition in Parliament, and why the changes were never put to Parliament, was precisely that the Government knew that they could not command a majority among their own Members, who recognised that. Several Chief Whips tried to persuade very stubborn Prime Ministers of that fact.

Why did the problems occur? Basically, the idea was fatally flawed, and it was made worse by the 5%. That rigid demarcation ended up forcing the Boundary Commission to make decisions and plans that made no sense on the ground. Take Birmingham: one ward was taken out of Sutton Coldfield, which has never accepted that it is part of Birmingham, and transferred to Birmingham, Erdington, while another ward was taken from Birmingham, Erdington and put into Sutton Coldfield. Nobody was happy with that, but it was forced on them by the narrow constraints. Similarly, my constituency, part of which is right up at the edge of Birmingham, was moved right the way through Sandwell and into Dudley town centre.

There was no coherence, no community, between them, and everybody recognised that. Another one went from the middle of Halesowen right the way in a strip across Birmingham, and that was replicated all around the country.

4 pm

Mike Wood: The right hon. Member will remember that the Halesowen and Selly Oak constituency was dropped by the Boundary Commission in its revised proposals. Does that not show how an independent Boundary Commission can respond well to reasoned arguments—rather better sometimes than parliamentarians?

John Spellar: Why did it come up with that in the first place when it was clearly such a dumb proposal? Parliament was the necessary corrective to this. It said: “This doesn’t work”, and by the way Conservative Members were still in a majority at the time. What’s even more extraordinary, in this Parliament, where the Government have a clear majority, they still do not believe they could carry the day with their own Members. There is a danger of that. There is a danger that the bureaucracy of the Boundary Commission will not pay regard to local sensitivities or communities and we will end up once again with boundaries of which Governor Gerry of Massachusetts, the founder of the gerrymander, would have been proud.

At the same time, it would be much better to go back to many of the basic principles, such as the principle, where possible, of not crossing borough or ward boundaries. In urban areas as well, these places form communities. The hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) is right about the size of some of the building blocks. That is why, within boroughs and other areas, people might have to accept some temporary disparity, but that might be a better than having one MP representing part of a particular ward and another representing the rest. Equally, there is the problem of orphan wards, which we have in many areas of the boundary review, whereby one ward is in a constituency in another borough. Inevitably, the focus of the Member of Parliament will be on the main borough. It is unnecessary and gratuitous.

It all depends on whether people believe, as I certainly do, and many Conservative Members do as well, in the fundamental principle of individual constituencies with individual Members of Parliament, not proportional list Members. If people think that Members of Parliaments’ connection to their constituencies does not matter, that is fine—just have a national list. I fundamentally do not believe that—and by the way nor did the British public when they voted it down in a referendum.

Let us be clear: we want to ensure that parliamentarians represent their constituencies and their constituency interests, and that is why we need a parliamentary override and a slightly wider area of discretion, so that anomalies can be properly dealt with and responded to, rather than the artificial constructs the Boundary Commission is forced into—maybe sometimes it goes into them a little too willingly—instead of looking at the interests of localities, particularly in urban areas.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I was actually enjoying the speech from the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar), and I agreed with some of his points, but it is worth pointing out that the purpose of the original decision by David Cameron and Nick Clegg to reduce the number of constituencies was to reduce the cost of politics at the time. [Interruption.] That was the argument put forward. Then we had Brexit and so on, but I actually agree with the principle of 650 constituencies in the

UK, because if we are not going to reduce the size of the Executive, it would create some disparity, so I welcome the changes.

I congratulate the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), and all the members of the Bill Committee on their work. It can be a complicated matter on occasions. We must not lose sight of the basic principle behind the Bill, which is to ensure that each vote in the UK carries the same weight—that there is an equal suffrage. When someone casts their vote in the polling station at any election, they should be confident that their vote is just as valuable as anybody else's. We therefore need boundary changes to take place, because there is an unacceptable disparity now.

I agree again with the right hon. Member for Warley that we as parliamentarians and constituency MPs do not like boundary changes, because we put a lot of investment, time and commitment into building up a relationship with our constituents, communities, villages and towns, and at a stroke of a pen the Boundary Commission can remove that connection that we have worked so hard on. In some ways, these changes are welcome, but in some ways they can be very difficult.

The main reason I wanted to speak in this debate is that, as sad as it may sound, I was looking through the *Hansard* reports of the Public Bill Committee and an awful lot was said about the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and its attitude towards the electoral quota and how much tolerance there should be between the size of different constituencies. I am the UK lead on the OSCE, and I have looked into what it actually said. For Members who are unaware of its work, the organisation sends election monitors to various countries around the world to ensure they are carried out in a fair, impartial and democratic way.

The OSCE does not have a view on whether there should be a 5% or a 7.5% tolerance in the electoral quota, but it is worth noting what it states in its "Guidelines for Reviewing a Legal Framework for Elections". It states:

"Electoral constituencies should be drawn in a manner that preserves equality among voters. Thus, the law should require that constituencies be drawn in such a way that each constituency has approximately the same population size...The manner in which constituencies are drawn should not circumvent the principle of equal suffrage, which is a cornerstone of democratic elections."

Emma Hardy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Since his hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) was unable to get to the point in his speech where he was going to answer my question, I will instead ask him. In this keenness to involve every person and make every vote count, what is his opinion on automatic voter registration?

Gareth Johnson: People have the option, if they want, to register to vote. That was made a very easy process by the previous Government, particularly through the actions of my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose), who was at pains to ensure that people found it very easy to register to vote. Of course, people have the right not to vote if they wish. I would argue that automatically assuming that somebody wants to vote is incorrect.

John Spellar: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman read the Committee reports, but I am not sure he read my comments. I read out the OSCE's recommendation that

"the maximum admissible departure from the distribution criterion...should seldom exceed 10 per cent"—

departure from the criterion would mean in either direction—

"and never 15 per cent, except in really exceptional circumstances".

We were being quite modest; we were only asking for a 7.5% departure.

Gareth Johnson: I did read the right hon. Gentleman's quote, and I have looked into exactly what that was. It was not the OSCE that said that, but the Council of Europe's Venice Commission. It is clear from the quote I gave and from what the Council of Europe has said that the further we move away from the median, and the greater tolerance we give to departures from it, the less weight there is to each individual vote and the more disparity there will be between constituencies.

If the House allows for 7.5% to be the maximum departure from the electoral quota, we would be saying that the size of an electorate can differ by 15 percentage points between individual constituencies. We would then be going down a road where people's votes would not count the same, so I think new clause 1 should be rejected for that reason. The main reason we are having boundary changes is to ensure we do not have constituencies that are too large, and we have got constituencies that are too large. We also have constituencies that are too small, where people have a greater weight to their individual votes. I argue that we should reject the 7.5% proposal.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Madam Deputy Speaker, I do apologise for attending the Chamber late—it takes me a little time to get here.

The hon. Member refers to avoiding making constituencies too large. The present constituency that I represent, if it had been enlarged under the David Cameron proposals, would have included Shieldaig, and the driving time from Shieldaig to Wick, which is also in the constituency—148 miles—is three hours and 15 minutes. What I want to put to the hon. Member and the Chamber is that this is not just about the number of votes, but about the right of access to an MP that the voters have. When an MP has to cover an area that big, surely there is a democratic deficit.

Gareth Johnson: This is perhaps one of the arguments behind keeping to 650 so the actual sizes of constituencies do not change. I have one of the few constituencies in the country that would actually have lost voters, even under the 600 formula, so there are a lot of differences between hon. Members' constituencies.

I would ask that the Labour party supports this Bill as it goes through Parliament. The only thing in the Labour party's manifesto about boundary changes was changing from 600 to 650. It has got what it asked for, and therefore should be supportive of the Government on this particular Bill.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I shall speak to new clause 3, tabled in my name and those of my other Liberal Democrat colleagues, and the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas).

The Government's rationale for this Bill is that they want to make every vote count equally, and we have heard that. I pointed out on Second Reading that an electoral system in which a Government can win a

[Wendy Chamberlain]

majority of seats in this House without a majority of votes is one in which votes can never count equally. What the Government really mean is that they want to ensure that constituencies are more or less equally sized. I think there is broad agreement across the House that, within our current electoral system, there are good reasons to do this, although there is clearly disagreement about just how strict that equality should be.

While we have spent much time discussing how much equality there should be between constituencies, we have not really addressed what I believe is a fundamental question: equality of what? That is why I have tabled my amendment. The legislation, as it currently stands, says that there should be equality between the electorates of different constituencies, and that equality should be determined as a proportion of the electorate of the country.

That is not the only option available. New Zealand, for example, uses the census to determine constituency sizes, and I am sympathetic to this. We provide public services to everyone in our constituency, regardless of whether they are eligible to vote or indeed registered to vote. However, my new clause does something else: it redefines what “electorate” means for the purposes of this Bill. Currently, the electorate within the scope of the Bill means all those people on the electoral roll. I would expand this definition. My amendment would include all those who are eligible to vote, not just those who happen to be on the electoral roll at the time of the review.

According to the Electoral Commission, over 9 million people who are eligible to vote are not currently on the electoral roll. I would suggest to the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) that these are not necessarily people who choose not to vote. Our electoral register is incomplete by a large amount. That is a huge problem for our democracy, and it is a problem for this Bill and for what the Government hope to achieve by it, for how can we say that this Bill makes constituencies equal sized when it is based on an incomplete register that misses out nearly 20% of eligible voters? It is easy to think up examples. Two parts of this country may well have an identical number of eligible voters, but one local register may be more complete than the other, and as a result one part of the country counts for more than the other when it comes to the boundary review. That will be the reality when this review takes place.

This also raises questions about the value some Members are placing on this 5%. We must also remember that, by the time of the 2024 election, voters who have lived overseas for more than 15 years will, according to this Government’s manifesto, also be eligible to vote. This is a move that I and my party welcome, but it is another reason why the boundaries that this review will create will never be truly equal. They are out of date before they are even used for the first time.

The most concerning thing, however, is that the 9 million who are eligible to vote but not on the register are not just a random collection of individuals. The groups who are disproportionately likely to be eligible to vote but not on the roll include young people, renters, those for whom English is not their first language, and black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. As far as I am concerned, this is a total failure of public policy.

Since the murder of George Floyd back in May, we have collectively reflected across this House on the fact that the structures and institutions that make up our society too frequently produce inferior outcomes for those people who are not white. Every Member of this House should be incredibly concerned about the fact that if someone is black, they are disproportionately unlikely to appear on the electoral roll. We are about to carry out a boundary review that will disproportionately exclude BAME people from being counted. That surely is not right.

That is the problem my new clause seeks to address. It would mean that the fact that our register is incomplete does not make a difference because the Boundary Commission would consider these potential electors too. It is entirely possible to treat 100% enrolment as an achievable goal.

Within this country, in Northern Ireland, there is a far more concerted effort to ensure that those in sixth forms and colleges are put on to the electoral register just as they turn 18. I welcome such assisted registration measures, which should be considered throughout the UK. The Government should accept that the annual canvass fails to register a huge number of people. Automatic voter registration is used in many countries, and it is an issue that the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) raised in her ten-minute rule Bill recently. Just last week, the Lords Select Committee on the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 found the same thing. It said that completeness of the register had not improved, and it proposed automatic and assisted registration as well as ways to reduce duplicate applications. We have to be doing more on this issue, and I hope that the Minister will offer assurances during her winding-up speech that the Government are willing to engage with this issue.

4.15 pm

This is a probing amendment, because Members accept that if we want the review to go ahead later this year, providing estimates of eligible voters might be difficult. I welcome the fact that an agreement to use the register for March this year, as opposed to December, has been reached. That shows that the Government accept that we should not be using incomplete registers. This is an issue of sufficient weight that I would be minded to move to a vote if the Government fail to offer an indication that they would be willing to engage on this issue.

We should bear all these points in mind as we look forward to the Government’s future legislative programme. We have all agreed that our democracy should be fair, but it also needs to be accessible and enabling.

Andrew Bowie: It will not surprise anybody that I rise in support of the Bill. The current boundaries of the parliamentary constituencies resulted from the fifth periodical review in Scotland. That was based on data gathered between 2001 and 2003, and completed in 2004. I was thinking about that earlier on, and I had a look at what was happening in 2004. What was in the news? Labour were seven years into a majority Government; the Hutton report was released; the European Union expanded, with 10 new countries joining; “Friends” aired for the final time—Rachel got off that plane; something called Facebook was launched at Harvard University,

but I am sure it will never catch on; and Tony Blair banished—sorry, sent—Peter Mandelson to Brussels as our European Commissioner. It was a much simpler time. I was 17 and looking forward to my final year at school. My point is that this Bill is long overdue.

When the last Boundary Commission report altered the boundaries of West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine to their current state, the population in my constituency was just over 81,000. The population of West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine now stands at an estimated 97,041, which is an increase of 16,000. Interestingly, the electoral roll has also grown by about 10,000 in that period. That will come as no surprise to those of us who have witnessed the growth of Portlethen, Westhill and Banchory over this time.

This legislation and the resultant review are long overdue. The geography of many towns and settlements in my constituency has changed beyond all recognition, such has been the scale of house building over the past two decades, and that story is replicated in some form in every constituency across the United Kingdom. Constituencies are not stuck in aspic. People move, the economy evolves, and populations rise and fall, so it is welcome that the Bill requires the Boundary Commission to report every eight years from July 2023. We should never again be in a position where we wait what will be, by then, 19 years between reviews. Not, of course, that we have been waiting 19 years between reviews, because we all know that there have been various attempts and, indeed, various reports from the Boundary Commission between 2010 and now, but today I am glad that we will finally see progress and that in 2023 a report will be implemented.

There must be equal representation of all people in this place, wherever in the United Kingdom they live. Every vote should count the same. How can we have confidence that that will be the case? How do we know that Liberal Democrat shenanigans and parliamentary arithmetic will not get in the way of implementing the commission's recommendations, as they have done in the past? *[Interruption.]* I will tell hon. Members why. It is because the single most important part of the Bill, clause 2, removes us MPs from the process. It is frankly ridiculous for MPs to vote on boundary changes. While I would never suggest that—

John Spellar: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Bowie: I will give way, but I am conscious of the time.

John Spellar: Is he saying that Parliament has been ridiculous for almost the whole of its existence? What was wrong with Parliament being involved in the final stage?

Andrew Bowie: I would never suggest that anybody who was in Parliament for all those years was in any way acting ridiculously, and I do not think that it was ridiculous, but it was quite clear that none of the commission's reports would ever be implemented. The parliamentary arithmetic prevented them from being implemented, whenever it was attempted to do so.

David Linden: Part of the point that the hon. Gentleman is missing is that it is not just Members of Parliament who have that oversight; it is also their noble lordships in the other place. Is he aware of that?

Andrew Bowie: I am fully aware of that; I was speaking about the entirety of Parliament. I am going to get back to my speech, because I am conscious of time and I know that Madam Deputy Speaker would like me to wrap up quite soon.

I would never suggest that Members of this House would have anything but the good of our country and their constituents as their motive for supporting or opposing legislation in this place, but the practice of MPs voting essentially on whether to abolish themselves is wrong. We saw it with the previous iteration of this Bill in the last Parliament: there was talk of deals and swaps; colleagues and friends were eyeing each other suspiciously over the top of newspapers in the Tea Room, looking out for trip hazards at the top of stairwells. One almost fancied an early retirement, as one of my good friends said to me on my 32nd birthday.

Likewise, we cannot see essential boundary changes stymied by political machinations, as we did in 2012 when Nick Clegg abandoned the then boundary review, worrying that his party would lose about 15 seats. It is important that we oppose amendment 1 in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, which would seek—as it says in the explanatory statement—to “maintain the status quo”, because the status quo does not work. The draft Order in Council giving effect to recommendations no longer being subject to any parliamentary procedure or approval before it is made is an important and positive move, and hon. and right hon. Members should oppose amendment 1, which would remove it. Of course it remains in Parliament's gift to create new primary legislation to manage this, as it always has.

I turn briefly to the Scottish National party's new clause 2. I must admit that I was rather disappointed to see that it is so depressing in tone. Protecting seats in the devolved nations is, of course, an admirable thing to fight for, but to do so at the expense of English constituencies is deeply unfair. Had the new clause in the name of the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) sought to protect the number of English seats, I may even have found myself walking through the Division Lobby with my friend on the SNP Benches.

James Grundy: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Andrew Bowie: I will not because of the time.

I am fully aware that SNP Members do not view us as one nation, but we Conservative Members most certainly do. We believe that there should be equal representation for every seat in the United Kingdom. I shall not detain the House any longer. This is a good Bill and it should have our full-throated support this evening.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Everyone on the Opposition Benches accepts that this parliamentary boundary review is overdue. I think we all also accept that what we want to achieve is equality in the weight of each individual elector's vote. However, we found from the evidence that we took and our deliberation in Committee that that is not possible.

There are local circumstances that require flexibility in how we construct our parliamentary constituencies, and I very much favour flexibility for the Boundary Commission to be able to get on with its job. We heard from Mr Bellringer from the Boundary Commission, who said that greater flexibility allowed the commission

[Clive Efford]

the opportunity to facilitate local concerns and make the best of representations from local communities, and it allowed him to do his job more efficiently. We do not represent individuals alone. We represent communities. I firmly believe that if we create flexibility, we can protect the communities that the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) referred to earlier. That is why the 5% rigid limitation that the Government want to impose is wrong.

The Boundary Commission wrote to the Committee with some additional evidence, in which it said that “a ward is a unit of electoral administration”.

Breaking up wards therefore needs to be avoided because it creates difficulty in administering elections. But if that is true, it must also be true that to go across a local government boundary is even more disruptive. What we have to create for the Boundary Commission is the flexibility to avoid circumstances that force it to decide that a parliamentary constituency must take orphan wards from a neighbouring local authority area or bits of communities from a neighbouring area that do not really match up to the communities in the main body of the constituency. We must accept the need to minimise disruption of that kind, so we need to ensure that the people making the recommendations on parliamentary boundaries have the maximum flexibility to do their job.

Andrew Rosindell: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but does he agree that sometimes a ward is completely artificial, so to break up a ward can actually unite a community, rather than divide it? Therefore, the Boundary Commission should be more flexible about using smaller building blocks, such as polling districts, or even an individual road that it makes sense to transfer into a constituency?

Clive Efford: I agree, provided it is within a recognisable local government area and a recognisable community, and there is support from the local community. In additional evidence the Boundary Commission sent, it talked about the administrative problems of going down to polling district level. The commission referred to getting Ordnance Survey to map all the polling districts in the whole country, but it seems to me that all it has to do is ring up the electoral registration offices, which can tell it how many people live in every road in every polling district. Why go to a separate organisation to find out information that is already recorded on a given date when we start the parliamentary boundary review? If that is already recorded and kept, all the Boundary Commission has to do is refer to it; then, it could go down to sub-ward level where that makes sense locally. I think the commission is creating problems for itself.

Why 7.5%? We had evidence from Dr Rossiter, who has researched this issue. He explained that as we go up from 5% to 6% to 7% to 8%, although each percentage point seems a small amount, it improves the quality of the outcome, and that there are benefits from moving from 5% to 6% to 7% or 8% because it improves the decision-making process. He then said that, beyond 8%, that benefit diminishes. The amendment therefore proposes 7.5%, and the experts who gave evidence favour a figure close to 7.5%. I ask the Government to reconsider their position, as they no doubt will in the other place,

to look at the evidence and to accept that 7.5% is a much more sensible figure than the rigid 5% which we know has created problems in the past.

Alun Cairns: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Clive Efford: No, because I heard Madam Deputy Speaker cough, which is telling me, “Efford, shut up.” I will conclude by making one point about parliamentary oversight.

If we had not had parliamentary oversight, we would now have 600 MPs, and I do not think anyone in this Chamber thinks we should have 600 MPs. Parliamentary oversight saved us from that gerrymander attempt, which I will not dwell on because I do not have time. It is Parliament that sets the rules, and in any process where someone sets the rules and sends someone else off to perform a function, at the end of it there must be oversight to ensure that the function was performed efficiently and according to the rules that were set out. That is what Parliament does. That is Parliament’s role in this area. Why do we not trust ourselves to perform the function that Parliament is put here to perform? If we set the Boundary Commission a task to perform, we should have oversight of the outcome. If we had not had oversight of the previous two reviews, we would have made the mistake of cutting our number to 600, with all the consequent chaos.

Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): This Bill is all about creating fair and proper representation in this House for everyone in the United Kingdom. Although there are many local challenges, we should be proud that the Bill aims to achieve just that, and for that reason I very much welcome it.

The Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 put in place processes to reduce the number of MPs in this House from 650 to 600. In Cornwall, the number of MPs would have been reduced from six to five and a bit. Reducing the number of MPs in that way meant that it was highly unlikely that the boundary of Cornwall would be respected, but that a cross-border constituency formed of towns and parishes in both Devon and Cornwall could and would be created. When the Boundary Commission for England published its proposals for the new constituency boundaries, it produced a parliamentary seat that quickly acquired the nickname of “Devonwall”, which naturally caused considerable upset in Cornwall and a bit of damage to Cornish pride. I tried at the time to argue that it was the start of a takeover, but the commission was not buying it.

Cornwall is a historic nation with its own traditions, its own heritage and its own language, and in 2014 the Cornish people became protected through the Council of Europe’s framework convention for the protection of national minorities. I am happy to say that because of this Bill, the cross-border issue appears to have been rectified for now, and I am grateful to the Bill Committee.

John Spellar: Can the hon. Lady see the logical inconsistency? Had the provisions of the Bill about automaticity gone through, there would not have been any way of stopping that; they would have gone through, and Cornwall would have been disadvantaged under precisely that rule.

4.30 pm

Cherilyn Mackrory: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but on this review, the mathematics mean that the people in Cornwall will be represented within its boundary, as we would expect.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Clive Efford: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Cherilyn Mackrory: I will press on, because we need to get other hon. Members this afternoon.

Constituency boundaries should coincide, where possible, with local administrative boundaries, which should help my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie). I am pleased that the Bill, by reviewing the number of MPs needed for fair and effective representation, ensures that the United Kingdom will continue to have 650 Members to serve in this House and six whole, passionate, hard-working Cornish MPs.

It is worth remembering that, as well as protecting the culture and identity of national minorities, the framework convention seeks to protect the political integrity of territories. I am of the opinion that the Bill will help to protect the Cornish people as a national minority by affording us fair representation for effective government, and our boundaries will stay intact. Once the Bill has passed, it will be for the Cornish MPs, the local authority in Cornwall and local residents to work with the Boundary Commission to ensure that the identity of Cornwall is protected, with its six constituencies within its boundaries, to offer the equal and fair representation that the people deserve.

There is an appetite in Cornwall to look further at greater autonomy, and I am sure that the Government will be more than happy to work with Cornwall towards that goal. It is through that mechanism that I call for more permanent protection of Cornwall's historic boundary, and I look forward to future conversations with Ministers to that end. If the local authority in Cornwall is serious about greater autonomy, I invite it to be part of those conversations with the Government at that time to achieve that. However, for now, I will continue to do what I can to ensure that my constituents in Truro and Falmouth get the fair representation that they deserve, as well as continued support through the current crisis and beyond, and I thank the Government for their part in that.

To that end, I support the Bill, and I support the Government's attempts to safeguard and encourage democracy throughout the whole country.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): It is a pleasure to participate in this debate, and a particular pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Cherilyn Mackrory), with whom I agree quite strongly that Cornwall is its own nation and should be respected. Indeed, in Committee, we received quite a bit of evidence to that effect from Cornwall Council and Councillor Dick Cole, who drew our attention to the fact that the UK Government recognised Cornwall as a minority nation back in 2014, and that its territorial integrity in terms of representation in this place must be respected.

I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Member that that should be addressed. Where we might disagree somewhat is that I believe we perhaps need to go further

—this is something that could be looked at again under this Bill, perhaps in the other place—to see how we can ensure that those safeguards for the people and the nation of Cornwall are adequately protected.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I am a fan of the Kingdom of Sussex and I still sing “Sussex by the Sea” on our national day, but is that not an argument for keeping within county boundaries or historic national boundaries? We therefore need a higher variance on the number; otherwise, the Cornish will be saved this time, but they will not be saved next time.

Ben Lake: The hon. Member makes a good point in terms of the fact that the protections are temporary, in so far as the mathematics, or the population, this time around is protected and works for Cornwall, but in the future there need to be other safeguards.

Cherilyn Mackrory: I would like to take this argument when we have further devolution calls; at that point, because Cornwall has a special status, I would like to see the boundary protected.

Ben Lake: That is a very good point well made.

To return to more familiar ground—Wales—let me say in passing that I was very pleased to see Ynys Môn included as a protected constituency. I see that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) is here. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) on her amendment. I tried to table a very similarly worded amendment—I see the right hon. Member gesturing—but it did not quite fit the bill. What is important is that the change got through. It is a rare day indeed when the Labour party, the Conservative party and Plaid Cymru find common cause on anything, so in that sense it is very good.

I am conscious that I was distracted earlier, so I will now keep to some points about Wales, and particularly a question raised during Committee stage that I believe warrants further debate, and which the right hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns) touched on: the allocation of seats between the nations of the UK. Other Members have already drawn attention to the fact that Wales is likely to lose quite a significant number of seats at this initial boundary review, which, yes—before anybody intervenes—is partly a result of our not having had a boundary review for so many years. The hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) and I had a good exchange on that in Committee.

However, although I completely understand the arguments for applying a single UK-wide electoral quota and agree with its proponents that it has a logical coherence, I think that the unintended consequences of such an approach should be addressed. In Committee, some practical issues with changing to a single UK-wide electoral quota were addressed, including that we are tying ourselves to demographic changes, with automaticity clauses meaning that further changes are implemented without further discussion or decision by this place.

Reference has been made to the fact that we base our electoral registers on those who are eligible to vote, as opposed to populations, but for the sake of argument, between 2001 and 2018 the population of Wales grew by some 200,000. Projections suggest that between 2018 and 2028—just before the further review—it will grow

[Ben Lake]

by another 2.7%. However, it is likely, according to the evidence we received in Committee, that the number of seats that Wales will send to this place will be reduced initially by eight, or perhaps seven, and a further one or two at the next review.

Some practical issues, including the creation of large geographical constituencies, have been addressed, particularly by the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone). However, there are constitutional considerations as well. Wales will lose eight seats initially, and unless demographic trends change quite significantly in the coming decade, we stand to lose further representation in this place. The right hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan made the valid point that one thing that has changed in the last decade or two is the devolution settlement, although that was not necessarily the rationale put to us for the move to a single UK-wide electoral quota. But if we were to adopt that logic, as the representative from the Liberal Democrats told us in Committee, there should be no reduction without further devolution.

Alun Cairns: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, for a cohesive society to sustain itself, equal representation is fundamental?

Ben Lake: I completely acknowledge and note the right hon. Gentleman's arguments, but we fundamentally disagree. I consider the UK to be a union of four nations, as opposed to a single entity. I think we are at an impasse and will never be able to agree. I acknowledge that his argument is coherent, but I do not agree with it, which is more than I can say for other Members.

The representation of the peoples of the UK could be addressed if we were to explore reforms to other parts of the constitution, most notably the other place. Other countries have shown that second Chambers can be very good at doing this. However, that is not on offer at the moment and, indeed, is not a measure before the House. For that reason, I encourage Members to support new clause 2, to at least make us pause and make sure that it is a conscious decision to reduce the number of MPs from the respective nations of the UK.

Mrs Miller: It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake). I am pleased to hear his support for my old new clause 10, which now makes up clause 7 in the Bill. I think he will find that his amendment was what we call technically defective. However, it is good to hear his support.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to this group of amendments on Report, but before I do that, it says it all when Labour characterises boundary changes, as the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) did, as unnecessary nuisances. The Bill is all about the quality of our democracy. Fair and equal-sized constituencies are at the heart of it.

John Spellar: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs Miller: The right hon. Gentleman has had quite a lot of giving way. I am not giving way.

John Spellar: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) attributed a statement to me that is not actually what I said. I therefore seek the opportunity to correct that.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): It is up to the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) whether she wants to give way.

Mrs Miller: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I actually wrote it down—perhaps the right hon. Gentleman needs to check *Hansard*.

John Spellar: You got it wrong! I said “a necessary”, not “unnecessary”.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman has put his views on the record, but he really must not interrupt in that way.

Mrs Miller: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Bill is all about the quality of our democracy and about fair and equal-sized constituencies, which are at the heart of the Bill. It is to ensure that every vote counts the same. I see that as part of a fair democracy. This group of amendments repeats many of the debates in Committee, despite the compelling evidence that we received. They are designed to dilute the intention of the Bill and, in doing so, reduce its effectiveness in delivering better democracy.

I will look at just two amendments: new clause 1 and amendment 1. New clause 1, which would allow an up to 15% difference between each of our constituencies, fundamentally tries to undermine the intention of the Bill. Anyone listening to the debate today would think that our communities all come in packages of particular sizes; that is simply not the case. Swindon and Reading both had to be split in two, and any increase in the tolerance around the quota would not have really helped them. My constituency of Basingstoke now has 83,000 people. Whatever way we read that, Basingstoke will have to be carved up into different constituencies, regardless of the fact that it is clearly one coherent community.

The cornerstone of what we are doing here has to be the issue of equal suffrage. That is the cornerstone of our democracy and we cannot con ourselves into thinking that our communities can be carved up easily—they cannot. It is difficult. Perhaps the right hon. Member for Warley had a point when he used the words—which I must get right now to ensure I do not affront him again—an unnecessary nuisance, because in many ways this is very difficult to put into practice. However, it was central to our 2019 Conservative party manifesto that we would have updated and equal parliamentary boundaries to ensure that every vote counted the same.

On the amendment, if we are to reach the Bill's objective, we need to urge the Boundary Commission to be far more imaginative in how it looks at our communities and go below the ward level when trying to construct new boundaries. It is possible within the existing rules to do that—no rule change is required—but I was rather taken aback by some of the Boundary Commission's evidence saying how difficult that would be, particularly given that software with geographic information system capability has been purchased to enable sub-ward-level boundaries to be considered. I hope that the Minister may be able to edify the Chamber a little on what more work has been done in that direction.

I note that the Boundary Commission's letter by way of supplementary evidence said that the political parties were going to meet the commission prior to the review

starting. I hope the Minister may be able to reassure us that further headway will be made on this issue. I welcomed the commission suggesting, in that supplementary evidence, the prioritising of the mapping of metropolitan council areas where the largest ward electorate sizes occur, but if other areas in the country require that to happen, how will we handle that?

Perhaps the Minister could also consider how we should be dealing with the Boundary Commission between reviews to make sure that it is doing this basic spadework then, rather than when a review is imminent. It seems to be a poor use of resources to be dealing with it in this way.

4.45 pm

Amendment 1 would effectively remove automaticity—again, a cornerstone of this Bill. As my hon. Friend the Minister has said, far from keeping more power with the Executive, the Bill takes away that power. We have to be very clear that we would not be in the position we are in now if automaticity had been brought in before. We would not be dealing with boundaries using data that is 20 years out of date. Automaticity is an essential part of this Bill. I thoroughly urge the Minister to reject the amendments.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for tabling amendment 14, which gives my constituency of Ynys Môn protected status in this Bill. To all those Members who sat on the Bill Committee, diolch yn fawr—thank you very much.

When I was elected as the MP for Ynys Môn last December, I know that there were many on the island who felt that a Conservative from England who was only 50% Welsh would neither care for nor understand their views or their culture. I entered into politics to make a difference and to give a voice to those who feel they have none, wherever I am based. Over the past six months living on Anglesey with my husband, our three children and our cocker spaniel, I have been welcomed and encouraged, and I already feel that sense of “coming home” when I cross the Menai strait on to the island.

Going through lockdown on Anglesey has shown me very clearly the strong bonds that tie this island community together. I have witnessed overwhelming friendship and kindness, with towns and villages drawing together to protect and support each other. Voluntary groups like Stayce Weeder’s Anglesey’s Random Acts of Kindness and Steve MacVicar’s Seiriol Alliance, along with many, many others, have shown exactly what Anglesey’s communities are all about and why it is such a special place.

It would be easy to take a contemporary view of Ynys Môn as part of the mainland merely because it is close enough to be connected by two bridges, but that misses the point. Ynys Môn is, and always will be, an island community. It is an island with a fierce history of independence, separated from the UK by the narrow but treacherous Menai strait until the 1800s. It has often been annexed politically as well as physically from the mainland. It was the last stronghold of the druids against the invading Roman army, it was one of the first places Edward I put defences when he conquered Wales, and it is famous as Môn Mam Cymru for keeping north Wales fed through the middle ages.

The island is environmentally and ecologically different from the mainland. I took a wonderful drive round the north coast of the island at the weekend, where the rolling, fertile fields stand in testimony to its agricultural heritage, and the rocky coastline plays host to buildings that hark back to centuries of maritime trade. The mainland, in contrast, is mountainous and has different economic needs. Talking to local people over the past few months, I have seen and understood why they feel that the island should not be united politically with the mainland and that that would be detrimental locally.

The proposal to give Ynys Môn protected status puts it on a par with the other major islands in the UK—Orkney and Shetland, and the Isle of Wight. The support that my right hon. Friend’s amendment has received from these constituencies shows that there is a shared understanding among islanders of being different from the mainland. I was really pleased to see party politics put aside so that the amendment enjoyed unanimous support in Committee. I particularly thank the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) for his backing. He, too, has a genuine understanding of Ynys Môn’s desire to be acknowledged as an island community in its own right.

I will conclude with a message sent to me by one of my constituents:

“Virginia having you as our MP is like having a window on Westminster. You have clearly fallen in love with the island—and we are falling in love with you.”

James Grundy: I am delighted that my hon. Friend has secured statutory protection for her constituency, alongside my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). In a previous life, when I worked for the Scottish Conservatives, I argued strongly for a set of provisions that would cover all island-authority constituencies; I was very disappointed that Ynys Môn was left out. I think my hon. Friend would agree that a great injustice has been corrected in the new version of the legislation.

Virginia Crosbie: I thank my hon. Friend for his interruption—[*Interruption.*] Sorry—his intervention. I am a bit of a newbie.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Either works!

Virginia Crosbie: Either works. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (James Grundy) is present to see his journey continue. I am proud to be the MP for Ynys Môn, and I am equally proud and delighted to see the island recognised with protected status in the Bill.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie). I congratulate her on her success; I hope it is the first of many. I shall not repeat her constituency name too frequently in case I injure its pronunciation. It is a great tribute to her that she has got that success so soon in this Parliament.

As we know, every day is a school day. It has been interesting to hear people on the Government Benches talk with a straight face about the equalisation of seats, having operated and implemented the English votes for English laws process in this Parliament. If Members want an English Parliament, they should create it, and

[Gavin Robinson]

I will support it, but it is no substitute for our national Parliament, which is this Chamber. It is hard to listen to equalisation arguments, having been unnecessarily excluded from so many votes in this place since the creation of that policy.

As I say, every day is a school day, and it is interesting to learn that not only is there a song called “Sussex by the Sea”, but it is an anthem with a national day on which to be sung. The hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) is looking at me because he understands all the nuances in our wonderful British Isles. It would have been no surprise to him, but it was to me.

Having heard the comments from the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden), who is not in the Chamber, about how much he enjoyed the Bill Committee, I suppose I should probably not admit that I gave evidence to the Committee and probably added to the pain and suffering that he and other Committee members endured. I was pleased to give evidence as our party’s director of elections.

Some important contributions have resurfaced today, not only from the Bill Committee but on the amendment paper, and should be considered. I can see no argument against parliamentary sovereignty or parliamentary scrutiny of boundary commission proposals. I added my name to amendment 1 for that precise purpose. The hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) made the argument earlier about setting the task and then agreeing with the conclusion, and that is our role.

I do not agree with the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) when she suggests that there is a commensurate removal of Executive power. When I gave evidence to the Bill Committee, I think I was fair when I reflected that there is no equivalence or equalisation between parliamentary sovereignty and approval and a technical amendment mechanism that is not used by Ministers and has not been used by Ministers. I have yet to hear Ministers put forward a comprehensive or compelling example of when that ministerial power was used and how it is of equal comparison to the removal of parliamentary approval for boundary commission proposals in respect of the restructure in the Bill. I do not think there is such an example and I have yet to hear one, but I am happy to give way should somebody wish to correct me.

I support new clause 1, but it is fair to say that it contains many arguments in which I have no part to play. I will not put forward arguments about the retention of seats in Wales—that is for others—or about the retention of seats in Scotland, either. In 2018, the Government published the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill, which secured 18 seats for Northern Ireland. It was published but never progressed, but that legislative commitment was given by Government, and it was important for the constitutional and balanced position that we have in Northern Ireland. It was a commitment that was given and has not been repeated in this Bill, which is hugely regrettable, so I will support new clause 2 if it is brought to a vote.

On new clause 1, there are fair arguments about 5% and how much better the constituencies will be with the increase of every percentage point thereafter. This has not been raised in the Chamber thus far, but Members will know that, under the Parliamentary Constituencies

Act 1986, Northern Ireland has a special provision in rule 7 whereby, if the Boundary Commission is unable to construe boundaries with geographical significance or there is no further inaccuracy, we are allowed to have a tolerance of 10%. That rule is retained in this Bill, and we think it is an important rule. The Minister will know from the comments I made in evidence to the Bill Committee that, following a judicial review last year and the Court of Appeal judgment issued only two months ago, Boundary Commission proposals from Northern Ireland were struck down in the operation of rule 7, and we are concerned that there may be a chilling effect on the application of rule 7 in future Boundary Commission proposals.

We will support the increased tolerance from 5% to 7.5% because we think that it would give the greater flexibility required to ensure that Boundary Commission proposals in Northern Ireland are fair, balanced and not infected by other historical arguments that could be brought into the process. However, I am keen to hear from the Minister how lessons can be learned from the application of rule 7 and that the 10% tolerance—or 20%, since it is plus or minus 10%—is important for Northern Ireland, and future boundary commissioners should not be precluded from using it, because it plays an important part in the Boundary Commission process in Northern Ireland, and ultimately it needs to be retained.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Things have perked up enormously on the time front. However, from now on, if Members could stick to five minutes, everyone will be able to speak. I call Shaun Bailey.

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): Before I begin, on Black Country Day, I want to pay tribute to the Black Country chartists and suffragettes in Wednesbury and Tipton who fought for us to be here under one member, one vote and ensure that our constituents could be represented.

I fear that I may repeat many of the arguments that had been made eloquently today. It is great to follow the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), who gave enlightening and interesting evidence to the Bill Committee. I would like to thank all members of the Bill Committee. It was my first Bill Committee, and what a Bill Committee to be on. As my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) put it, it allowed me to utilise my psephological exuberance, which is a fantastic phrase that I will try to make sure I get into conversations from now on.

I want to touch on three main points. The first is on automaticity—a word that I have finally learned to say without tongue-twisting. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) said in Committee, at the moment we are in a situation where we mark our own homework; there is no doubt about that. I do not understand how we can reconcile that. I repeat what I said on Second Reading: what is being proposed is an independent, judiciary-led commission. I have trust and faith in our judiciary. I am a lawyer—that is bred into me. Unless someone wants to take me to school on this, my understanding of our constitutional structure is that this place sets the laws, and the judiciary help to interpret them, so I do not understand where this fear of what is business as usual comes from.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) articulated the point eloquently, as did my neighbour, the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar), about the Boundary Commission's Selly Oak proposal. The independent commission took evidence from the community, after which it made the decision that the proposal was not acceptable. We talk about this as if, once we get the initial recommendations, that is it—game over. It is not like that at all. Those who have been through the experience of a boundary change know full well that it is not like that, so I struggle to accept that argument from the Opposition.

When we talk about a 7.5% threshold, it is not actually 7.5%—it is 15%. Let us be honest about that. The Venice Commission report, which Opposition Members have quoted freely, states clearly that that 15% threshold is for exceptional circumstances.

The semantics of that report were quite clear. It effectively advised to steer well clear of going anywhere near that, and actually went so far as to suggest that we should keep that threshold as minimal as possible to ensure certainty, fairness and parity among constituencies. I do not accept Opposition Members' interpretation of that report.

5 pm

I do have sympathy, particularly with the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake), who has the honour of representing the town in which I went to university. It was great in Committee to go down memory lane, talking about places such as Llanbadarn, Llanbedr Pont Steffan, Pont-Siân and Aberystwyth, of course—the prime town in Wales. What I would say to him is that our constitutional settlement has changed. It was a point I raised in Committee, in that I think voters—electors—are sophisticated now. They understand the difference between a Member of Parliament and an Aelod o'r Senedd or Member of the Senedd. Electors understand the difference between their local authority and their devolved authority, and the fact is that our constitution is going through a period of change naturally. As a result, we have a scenario of 60 Members of the Senedd and 40 Members of Parliament. Effectively, we have a scenario of 100 elected representatives on that sort of threshold level. I understand what the hon. Gentleman is trying to say in geographic and cultural terms, particularly as self-taught Welsh speaker. I have sympathy with the cultural and language element, but constitutionally the numbers do not really help the argument.

In conclusion, I support the Bill and I oppose the amendments. We have to trust our judiciary and the Boundary Commission. We have to trust the fact that this is business as usual when it comes to how we make legislation, how we pass laws and I commend the Bill to the House.

Mike Wood: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and a very happy Black Country Day to you today. As a proud Black Country man it has been an honour to represent communities in Dudley South for the past five years. I hope to have the opportunity to do so for a number of years to come. Like many other constituencies in this country, the boundaries on which I was elected were last fundamentally altered ahead of the 1997 general election, based on electorates from the early 1990s. We are literally a generation out of date on the boundaries on which many of the constituencies in the west midlands were drawn up.

Like Members on both sides of the House, I am enormously fond of all parts of my constituency. I love every last ward and polling district of it. It would be a real wrench if any of it were to be taken out of Dudley South, but we also have to recognise that, like many of the Black Country constituencies, the current size of the constituency is under the quota whether it is based on 600 or 650. Many constituencies in the Black Country will need to take in additional areas and, of course, some will be divided between constituencies. I am as likely to find myself without a constituency to represent as any other Member of Parliament, but when we are considering fundamental constitutional reform such as this one it is not about whether I have a constituency to represent. This is not about me. This is about the wider electoral system. It must be a fundamental premise of our electoral system that constituencies have to be as close to the same size as is possible.

One of the very few upsides of this horrific outbreak and lockdown has been the opportunity to spend a little more time helping my children with their schoolwork at home. My daughter is in year 7 and she is studying the people's charter of 1838—it was referred to by my hon. Friend for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson)—which includes the campaign for constituencies based on equal numbers of electors. Many Opposition Members—and possibly even some Government Members—consider themselves the natural heirs of 19th century radicals, but instead of picking up the torch of William Lovett and Feargus O'Connor, it seems they are choosing to put themselves on the side of those arguing for representation on the basis of acres of land and for the geographic extent of a constituency to somehow override the priority of equalising the number of electors represented within. That cannot be the right way. It was not the right way in the 19th century and it is certainly not the right way in a 21st century democracy.

There is a better way, one that has been referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell); we can make sure that equal-sized constituencies can be drawn up that properly represent local constituencies if the boundary commissions are encouraged to look more favourably at dividing wards across constituencies where the alternative would be unnatural constituencies or dividing communities. That was done in the west midlands during the last review and it is one reason why the proposals by the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar)—he is not in his place—for a Halesowen and Selly Oak constituency, for Sutton Coldfield to be divided and for various other strange things in the initial recommendations were not in the final recommendations. It was precisely because in only three wards across the whole of the west midlands are they able to divide across natural boundaries within those wards, which are amalgamations of wards, and therefore have more natural boundaries across the constituency.

Let me briefly touch on the issue of automatic implementation. The right hon. Gentleman said that, as Parliament, we instruct these independent bodies to go out and draw up rules, and therefore we should be able to decide whether to implement them and whether they are the right decisions. But we also instructed the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority to draw up parliamentary pay and conditions. In the not-too-distant future, it will look as strange to people that we think we should draw the constituency boundaries on which we are elected—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I call Emma Hardy.

Emma Hardy: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have found the debate a little confusing, because the arguments that Conservative Members have been making, some of whom I hold in high regard, make me wonder how clearly and accurately they listened to the opening speeches. I would go as far as to say that there have been many straw man arguments created throughout this debate. At the outset, I wish to say that when quoting any Member of the House it is important that it is done accurately and precisely, and I hope *Hansard* will reflect that.

The Labour party of course accepts the need for boundary changes. No one has argued against that, so again I am slightly confused by the arguments presented by Conservative Members that somehow we are speaking against it. We have welcomed the fact that the Bill has moved to having 650 MPs and that the data being taken is from March 2020. I wish to spend a moment paying tribute to my staff for the amount of work they have done and for how hard they have worked during this pandemic. I am sure that is the case for all Members' staff throughout this time and we should all recognise the need for 650 MPs.

I wish to address some of the comments made by Conservative Members. I was disappointed to hear our amendment referred to as a “wrecking amendment”, as I thought that was unjustified. Trying to extend the flexibility of a boundary commission to take into account local history and local cultures is not “wrecking”; it is merely pragmatic and sensible, so I was disappointed with the language used. Another Member mentioned the need for the Boundary Commission to be more imaginative, but surely there needs to be recognition of the fact that it is difficult for it to be imaginative when its hands are tied behind its back because it is restricted to 5%. As our shadow Minister said, 5% on the basis of 600 Members is 4,000 electors, whereas 5% on the basis of 650 is only 3,500.

Yet another straw man argument being presented by Conservative Members is that all these constituencies would be 15% different, which shows that they have not accurately read the amendment. That is not what it says. It says that the Boundary Commission would use the 5% and have a tolerance to extend to 7.5% in areas where it is absolutely necessary. It does not at any point say, “Let’s encourage the Boundary Commission to make sure all our constituencies are 15% different.” Again, we saw another straw man and another disappointing argument from Conservative Members.

Some of the evidence that was given during the Bill Committee included comments from David Rossiter and Charles Pattie, who noted that it was the 5% that caused the greatest disruption. Indeed, one of the things that was so intolerable to the people in the community in the changes that were going to be implemented in my constituency of Hull West and Hessle was the movement across the natural boundaries. A ward was proposed that would instead go from east Hull into west Hull. I do not expect anyone in the House now to be aware of the historical traditions and rivalries between east and west Hull, but if Members look at our rugby teams as a good example of that friendly rivalry that exists in the community, they can perhaps start to understand why a

movement across the River Hull would be so intolerable. That was indeed mentioned by my predecessor, Alan Johnson, and by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull East (Karl Turner) in the evidence that they gave to the previous Boundary Commission. I suppose that part of my message to the Boundary Commission, via the Minister, is that it really does need to look at natural geography and the histories and cultural traditions of places. That is why I am in favour of allowing this extra tolerance—not on every occasion as has been mentioned—to ensure that it takes those historical differences into account.

I will not detain the House for too much longer, but I think it is also worth pointing out—it is certainly the feeling I get from residents in Hull—that no one would thank a political party for trying to enforce a new identity on an established community by moving it out of one community and insisting that it belongs to another. I am also a little perplexed by the idea that a political party, which seems to be so keen on taking back control of our borders, seems to want to relinquish control of our constituency borders to an unelected body.

On the point about bringing the decision back to Parliament, it is worth pointing out that we are under no illusion that, if we bring the matter back to Parliament, the Conservative party has the majority to force through what it wants, so this is a point of principle, rather than any realistic notion that we could change the decisions that have been made. That is why I support new clause 1 and amendment 1 in the name of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy). I am very glad to be able to speak today as, unfortunately, time ran out on me on Second Reading. I congratulate the Bill Committee on all the work it has done on this Bill in the meantime.

The obvious core point is about fairness, which a number of Members have mentioned. I will not go into any great detail, because it does seem to be a point that has been broadly conceded. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) represents nearly 100,000 people when plenty of Members in this House represent fewer than half that number. That is not fair on either him or, more importantly, on his constituents, because their votes literally count half as much as those of other constituencies.

On the subject of tolerance, a 5% tolerance is a 10% band, and every seat should be within 7,000 or so people, which is a perfectly reasonable proposition. We might flatter ourselves that the identity of our constituents is formed by the constituency in which they live, but I do not think that is the case at all. Our constituents actually look to their immediate community, and perhaps even to their church hall, which, as a polling station is an element of community. I do not think that constituents are that bothered by the name of the constituency in which they happen to live. My seat of Newcastle-under-Lyme is slightly on the small side, so I understand that that will mean changes for me. It means that I will probably have to absorb some more of the Loyal and Ancient Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme, which I welcome. I gently point out to the Boundary Commission

—if it is listening or reading *Hansard*—that crossing the A500 into Stoke-on-Trent will probably not go down very well in the area.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): If my hon. Friend is looking for more of the Newcastle-under-Lyme borough, could he please leave Kidsgrove and Talke alone?

Aaron Bell: The point of my hon. Friend and neighbour is well made.

I would also like to say how much distaste I feel when I hear these allegations of gerrymandering, which sometimes happens with these Bills. They seemed to start with the former Member for Blackburn and former Lord Chancellor, Jack Straw, who described our manifesto proposals in 2010 as “gerrymandering”. I regret to say that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), the Chair of the Committee on Standards, described this Bill as gerrymandering in a tweet in May. Nothing could be further from the truth. This Bill is quite the opposite; it levels the playing field. To call it “gerrymandering” is a slur on the Boundary Commission and the judicial process. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey) said, it is a judicial process and we should have trust that it will be fair. Either they do not know the meaning of the word “gerrymandering”, or they are choosing to misrepresent what is going on, potentially for partisan gain, or potentially to scare the electorate into thinking something nefarious is going on. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I am also pleased that this Bill introduces the automaticity that my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) was regrettably unable to get to in his speech.

It makes the translation of boundaries into law near automatic. It not only removes delay, but ensures integrity in the process.

5.15 pm

I was a neutral outside observer when I saw what happened in the 2010 to 2015 Parliament: clearly, the proposals that came back were, for partisan reasons, unwelcome to Members who had already voted that there should be a review on that basis. To answer the point made by the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford), the House had had its say. The House had said that we should be down to 600; now the House has changed its mind as a result of Brexit, and I understand that, but the House had already agreed to 600, yet the proposals that came back were not acceptable to Members for partisan reasons, because they feared they were going to lose their seats. That is what brings politics into disrepute—when we vote down judicially decided and fair proposals that have been reviewed through the processes that my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) talked about. If we do that because we are worried about our own individual seats—or the consequences for the Liberal Democrat party, which we can see right now—that brings politics into disrepute. So I really do welcome this, and for that reason I am completely against the proposal to remove the automaticity from this Bill.

Finally, I want to briefly raise something with the Minister, perhaps for another day. There are lots of amendments and suggestions about what we should do

with electoral registration; one of the real concerns with the present system is dual registration. I represent a university seat, and I know others who represent university seats, and obviously I represent the students in my seat to the best of my ability, even though I fear that not that many of them voted for me, but dual registration is fundamentally unfair for two reasons: first, it distorts the numbers on which the boundary review is based; and secondly, it gives anybody who is dual-registered, whether they have a second home or are a student, a choice of where to exercise their vote for maximum personal electoral gain. That is not fair, and we need to look at it in the future. People may want to register in two local authorities, but they should have to nominate which is their general election seat. That is something I propose for the future.

In conclusion, I support the Bill and thank the Minister and her team for all the work they have done on it. We must get as close as possible to the principle of equality, so that all votes in this place and in the country count the same.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: When I went to the Table Office a few weeks ago to pick up this Bill I picked up the wrong one, and I was reading it and thinking, “This is a particularly good Bill and it seems very reasonable and sensible,” and then I realised it was actually a private Member’s Bill from a number of Conservative Members. So better suggestions have been laid here in Parliament, and it is such a shame that the Government do not take more heed of their own Members. But let us talk about the content of the Bill before us today.

The question is, of course, what is in a number, because the reality is that a percentage does not really matter. We are talking about building blocks that are numbers, not percentages. We do not say, “In this ward there is 5% of the population”; we say, “In this ward there are 3,000 voters.” That is what we are working on.

So let us talk about practicalities. In the average metropolitan borough or London borough, the average ward size is 9,800 people—about 10,000 people. A 5% variance at the moment excludes all of those borough wards. It does not affect nice shire counties where, of course, Government Members predominately come from, because their average size is only 3,000. So of course they are able to build coherent communities in those places more easily, but it is harder in urban areas and we divide and rule communities there with this 5% variance. If we had a 7.5% variance, we would of course avoid that, because then the variance is 10,000; the vast majority of our urban wards would be able to be included as a whole, and there would be very little problem.

I think there is actually an argument to review how we do boundary proposals in their holistic nature from bottom to top, and say that the boundary commissions for local government should be creating wards of smaller sizes, so they fit into the shape of what we want the variance to be. There is an argument for doing that to get the building blocks right, but the Government have not come forward with such a proposal; they have rejected the idea of talking about local government reviews at the same time as parliamentary Government reviews. Since that is off the table, we need to accommodate ourselves to the situation that we have.

Mr Holden: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: No, I am afraid that time is very tight.

The predecessor Committee to mine suggested 10%, with a 15% allowance in exceptional circumstance. That was agreed across the parties in 2015; this is a far more modest proposal. Of course the Boundary Commission should aim to be dead on—no one is saying otherwise—but where that is impossible, we should allow it flexibility. To use a judicial analogy, we should allow the judge to use their expertise, rather than tying their hands behind their back.

We know that if the rules are written incorrectly, we will get a gerrymandered outcome. That is not the fault of the commissioners; it is not the fault of the judges, although it is not a judicial but a quasi-judicial process; it is a fault in how the rules are written, which is why it is so important that the question should come back here. It is not we who vote in Parliament; our votes are for the people, so removing this place's oversight is removing the oversight of the people.

Finally, I will quickly touch on how we look at the numbers. The 1917 boundary review, which was the first major boundary review in this country, used census data. The 1911 census, which I have been looking at recently while doing my ancestry—scarily, I am related to the Eustices; I must inform the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—was used as the building block, because it was both the census and the electoral roll. Splitting it has meant that we no longer have an automated electoral roll. If we either had an automated electoral roll or used the census, we would have fairer constituencies as well. I am disappointed that the Government have not included that.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call Alex Davies-Jones.

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab): Diolch, Madam Deputy Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this very important Bill; I will keep my comments brief because I know that we are short on time.

It will come as no surprise that I have concerns about the restrictive 5% electoral quota and the impact that it will have on constituencies such as the area that I represent in the heart of the south Wales valleys. Creating constituencies that make sense to the local communities is even harder with our local geography. I know that this has already been eloquently explained by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake), but locals in my patch in Pontypridd and across Rhondda Cynon Taf will tell you in a heartbeat that it would make no sense for constituencies to have more than one valley and a mountain range in between. Indeed, during her evidence session, Shereen Williams of the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales said:

“I think the valleys will present a unique challenge for us, because you do not really want to split a valley and have half in one seat and the other half in another seat.”—[*Official Report, Parliamentary Constituencies Public Bill Committee*, 18 June 2020; c. 20, Q35.]

I completely agree. It is clear that our stunning valleys should be given greater consideration than the 5% variance in drawing Welsh boundaries, and I urge colleagues to support a flexible and sensible approach.

Naturally, I also have general concerns that Wales will be hit most by the loss of constituencies in the next boundary change, because of the large population shifts

in the area over the past 20 years, which colleagues have alluded to. I have also been shocked, frustrated and actually quite tamping, for want of a better word, to read the incredibly reckless comments from colleagues in the Senedd, most notably from Mark Reckless MS, about abolishing the Welsh Parliament. It is clear, now more than ever, that the Welsh Parliament plays a vital role in scrutinising policy that has an impact on communities across Wales.

I urge colleagues on the Government Benches to stand with me and commit to strengthening, as opposed to weakening, Wales's voice, both here in Westminster and in the Senedd. It is vital that the boundary commissioners be given greater flexibility to take into account our unique geography, particularly if we are to ensure that representation in Wales is not forgotten here in Parliament.

Mr Holden: I rise to speak to new clauses 1 and 3. New clause 1 is perhaps the biggest piece of contention on both sides of the House. When I read through the Bill Committee's proceedings, I noticed that at the very start and the very end—in sittings one and eight—the Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson really pushed the point about 5% versus 7.5%. I cannot understand how the Labour party, which historically has campaigned for one person, one vote, can now be campaigning for something that would make that less likely. It is totally logical to want as small a variant as possible between populations.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) talked about wards being the building blocks of our communities. I totally disagree with the point, which he made in an intervention, that church halls and polling districts are not the building blocks. Church halls are the heart of communities in our constituencies; they are where people gather, where the scouts and brownies go, where people have coffee mornings, and so on. They are the building blocks of our communities, and the Bill should be based on them, not on arbitrary boundaries.

I actually agreed with the hon. Member on his point about looking at wards more generally. I would be very much in favour of single member wards. Some parts of my constituency have one member, while some people are represented by three councillors. It is bizarre that in one part of my constituency someone can ask three people to represent me, but in another part only one. We dealt with that in this place in the 1950s. I think we could deal with it on a council level as well and would support any moves the Government make in that direction.

The switch to 7.5% is not a price worth paying to keep wards together. On that point, there is a fundamental disagreement between the two sides of the House. I am very happy to go with polling districts. I listened to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Cherilyn Mackrory), who is the co-chair with me on the all-party group on local democracy. We represent a lot of town and parish councils. Such things are much more important and should be recognised where possible. If the Minister could speak to that, it would be really helpful. I generally agree also with my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), who is not in his seat, about this obsession with metropolitan wards being large contiguous units. It is not true. Some of these wards have 15,000 or 20,000 people in them. They are not one community and could easily be divided up.

On new clause 3, the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) mentioned this idea that we should want to try to estimate things. I remember what happened to her colleague, the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), in the 2017 general election. The Lib Dem counters on election night mis-estimated his votes and thought he was about to lose, which was why they left him in a car park for several hours when he was leader of the party. We should not bring estimates into this. The current situation is sensible. The electoral roll has been the basis for some time and is the right basis.

In conclusion, I urge hon. Members to support the Government today and back this excellent Bill, which is not before time.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): I speak in this debate with previous experience of the process of making electoral boundaries. As I referred to on Second Reading, I used to work for the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on periodic electoral reviews of local government boundaries, and I must declare an interest: some of my friends and colleagues moved on to work more recently for the Boundary Commission for England on parliamentary reviews.

I am pleased the Government have accepted our call to scrap the plan to cut the number of MPs to 600. A reduction would have weakened the role of Parliament to the benefit of the Executive, and recently we have seen the value and importance of a breadth of scrutiny of Government during the covid-19 pandemic. I am pleased also that the numeration date changed to 2 March 2020 to ensure maximum reflection of the electorate, rather than one impeded by covid-19.

I still have concerns, however, about the Government's intention to remove parliamentary scrutiny from the boundary review process and the imposition of a restrictive electoral quota, so I am speaking strongly in favour of amendment 1, to remove clause 2, and of new clause 1, both tabled in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. Effective democracy is reliant on transparency and public confidence in the structures and processes, so removing parliamentary scrutiny and approval of the structure from the process raises questions about the integrity of our democracy. It would give the Government of the day unequal influence over the process, but the most important point is the one made very eloquently put by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle). The point about democracy is that our constituents can hold us to account for the decisions we make, and the proposal takes that away.

The Government's intention to impose a 5% electoral quota will have a detrimental impact on the democratic representation of our communities.

Flexibility must be central to our boundary review system in order to recognise community identities and connections, and to facilitate the accurate representation of different geographical areas.

5.30 pm

From my experience of boundary making, I have an informed understanding of how the public responds to well-made and poor boundaries, or should I say, sensible and coherent constituencies that reflect local community identity and ultimately make sense locally, and those that do not. A 5% electoral quota will restrict the

Boundary Commission's ability to construct constituencies that protect local ties, reflect local authority boundaries and recognise the natural topography of rural and urban areas. The statistical difference in size of constituencies is marginal, but the positive impact that it will have on the functioning of our democracy is overwhelming. It would help to reduce the ratcheting effect where, to be within the tolerance of the quota, an amendment is made to one constituency which has a significant knock-on effect across multiple constituencies, resulting in a poorer sense of community identity in many constituencies simply to avoid a single constituency having only a few hundred more or fewer votes. I urge the Minister to reflect on that and agree that, in certain circumstances, it is more important that people who have common interests and live in a common identifiable community are kept together, rather than divided in order to meet these very tight constraints on the size of constituencies.

Any decent boundary geek worth their salt also knows that a higher variance is the exception, not the norm. There have been only a few occurrences when a slightly higher tolerance would facilitate better boundaries, as well as help to manage compound names, which can often agitate the public, who write in to complain more about that than with objections to boundaries.

I have one point to add to the earlier debate about the use of polling districts as building blocks. I fundamentally disagree that they should be used as building blocks because they do not have a statutory standing compared with wards, which do. Their main focus is on accessibility, and they are administrative conveniences agreed by local authorities with no statutory standing compared with ward boundaries. Some wards may have five or six polling districts compared with some that have only three or four, so it is a flawed measure in that they are not evenly distributed. They are focused on polling places, not necessarily on communities.

With that, I commend the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith), and I hope that the Minister will consider them.

Jonathan Gullis: New clause 1 is in my opinion about stopping equalisation, because through this Bill we are going to see equal, fairer boundaries. The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) talked about the shires—I am not quite sure that the shires of Stoke-on-Trent exist at the moment but I look forward to seeing them being created, apparently, with the so-called gerrymandering that we are trying to do.

We talk time and again about the idea of identity. Let me tell the House about Stoke-on-Trent. We might be a city, but we are a federation of towns, from Burslem to Tunstall, to Longton, to Fenton. Even within that, when we talk about identities, in the ward of Baddeley, Milton and Norton, we have Norton Green and Norton le Moors, and if someone says to a Norton Green resident, "You are a member of Norton le Moors", they will get accosted—as I rightly did, on the doorsteps during the last general election campaign—for misannouncing them. So even though we talk about this idea of 5% to 7.5%, we are still talking about identities that are broken down even within the wards of local councils.

As I said, the community I represent is an amalgamation of pit villages, small towns and little villages. However, I dare to cross from Stoke-on-Trent to—this is where the hon. Gentleman will be pleased—Staffordshire County

[Jonathan Gullis]

Council, so I do have a small number of shires, in the guise of Kidsgrove, Talke and a small slice of Newchapel. Again, the people of Stoke-on-Trent North and Kidsgrove would identify as sharing common values. Even though they are different areas with different needs, they have a proud industrial mining heritage. Therefore, new clause 1 effectively goes against this idea, giving 7.5% here and 5% there. That is not equalisation. That is against it and once we start applying the rule to one area, we think, “Do we apply the rule to this area instead?” It becomes a bit of a mess, so I have to honourably disagree with Opposition Members on new clause 1. I will, of course, be voting against it.

On new clause 3, I wholeheartedly support my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) on the use of the electoral roll rather than estimates. I agree that this could become a grey area. How would the estimates be calculated? How would we create the formula to make it viable in future? The electoral roll is something solid. It is something that businesses and politicians use. It is simple and we should carry on using it.

Let us not forget that this is an important time for us to update the boundaries. In Stoke-on-Trent, I represent—I say this cheekily—a larger constituency than my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon) and for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton). Do I get paid more for doing more work than them? They would argue that they work harder and I would not necessarily disagree on some areas. They are very good at chuntering—*[Interruption.]* I know, spicy. The idea that there should be a difference is not a fair one. We want to be equal. We are a proud city and every single one of us wants to represent our areas. There are areas like Abbey Hulton, where, I believe, I have 15 electorates from the ward in my constituency. I find that rather bizarre. The way the boundaries have grown over time with housing developments in my area has left us in a bit of a confusing mess. This is, therefore, a good time to update the boundaries so that the people of Stoke-on-Trent can be represented as they deserve to be, in an equal and measured way, and in an area that they notice and understand. As I say, the idea that we must go on local government boundary wards is for the past, not the future.

Finally, I will have a little pop at new clause 2. I have great love for the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden). We get on incredibly well. We disagree on everything, but we have a good chat. I know he is desperate to leave this place and never ever to have to come back, but I have to remind him that we are one United Kingdom. It is therefore only right that for the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, who again are my dear friends—I know the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) will be disappointed that I say this—we ensure there is equality and fairness across our United Kingdom. I will be voting against new clause 2 and I urge Members across the House to do so, too. I am sure that will be used on Facebook as a clip of “the English so-and-sos stopping us having what we want”. I wholeheartedly support the Government in what they are doing today.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis). He and I have been very good friends

in this House in the short time he has been here. I agree with him that we are always better together. It is better to have the four regions together as one. That is the real United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: stronger, better together every time.

This is not the first time I have spoken on this issue and I will start by declaring, as I always do, an interest in having the most wonderful constituency in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Strangford is the most beautiful constituency it is possible to have and I am very pleased to be able to represent it. It brings a lot of communities together and we have an affiliation with each other. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) mentioned earlier, we absolutely require the 10% variation on the quota given our distinct geographical circumstances and the limitations to what changes can be made in Northern Ireland. As everyone knows, we have a land frontier with another country, so our circumstances are very different from everybody else's.

One issue that is essential, especially in Northern Ireland with the mix of rural and urban in almost every constituency, is the notion of belonging and community. My constituency of Strangford represents the council areas of Ards and North Down, and parts of Lisburn and Castlereagh, and Newry, Mourne and Down. When I was first elected in 2010, we had a massive change in that Ballynahinch East was added to Strangford. I made a decision to make sure that they knew their MP and opened an office in Ballynahinch to underline my commitment to make them a part of Strangford when they never were before.

The office costs allowance could never fully cover another office, but I made the decision because people could not necessarily travel some 45 to 50 miles—an hour or thereabouts—to my office in Newtonards. That has been a great boost because the people of Ballynahinch now very clearly see the constituency of Strangford as it is now and as it should be. When that happened back in 2010, the southern part of Ballynahinch—the Spa area—went into South Down and the west part went into the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley. This area was slightly different from the rest of Strangford and required an office to make its MP accessible to all, and I believe that decision was the right one.

However, every time there is a tinkering with the boundaries, it becomes an issue. Although numbers are easy to understand and move around, people's identities are less easy to move around. To me, identity is very important, and people's kinship is worthy of consideration. That is why I am delighted that some of the early proposals did not find their way into these final measures. I understand the concerns of some Members. The Bill has rightly ring-fenced the Isle of Wight, and the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie), in her contribution, referred to that as well. In Northern Ireland, we must take account of individual circumstances, not simply let the numbers involved in a headcount be the be all and end all.

I can remember a situation where, to put in place the ward of Carrowdore, two people had to be moved—just two people. They lived no more than 300 yards from the school where they voted, and they were moved out and had to go and vote in Carrowdore, a 20-minute journey

by car down the road. That tinkering, I believe, was wrong, and I did make representations to the commission at that time. The sentiment has been embedded in my mind that where someone votes can matter, and that while moving those two on the map tidied up the numbers, it impacted on people. That must always be a consideration. I believe it is very important that people feel they are part of the constituency and part of the area.

I am thankful that after I hang up my tie and take off these worn leather shoes—it is probably a long time away, by the way, but it happens to all of us who look to be here—Strangford will remain and prosper, and I hope that remains the case for years to come. Strangford, my constituency, has been held together over these years with blood, sweat and tears, and that must be recognised and protected. The personality and the affiliation of Strangford must be considered along with the numbers for every constituency. It is not just about numbers; it is about the constituency and about the people whom we represent. What a joy it is to represent Strangford! It is my pleasure.

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): And what a pleasure it is, as always, to follow the remarks of the sage of Strangford, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), with his unrivalled love for his constituency and, may I say, for this Chamber, which he demonstrates day after day—and evening after evening.

Let me take each proposed amendment in turn. I will do my best to accommodate the comments that hon. and right hon. Members have made. If I do not manage to do justice to all of that, I will try to accommodate them in my remarks on Third Reading.

Starting with new clause 1, I am very grateful to hon. Members for all their contributions, because it was a very strong theme in Committee. It is about how much flexibility ought to be given to the boundary commissions. Let me start by outlining that 5% is the existing law—the status quo—and there are a number of reasons why the Government have chosen not to change the legislation in that area and why we therefore do not support the new clause. When we say plus or minus 5%, we are talking about a range of 10% around the electoral quota. By that token, when we talk about plus or minus 7.5%, what is being spoken about is a range of 15%. By my calculation, each percentage is over 1,000 people, and people matter in this.

We believe that a 10% range does give the boundary commissions the space that they need to take account of the other factors that they may consider. As hon. Members will know, those include local geographical features, community ties, local government boundaries and existing parliamentary boundaries. At this point, I note that my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) is right that discussions are ongoing with the Boundary Commission for England, picking up on what we did in Committee.

Some characterise 10% as overly mathematically or too constraining—I think those were the words used by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith)—but that is not the case. It is right that the boundary commissions are able to engage in dialogue with local communities—that is very important—and are able to adjust the number of electors to reflect important community ties. The 10% range allows that,

and the proof is seen in an example from the Boundary Commission for England: in the 2016-18 review, more than 50% of its initial proposals were changed in the light of consultation and feedback.

5.45 pm

Emma Hardy: I am listening carefully to the Minister's observations about the need to have equal constituencies. Will she not take back to the Government the need for automatic voter registration, so we can have a truly accurate picture of the number of people in each constituency?

Chloe Smith: I admire the tenacity with which the hon. Lady has made that argument today. It is not the subject of the Bill, and, for what it is worth, I do not agree with the concept of automatic voter registration, but I am happy to have that conversation with her in more detail at another time. I will be more sparing in taking interventions from now on, because there is a time limit and I have much to get through.

As I understand it, the intention behind new clause 1 is to require the boundary commissions to aim for the 10% range, and only if necessary would they then use the extra 5%. That approach gives rise to a number of concerns. First, it seems to me that there is a lack of clarity, which could generate confusion; it would certainly generate ambiguity and might undermine the effectiveness of the process. One can imagine local authorities simply not knowing at the outset of the process whether their constituency would fall within the 10% range, or whether they might be a special case. A process that was previously clear and transparent would become less so.

Secondly, there is the risk of a ratchet effect. If we were to offer the boundary commissions the option to go up 7.5%, they would quickly come under pressure. That might lead to lobbying and the 15% range becoming increasingly widely used. It might be said that those who want that outcome should put it directly and courageously in an amendment, rather than saying it could be used if the commission wanted to use it.

Thirdly, and quite important, the discretion provided to the four boundary commissions would be likely to generate different approaches in different parts of the United Kingdom. That could open the door to legal challenges and a situation where the commissions' work was made more difficult. I acknowledge the words of the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) about rule 7 and the court case there. I recognise his points, and much more detail was drawn out in that ruling, but let me say briefly now that I think rule 7 is important and it stands, notwithstanding that ruling.

In Committee, we discussed 5% versus other numbers at length. Today, I say that we should be in the business of giving the boundary commissions clear instructions. There are times when we give them room for judgment and discretion. We ask them to conduct an intense process, but this should not be one of the times when their instructions lack clarity. The matter of the tolerance is a judgment for us; it is for us in this House to set out what we think it ought to be. A balance must be struck, and no academic can tell us the right answer. Conservative Members believe in equal-sized constituencies and in being able to deliver updated and equal constituencies, and the 5% tolerance gives a better chance of achieving that and ending an unfairness that has persisted for too long.

[Chloe Smith]

Let me address new clause 2. I thank the hon. Members for Glasgow East (David Linden) and for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) for making this an interesting debate—one that we also had in Committee. It seems that something that is actually quite technical is being used here as a conduit for a much larger constitutional debate about the Union and how its nations relate to each other. That is important and extremely interesting, but today is rather a narrow debate and it is not necessarily the time for concluding such big questions. Let us talk about what this new clause would actually mean.

My concern is that new clause 2, by fixing a minimum number of constituencies, would effectively enshrine electoral inequality, cementing the current situation and not allowing it to develop. I can give the House lots of examples of unequal constituency sizes within and between our nations, and those are the kinds of inequality that we are trying to address in the Bill overall. Of course, it is critical that every nation and every part of the Union has a powerful voice in Westminster. They have two powerful voices here today—and across the Chamber—but there is already a sensible way of setting the nation's participation in Westminster. The new clause would not add value in that respect.

Under the current legislation, a mathematical formula exists to do exactly the job of allocating constituency numbers to each of the four nations. It is widely used internationally and is widely thought of as being one of the fairest methods. It should be maintained because it is fair and rational. The problem with the new clause is that it suggests that the hon. Members who tabled it could be fairer and more rational in deciding what the numbers ought to be, but in effect those Members are guessing what the numbers should be and trying to lock them in. The new clause would lock in quite radical inequality between the nations of the Union in terms of the citizen-to-MP ratio that would result, and there is not a good reason for that.

Alun Cairns: Does the Minister recognise that new clause 2, tabled by Plaid Cymru and the SNP, almost suggests that we are a federal nation? We are not a federal nation but a proud Union.

Chloe Smith: I agree with my right hon. Friend. He knows that the Conservative party and the Government are absolutely committed to strengthening our Union and we do not believe that that would be achieved through new clause 2, which would undermine in many ways what ought to be an equality in the assessment of the voices in the Union and an equality between citizens that can be enjoyed across the nation.

I absolutely recognise the wider debate about what our nations and our Union consist of, although the hon. Member for Glasgow East would love to have nothing more to do with that debate—he would love to be nowhere near here today, and that breaks my heart. As much as I may say that I would love to see the back of him, of course I would not. I cannot wait to spend even more time discussing exactly this point with him and with anybody else who would like to join me in the debate about how to strengthen our Union, how to maintain excellent intergovernmental relations, how to help our nations work best together

and how to help people across the nation to be as prosperous as they can. But new clause 2 is not the place to do that.

I thank the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) for tabling new clause 3. She was honest and sincere about what she is seeking to do with the amendment, which is to open up a valuable broader debate. I will talk a little about why the new clause would not quite do what is right, but let me say that the hon. Member's instincts are admirable. We should all share the goal of being able to do the utmost for our constituents, whether they are registered to vote or not. Furthermore, we should all share the goal of wanting as many people on our electoral registers as possible. That is notwithstanding the fact that the Government believe that it is an important principle that our constituencies are based on the electoral registers.

On what we are doing to ensure that the registers are as accurate and complete as possible, the introduction of online registration has made it simpler and faster for people to register to vote; it takes as little as five minutes. This benefits everybody, including anybody who may previously have found it harder to make an application to register. We have developed a range of resources to promote engagement with our democracy and to encourage people to register to vote, all of which are available on gov.uk and are aimed widely—at registration officers, civil society groups, teachers and more.

We are also in the process of implementing changes to the annual canvass of all residential properties in Great Britain, which will improve its efficiency greatly and will allow officers to focus their efforts on those who they may traditionally have found harder to get to register. That is important for accuracy and completeness. Since the introduction of individual electoral registration, the registers in Great Britain are as complete and more accurate than before; that is an important base of the record.

I share the intentions of the hon. Member for North East Fife of wanting to see more people registered and to see us listening to all in our community, so let me turn to why new clause 3 would not necessarily work as well as might be wished. Its core problem is that it deals with estimates and moves away from facts. It asks the Electoral Commission to do a very large job of estimation when, in fact, we already have firm data that the process can be based on. It would be a huge and unnecessary task to set off, bringing further elements of risk and challenge to the work of the Boundary Commissions.

The work of the Boundary Commissions should be based on those who have registered as electors. That principle counts those who want to have their views represented in Parliament. That is what a Member of Parliament is for and that is what voting for Parliament is for. It is a good principle that that is the basis on which we work, and it is not new, having been the case since 1944.

We should encourage more people to register to vote. I think the new clause does a slightly different thing. I welcome the fact that the hon. Lady referred to it as a probing amendment, and I hope she will not press it to a Division. Before I move on, I welcome her support for our overseas voters. She will know that there is much work to do to enable more overseas voters to register. The Government are committed, as I hope she is, to ending the injustice of the abrupt disenfranchisement that they face after 15 years overseas.

Finally, I cannot support the intention of amendment 1. The effect of clause 2, which amendment 1 would remove, is to bring much-needed certainty to the boundary review process. It gives confidence that the recommendations of the independent boundary commissions will be brought into effect without interference or delay. They develop their proposal through a robust process that lasts over a two to three-year period with extensive public consultation. Those impartial recommendations ought to be brought into effect promptly without any further wastage of public money and without any question of their independence. Clause 2 provides for that, and it does so by a very normal mechanism.

I just want to pick up one point that was made. The hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood tried to go to town on the nature of an Order in Council. Let me break it to her, in case she is not aware, that the last Labour Government used more than 300 of them between 1997 and 2010. They are a normal constitutional legislative instrument. They should be recognised as being part of the status quo. She is either misreading the Bill or wilfully misrepresenting it—I do not know which. She did so in Committee, and she is doing so again today.

The Order in Council is not the villain that the hon. Lady makes it out to be, and nor is there an increase in powers in the Bill for the Executive. The opposite is the case. Countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand use similar approaches. A string of respected academics voiced their support for this change during Committee when giving evidence. Memorably, one in particular said:

“It is probably better that MPs set the terms of the exercise for the Boundary Commission behind a veil of ignorance...without knowing exactly what the particular outcomes would be for them as individual MPs.”—[*Official Report, Parliamentary Constituencies Public Bill Committee*, 18 June 2020; c. 57, Q117.]

The Government believe that clause 2 is an important and principled change. It will ensure that expert recommendations are brought into effect independently with no further delay.

It provides a better outcome for people, and I urge the hon. Lady not to press the amendment to a Division.

Cat Smith: I did not think it was possible to have as much fun as we had in Committee, but this afternoon has perhaps run it quite close. Of course, there is no comparison between three hours and four days. I put on record my thanks to the members of the Committee who have also made contributions to today’s debate.

The Labour party supports the democratic principles of the boundary review. We recognise that this review is urgently needed, given the out-of-date boundaries we currently have. The idea of constituencies being of broadly equal size and the idea of constituencies also taking account of local community ties are not mutually exclusive, and I urge Members to support that amendment. Labour’s new clause would provide for the flexibility needed to create constituencies that communities can have confidence in and identify with.

Most critically, I encourage Members across the House to support amendment 1. The Government must not use the Bill to strengthen their own power at the expense of parliamentary power. It is an insult to this House, and it sets a dangerous precedent for future legislation.

Question put. That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 246, Noes 342.

Division No. 74]

[5.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Edwards, Jonathan
Abrahams, Debbie	Efford, Clive
Ali, Rushanara	Elliott, Julie
Ali, Tahir	Elmore, Chris
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Eshalomi, Florence
Amesbury, Mike	Esterson, Bill
Anderson, Fleur	Evans, Chris
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Farron, Tim
Ashworth, Jonathan	Fellows, Marion
Bardell, Hannah	Ferrier, Margaret
Barker, Paula	Fletcher, Colleen
Beckett, rh Margaret	Flynn, Stephen
Begum, Apsana	Fovargue, Yvonne
Benn, rh Hilary	Foxcroft, Vicky
Betts, Mr Clive	Foy, Mary Kelly
Black, Mhairi	Furniss, Gill
Blackford, rh Ian	Gardiner, Barry
Blackman, Kirsty	Gibson, Patricia
Blake, Olivia	Gill, Preet Kaur
Blomfield, Paul	Glindon, Mary
Bonnar, Steven	Grady, Patrick
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Grant, Peter
Brennan, Kevin	Gray, Neil
Brock, Deidre	Green, Kate
Brown, Alan	Greenwood, Lilian
Brown, Ms Lyn	Greenwood, Margaret
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Griffith, Nia
Bryant, Chris	Gwynne, Andrew
Buck, Ms Karen	Haigh, Louise
Burgon, Richard	Hamilton, Fabian
Byrne, Ian	Hanna, Claire
Cadbury, Ruth	Hanvey, Neale
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Hardy, Emma
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Carden, Dan	Harris, Carolyn
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Hayes, Helen
Chamberlain, Wendy	Healey, rh John
Champion, Sarah	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Chapman, Douglas	Hendry, Drew
Charalambous, Bambos	Hill, Mike
Cherry, Joanna	Hillier, Meg
Clark, Feryal	Hobhouse, Wera
Cooper, Daisy	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Cooper, Rosie	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Cooper, rh Yvette	Hopkins, Rachel
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Hosie, Stewart
Cowan, Ronnie	Howarth, rh Sir George
Coyle, Neil	Huq, Dr Rupa
Crawley, Angela	Jardine, Christine
Creasy, Stella	Johnson, Dame Diana
Cruddas, Jon	Johnson, Kim
Cunningham, Alex	Jones, Darren
Daby, Janet	Jones, Gerald
David, Wayne	Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Davies, Geraint	Jones, Ruth
Davies-Jones, Alex	Jones, Sarah
Day, Martyn	Kane, Mike
Debbonaire, Thangam	Keeley, Barbara
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Kendall, Liz
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Khan, Afzal
Dodds, Anneliese	Kinnock, Stephen
Doogan, Dave	Kyle, Peter
Doughty, Stephen	Lake, Ben
Dromey, Jack	Lammy, rh Mr David
Duffield, Rosie	Lavery, Ian
Eagle, Ms Angela	Law, Chris
Eagle, Maria	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma

Lewis, Clive
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lynch, Holly
MacAskill, Kenny
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owatemi, Taiwo
Owen, Sarah
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Steve

Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Robinson, Gavin
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn
Smith, Cat
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Starmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Vaz, rh Valerie
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jeff Smith and
Liz Twist

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Ahmad Khan, Imran
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward

Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John

Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Brokenshire, rh James
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, rh Conor
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain

Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gideon, Jo
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Glen, John
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister

Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll

Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig

Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne

Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Michael Tomlinson and
David Rutley

Question accordingly negated.

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

6.16 pm

Proceedings interrupted (Programme Order, 2 June).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

New Clause 2

ALLOCATION OF CONSTITUENCIES

“(1) Rule 8 of Schedule 2 to the 1986 Act (the allocation method) is amended as follows.

(2) After rule 8(5) insert—

“(6) Notwithstanding the allocation of constituencies according to the allocation method set out in rule 8(2)(5), there must be a minimum allocation of constituencies as follows—

- (a) Wales must be allocated at least 40 constituencies (including the protected constituency);
- (b) Scotland must be allocated at least 59 constituencies (including the two protected constituencies);
- (c) Northern Ireland must be allocated at least 18 constituencies; and
- (d) the allocation of constituencies must be adjusted accordingly.”—(*David Linden.*)

This new clause seeks to protect representation in the devolved nations by securing a minimum number of constituencies in each of the devolved nations.

Brought up.

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.

The House divided: Ayes 50, Noes 339.

Division No. 75]

[6.16 pm

AYES

Bardell, Hannah
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela

Day, Martyn
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Doogan, Dave
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Hanna, Claire

Hanvey, Neale
Hendry, Drew
Hosie, Stewart
Lake, Ben
Law, Chris
Linden, David
MacAskill, Kenny
Mc Nally, John
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McLaughlin, Anne
Monaghan, Carol
Nicolson, John
O'Hara, Brendan
Oswald, Kirsten

Robinson, Gavin
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shannon, Jim
Sheppard, Tommy
Smith, Alyn
Stephens, Chris
Thewliss, Alison
Thomson, Richard
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Ayes:
Owen Thompson and
Gavin Newlands

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Ahmad Khan, Imran
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Brokenshire, rh James
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, rh Conor
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James

Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon

Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gideon, Jo
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Glen, John
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyns, Andrea
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay

Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mayhew, Jerome
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Morton, Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew

Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain

Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Michael Tomlinson and
David Rutley

Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 Debonnaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glendon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret

Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Johnson, Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian

Question accordingly negated.

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

Amendment proposed: 1, page 2, line 19, leave out clause 2.—(Cat Smith.)

This amendment aims to maintain the status quo of parliamentary oversight within the boundary review process.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 237, Noes 339.

Division No. 76]

[6.31 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty

Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy

Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Jeff Smith and
 Liz Twist**

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Ahmad Khan, Imran
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib

Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishty, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo

Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinéage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gideon, Jo
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian

Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heatton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack

Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cheryl
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee

Russell, Dean
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
 Michael Tomlinson and
 David Rutley

The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.

Third Reading

6.45 pm

Chloe Smith: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I thank all Members who have contributed to our debates on the Bill. In addition to our colleagues on the Front Benches, we have heard excellent contributions from my right hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns), my hon. Friends the Members for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson), for Dartford (Gareth Johnson), for Truro and Falmouth (Cheryl Mackrory), for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie), for West Bromwich West (Shaun Bailey), for Dudley South (Mike Wood) and for North West Durham (Mr Holden), the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) and the hon. Members for Eltham (Clive Efford), for Ceredigion (Ben Lake), for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle), for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones) and for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins). Forgive me if I have missed anyone.

All Members who have contributed to these debates have considered the principles behind the Bill and the details of each of its clauses with a constructive and positive outlook. I have been struck by how many Members have acknowledged that the current situation of having unequally sized constituencies cannot continue and that action must be taken. The Government agree, and this Bill delivers that. Of course, there have been differences of opinion along the way, and there has been thorough scrutiny and robust challenge, which I hope has improved the Bill.

Our engagement before the introduction of the Bill with representatives of the parliamentary parties and electoral administrators has helped us to hone the technical aspects of the Bill and to take better account of what works from a practical standpoint. Our debates on amendments to the Bill in this elected House have led to a common-sense addition for the smallest of protected island constituencies. I am very grateful to all those who have contributed, including the witnesses who spoke at our Committee sessions. Many Members have advocated, challenged, probed and scrutinised in a spirit of logic but with good humour, and we have all joined in the overarching common purpose of ensuring that a crucial part of our democracy is made fairer and more equitable without delay.

There has been widespread acceptance of the equality of voting power as a fundamental principle. I think everybody knows that the boundary commissions have an important task that they have to get right of balancing that goal of equality with the need to maintain community links within constituencies. We all value the responsibility of representing our constituents and our communities, and none of us will ever stop defending the precious link between our constituents and us as their representatives. Soon we will be able to do that with a renewed sense that there is fairness and equality in our democracy more than before and that each elector's vote to choose the Government of the day carries the same weight.

Question accordingly negatived.

[Chloe Smith]

We have looked closely at how to ensure that the recommendations of future boundary reviews can be implemented without delay, and we have drawn on the experience of comparable systems in other countries. That matter was pressed to a Division in Committee, and the view of the elected Chamber is clearly in favour of automatic implementation.

The Union was never far from our mind in these debates. We gave careful consideration to the specific needs of the four nations in an overall framework, and we considered a variety of ideas in that context. The hon. Member for Ceredigion is not in his place, but I particularly enjoyed a discussion of the Welsh language and its role in community identity, and I was pleased to put on record how that can already be accommodated.

I thank the two hon. Members who chaired the Committee, as well as you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your guardianship today; I am sure I speak for all Committee members when I say it has been a pleasure to serve under you and those hon. Members. I am also grateful to my counterparts on the Opposition Benches, including the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain), for their positive and challenging approach to their duties. I was particularly interested to find out from the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) that not only have we had three had children since last we last served on a similar Bill Committee, but that this is in fact the first time she has completed a Bill Committee without giving birth—although there are still nine minutes and 40 seconds to go. I share her gratitude that the Committee did not decide to go on any longer than it needed to, further risking that. To make progress, all Bills rely on the wise counsel of Clerks and our officials, so I place on record my gratitude to them. We tested the new circumstances in which we find ourselves thoroughly in Committee and with our witnesses.

As a result of all those efforts, the House now has before it a Bill that provides equal and updated boundaries, meaning that, wherever voters live in our United Kingdom, they can be sure of having a fair and equal say in the crucial question of choosing who will govern. I hope that the noble Lords will now play their part so that the next review can finally get under way. It is with pleasure that I commend the Bill to the House.

6.51 pm

Cat Smith: I will keep my comments brief, as I covered the Labour party's stance in my speech on Report. I put on the record that I am disappointed that the Government rejected the new clause and amendment that would have improved the Bill. The process of requiring MPs to vote on the final report from the commission is an important safety net, without which we would have just 600 MPs today.

We do not seek to delay the progress of the Bill. As I said in my opening remarks, we need new boundaries at the next election; the data on which our constituencies are built looks to be a quarter of a century old. We certainly hope their lordships will look again at clause 2, as we still have significant concerns about the Government's approach to that matter.

With that, I draw my remarks to a close. I thank Committee members for their useful contributions and for how much fun I had taking the Bill through the House on behalf of the Opposition.

6.52 pm

Mrs Miller: The Bill is all about creating fairness and making sure that every vote counts the same, and I wish it well as it travels through to the other place. The right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) and I locked horns on whether boundary changes should ever be characterised as a nuisance; I would never want to misquote him, and I apologise if he thought I did. However, there is no nuisance in creating fair and equal boundaries—we should all agree on that.

Equal suffrage is a cornerstone of our democracy, and the Bill is part of that. I thank the Minister for accepting new clause 10 during the Committee's proceedings, which is now clause 7 of the Bill and makes Ynys Môn a protected constituency, which is an important addition to the two constituencies that are already protected. The Bill honours a 2019 Conservative party manifesto commitment to ensure that we have updated, equal parliamentary boundaries, making sure that every vote counts the same. I hope that the other place heeds the debate in this place, and the fact that this was a Conservative party manifesto commitment, as they consider the measures in the usual way.

However, one outstanding issue is certainly the Boundary Commission and the way it will operate in support of this legislation. I hope the Minister is able to continue, through the Cabinet Office, to make sure that that organisation is doing everything it should to have the data it needs to put in place this important piece of legislation.

I close by saying an enormous thanks to the Committee Clerks, who made the running of the Committee so smooth, and also to the Minister, her colleagues, those Members who chaired the Committee and, of course, to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for being here this evening.

6.54 pm

David Linden: I echo the comments made by my colleagues on the Front-Bench about our thanks to those who presided over the Committee and to all the Members who took part. I regret that new clause 2, which sought to protect Scotland with 59 constituencies, was not passed. I think history will judge that vote harshly in the years to come, but that is a story for another day. I was speaking with a friend earlier this week about some of my favourite music and we were reflecting on a shared love of Green Day. I was reminded of their song "Wake Me Up When September Ends", because when September ends we will have Lords amendments and I very much hope that when their lordships look at this Bill they will remove clause 2, which is an affront to democracy.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call Gavin Robinson.

Gavin Robinson: My name was withdrawn at a quarter past 11 this morning.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Oh, my goodness. I have no Member for North East Fife and although the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) is in his place, he has indicated that he might not wish to speak—this is historic. Would the Minister like to wind up?

6.56 pm

Chloe Smith: Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, let us consider the glory of the United Kingdom. Let us start, alphabetically, with the first constituency that comes to mind. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar) is not in his place, but if he were, he would doubtless tell us what a glorious place it is. We would then turn to the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn). Regrettably, he is not in his place, but if he were he would tell us how wonderful Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire are.

Mrs Miller: Does the Minister not agree that the debate has given everybody the opportunity to talk about the uniqueness of their constituency, and that the Boundary Commission should not forget that when looking at redrawing the boundaries, because that uniqueness in each of our constituencies is what makes us want to do our jobs?

Chloe Smith: I absolutely agree on that, and it allows me to do something rarely allowed to a Minister in such proceedings, which is to pay tribute to one's own constituency. Let me put on record how wonderful Norwich North is, with its parishes and towns, which in themselves are separate communities. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) made the point about how fiercely such things are argued, even within a constituency.

Chris Clarkson: Will the Minister give way?

Chloe Smith: Not until I have managed to name all the parishes and towns in Norwich North, which are, of course, as anybody will know, the wonderful places of Hellesdon, which goes back to the Domesday Book—shades of my maiden speech coming on here—Old Catton, Sprowston and Thorpe St Andrew, and next to those the historic characteristics of more urban Norwich.

Chris Clarkson: They sound like lovely parishes. I could also mention Norden, Bamford, Castleton, Heywood and Middleton in my constituency, and just have. I wish to pay tribute to everybody who participated in the Bill Committee, because I think we have achieved a robust Bill. Obviously, we will see what their lordships send back to us and no doubt we will have further interesting and exciting psephological exuberance, as I said earlier. I also wish to put on record my thanks to the Clerks, all the House staff and all the Bill Committee members, and, of course, to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for being here tonight. I have to say how disappointed I am not to hear the hon. Member for Strangford speak—

Jim Shannon: Don't go away.

Chris Clarkson: I will not.

Chloe Smith: May I close this unusual contribution to the end of a Bill's proceedings by also noting how wonderful the constituencies are of our Whips, those of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) and—this may take us to the end of the alphabet, although I am subject to challenge—the hon. Member for Wolverhampton. [*Interruption.*] Oh goodness me, I meant my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North

(Eddie Hughes). I have got it wrong and I am going to face retribution for that—there will be letters written about the difference between those places. With that, I think I can now give way to a Whip to conclude tonight's proceedings.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I believe York Outer is the last one. Let me now put the Question.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I will not suspend the House, because I trust that hon. Members will leave quietly in the right direction and that those who want to contribute are already present.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall take motions 3 to 7 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Stand Order No. 118(6)),

COMPETITION

That the draft Enterprise Act 2002 (Share of Supply) (Amendment) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 22 June, be approved.

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Jobseekers (Back to Work Schemes) Act 2013 (Remedial) Order 2019, which was laid before this House on 5 September 2019, in the last Parliament, be approved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield Combined Authority (Functions and Amendment) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 29 June, be approved.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

That the draft Community Infrastructure Levy (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020, which were laid before this House on 30 June, be approved.

COMPETITION

That the draft Competition Appeal Tribunal (Coronavirus) (Recording and Broadcasting) Order 2020, which was laid before this House on 22 June, be approved.—(*Eddie Hughes.*)

Question agreed to.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND (GENERAL SYNOD) (MEASURES)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Stand Order No. 118(6)),

That the Channel Islands Measure (HC 548), passed by the General Synod of the Church of England, be presented to Her Majesty for her Royal Assent in the form in which it was laid before Parliament.—(*Andrew Selous.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Merger of Department for International Development and Foreign and Commonwealth Office

7 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I have been contacted by huge numbers of constituents who are deeply concerned about the UK Government's decision to merge the Department for International Development with the Foreign Office. This was done without consultation with the UK's international development and humanitarian sector and against recommendations of independent aid scrutiny bodies. The Department for International Development has repeatedly been found by independent reviews to be the most transparent and effective Government Department for spending. In contrast, the Foreign Office, with which DFID is to be merged, has been criticised for spending UK aid on projects that do not prioritise reducing poverty for the poorest people on earth. Therefore, I rise to present the petition on behalf of the residents of the constituency of North Ayrshire and Arran.

The petition states:

The Petition of the residents of the constituency of North Ayrshire and Arran,

Declares that the proposed merger of the Department for International Development with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is a retrograde step that will diminish the UK's respect as a global leader on international development; further declares that the merger is the first clear step in a change of policy, which will inevitably see UK aid explicitly linked to trade rather than being based on need.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to immediately abandon proposals to merge the Department for International Development with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002589]

Flammable Cladding Removal

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

7.2 pm

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): It is beyond belief that it has been three years since that terrible night at Grenfell Tower. I want to begin by paying my respects to those who lost their lives, and we will remember them today in this debate. We are also incredibly grateful to their family members, their neighbours and the survivors for campaigning, despite all they went through, for the safety of properties that are clad with dangerous aluminium composite material and also of other properties that are a risk.

There are still an estimated 60,000 people living in homes with similar ACM cladding on the outside of their buildings, and many more living in buildings that are dangerous. According to the Fire Brigades Union, some 500,000 people are at risk from living in unsafe housing across the UK. Each night, they are going to bed, knowing that, if their building caught fire, it would spread quickly because of the flammable cladding, and they know, too, that their chances of survival are seriously lessened in that context. They know that progress to remove that cladding has been slow and has slowed further because of the pandemic. I have called for this debate because I think that it is vital that Ministers step up and make sure that the cladding and other dangerous materials on those blocks are removed as a matter of urgency.

It took a year for the Government to agree to fund the removal of ACM cladding in high-rise social housing blocks and then two years for private blocks and three years for others commitments to be made. That happened because of the actions of campaign groups such as Grenfell United, the UK Cladding Action Group and Inside Housing, as well as Members of Parliament and charities and housing organisations. It is not good enough that the Government have been forced kicking and screaming into doing these things, rather than taking responsibility, as was promised at the time of the fire. Although £1.6 billion of Government funding is welcome, they estimate themselves that between £3 billion and £3.5 billion is required to make all buildings safe.

Residents feel like prisoners in their homes. They cannot sell or remortgage their flats, and the external wall fire review and EWS1 form process is not sufficient, is costly and takes too long. They are trapped.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend raises an important point about the paperwork needed. Even many residents who live in homes that are not as unsafe as some others find that without that form they are unable to sell. One of the things the Public Accounts Committee picked up on in our recent hearing was that being unable to get professional indemnity insurance is a major brake. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government need to step in on this issue?

Rushanara Ali: Yes, absolutely, and I hope that the Minister will, along with his Treasury colleagues, look at this very quickly to resolve the matter, because it affects people who are trying to sell homes, as I have seen in my constituency.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making crucial points about the UK Government's responsibilities in this area, and of course fire safety issues go well beyond the issue of cladding to other matters such as compartmentation and other fire safety measures. Does my hon. Friend agree that the original developers of buildings also need to take a huge responsibility? In my constituency, Laing O'Rourke is refusing to engage with the Celestia development residents about fire safety issues that it is responsible for, in defects in the construction; does my hon. Friend agree that developers must take their responsibilities seriously?

Rushanara Ali: I agree with my hon. Friend. I will come on to that point, and I hope the Minister addresses the point about the need for private developers and freeholders to take action and also talks about proposals the Government might have if they do not act, including the recommendation of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee of compulsory purchasing if required. We cannot just rely on good will, because some of them do not have the good will to take action, and people's lives are at risk.

The Government's latest release in June revealed that 155 of the 455 high-rise buildings identified as covered in ACM by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government have had cladding removed, but another 300 are yet to be remediated. That is a lot of housing that needs to be remediated.

The Government have repeatedly missed their own deadlines of 2019 for social sector blocks and June 2020 for private sector blocks. Despite the major fires in 2019 at student accommodation blocks with high-pressure laminate cladding in Bolton and at the flats in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), where flames quickly spread up the timber balconies, progress has been painfully slow and the coronavirus pandemic has hampered progress even more, as I have said.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that the leaseholders of St Francis Tower in Ipswich, who have had absolutely no say on, or power to stop, dangerous HPL cladding being put on the tower where they live, are right to feel aggrieved that they now receive letters harassing them for payments for removing that cladding? Does the hon. Lady agree that the Government should support those leaseholders and eliminate that uncertainty and anxiety?

Rushanara Ali: I could not agree more. In debates on these matters I have called time and again on the Government to use their powers and stand with leaseholders and take action, because at the moment leaseholders are being expected to take legal action against powerful, wealthy developers and owners, and that is not a fair balance. To this day, the Government have failed to act, yet they could use their powers and might to help these people. These are hard-working families who worked really hard to get on the property ladder; these are people who work in the NHS; these are people who are keeping us safe and alive, and the Government should be stepping up to support leaseholders.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government's response has been entirely inadequate? Not only are not all tall buildings

with flammable cladding identified, but neither are medium-rise buildings above 11 metres high and those with valuable occupants such as hospitals and care homes.

Rushanara Ali: I could not agree more.

The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee found that the £1 billion building safety fund would pay for only 600 of the buildings, when actually we need billions to ensure that all buildings in the country that are in this unsafe state can be addressed.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent argument. Is it not particularly unsatisfactory that Ministers have signed up to the principle that leaseholders should not have to bear these costs, but have not provided the funds to make a reality of it?

Rushanara Ali: Absolutely.

We are finding that the small print requirements that housing associations and local authorities are having to pass is excluding them from accessing funding. They are then having to pass on the bill to the leaseholders, as hon. Members have said. Our leaseholder constituents cannot afford tens of thousands of pounds when right now their jobs are on the line, they are struggling to make ends meet and struggling to feed their kids. Middle-class families are having to rely on food banks in this crisis, and now they are worried about what will happen to their housing.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this forward. She has been a champion when it comes to highlighting this issue, and I want to congratulate her on that as well. With the large number of Northern Ireland students in university flats and housing—some of them are my constituents, by the way—I have real concerns about the number of our students who are in unsafe housing. Does she agree that universities and landlords must do more to upgrade student housing to the highest standards to ensure that what happened at Grenfell does not happen there?

Rushanara Ali: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I urge the Minister to use his powers and his position to look at these issues in the round, so that he can sleep at night and feel comfortable that he has done everything to protect people. Ultimately, we have a duty of care and responsibility to our citizens, and I hope that he will do all he can to address these points today.

My own local authority has 49 ACM-clad high-rise blocks, which is one of the highest figures in the country. I have had representations from many of my constituents over the past few years. It been years now, and the leaseholders have had to pay for the fire safety wardens. They were originally told that this would take a few months, but it has been years. They are worried about their safety and there is no end in sight for the work being completed. It has been done for some blocks but not for others.

A number of people have been told that the housing providers will not be able to provide the fire service reports. I hope that the Minister can give me some clarity on the need for transparency here, because whether they are private developers who own the freehold or

[Rushanara Ali]

housing associations, they should provide the fire safety reports. Without them, it is difficult for our residents to know how much they will have to pay if there is no Government funding, or to make plans for their future.

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): Do you agree that many of my constituents in the Riverside Quarter, the Swish Building and the Argento Tower are facing this same limbo and have no end in sight? The fund needs to be given out more quickly and transparently. Would you agree that the Minister is not doing enough to explain about these funds and when they will be made available for residents?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Would the hon. Lady mind saying, “Would the hon. Lady agree” rather than “Would you agree”?

Rushanara Ali: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. As the Minister can see, this is a short debate but there is a lot of interest and concern, and I hope that he will hear these concerns and address these points, and that he will really look carefully at how we can unblock these issues so that people can get the results they need so that they can live safely.

One of my constituents said:

“I spend all day stressed at the thought of losing my home. At night I am anxious about the possibility of fire. I haven’t slept well for months and do not see any end in the situation. I am trapped. I cannot sell and I am not allowed to rent the flat out. I am forced to stay here. It now feels like a prison.”

Another said: “I feel suicidal.” Another said:

“I can’t sleep from worry. Because of covid-19 I could lose my job any day now, and when that happens I won’t be able to pay my mortgage or sell my flat. Because of the cladding, I will end up losing everything I have worked for. It’s a big worry that affects my mental health and sleep. It is not fair for the Government to allow housing associations and construction companies to sell us unsafe houses, and we are now getting punished for their mistakes.”

Housing providers have an obligation to ensure that they are doing everything they can to make buildings safe, but the Government have the ultimate responsibility to ensure that they have access to the funds needed to do so. The Government took a long time before providing the funds and gave private developers and freeholders plenty of time to get their act together, but they have not done so. It is time the Government used their powers to make this happen. Ministers have said repeatedly that private owners of buildings have the responsibility to act, but the Government are shirking their responsibility by leaving it to the good will of building owners—many with complex ownership structures based in other countries, including for tax avoidance purposes—to apply for a limited first come, first served fund or to pay for the works themselves. Many have found cunning ways to avoid paying anything, leaving our constituents high and dry, unable to live safely in their homes. This is unacceptable. It has to stop. Our Government must act and go after those owners. We have said this time and again, and it has not happened.

I call on the Minister to address the following questions. Will he explain what powers he will use to make private developers and freeholders end the delays and remove the cladding? Will he increase the building safety fund to cover the costs of removing cladding and other fire

risks to all buildings in that position? Will he provide a clear timeline for remediation that the Government will stick to? What plans does he have for ensuring that upcoming legislation improves fire safety and building regulation? Will he consider primary legislation that goes far enough to prevent another tragedy, as well as increased funding and resources for the fire services to carry out vital preventive inspection work?

Finally, I draw the Minister’s attention to the recommendation of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee that the Government should give urgent consideration to the establishment of a new national body whose sole purpose is to purchase the freehold and manage the remediation of buildings with serious fire safety defects. Any residential building where works have not commenced by December 2020 should be subject to a compulsory purchase order. The national body would step in where overburdened local authorities are unable to act. Once remediated, buildings should be converted to commonhold and returned to leaseholders. In my view, that is a reasonable and proportionate way forward if companies do not act. I hope the Minister will consider that suggestion. If he will not, we just need action. If he comes up with another creative way to make things happen to keep our constituents safe, now is the moment to set out his plans, and I hope he will.

After Grenfell, the then Prime Minister said:

“My Government will do whatever it takes to...keep our people safe.”

Three years on, this Government have been found wanting. I implore the Minister and the Government to honour the commitments that were made by his party in government when this tragedy happened. It was a man-made disaster that should have been avoided. We need to learn from that and make sure that we all do everything we can to keep people safe. The Government must honour their commitments and honour those who lost their lives, make the funds available, and create the legal framework and the requirements to make sure that our constituents can live without fear safely in their homes.

7.18 pm

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) for securing the Adjournment debate and bringing this important subject to the House today. She secured a similar debate in April last year. I know it is a matter of considerable importance in her constituency, and I pay tribute to her on the record for the work she is doing on behalf of her constituents. I also thank all hon. Members who have taken the time to intervene on behalf of their constituents about the challenges of remediating high-rise residential buildings with unsafe cladding systems, particularly in the light of covid-19.

We established our building safety programme within days of the Grenfell Tower fire. Its aim remains to ensure that residents of high-rise buildings are safe, now and in the future. Our aim has been clear from the outset: unsafe ACM cladding of the type found on Grenfell Tower and other dangerous cladding must be removed from high-rise residential buildings. It is therefore our priority to ensure that unsafe ACM cladding is removed and replaced swiftly, at no cost to leaseholders.

While many responsible building owners have taken action, some—as the hon. Lady says—have not. Too many building owners and managing agents in the private sector have been too slow in getting remediation work started.

Tom Hunt: A legal dispute is going on between the freeholder of St Francis Tower in Ipswich and the contractor that put the unsafe cladding on the building. Surely that is an admission from both parties that one of them is to blame, not the leaseholder, yet the leaseholder is in the middle and is getting harassed to pay fees that it should not have to pay.

Christopher Pincher: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I will not dwell on any particular tower block or issue, but let me simply say that our intention is to make sure that leaseholders should not have to foot the bill; building owners and building managers and their agents should be looking after their buildings. That is why the Government have intervened with funding and specialist support, and we will not tolerate any further delays. Where building owners are failing to make acceptable progress, those responsible should expect local authorities and fire and rescue services to take tougher enforcement action.

By the end of May, of the 455 identified high-rise buildings with ACM cladding, 209 had either completed remediation or had their ACM cladding systems removed, while a further 86 had started remediation but not yet had ACM cladding removed. However, although there has been progress, there is much more to be done. We are under no illusion about that. For the removal of unsafe ACM cladding, we are aiming for all building owners to have works on site by the end of 2020, with completion of remedial works by the end of 2021. It is a challenge, but one that we are determined to meet.

Even with public funding available, the pace has been much too slow. We recognise that remediation is a complex undertaking and that every building is different; we also understand that building owners do not always have the requisite expertise or experience to advance the work. We have therefore recently appointed Faithful+Gould as specialist construction consultants to help responsible entities to increase capacity and capability and to support them directly through the remediation process. F+G is currently working with those buildings identified as most at risk of missing the end-of-year date. It is examining project plans and seeking ways to reduce timescales to mobilise projects.

Overall, the Government have set aside £1.6 billion in funding for the remediation of ACM and other types of unsafe cladding from high-rise residential buildings in the private and social housing sectors. We made that money available to support the remediation of unsafe cladding, and a large proportion of that support will protect leaseholders from costs. We recognise that there are wider remediation costs that will need to be met to ensure the safety of existing blocks of flats, but the public funding does not absolve the industry from taking responsibility for any failures that led to unsafe cladding materials being put on those buildings in the first place. We expect developers, investors and building owners who have the means to pay to take responsibility and cover the cost of remediation themselves, without passing on costs to leaseholders.

The Government have committed £600 million to remediate buildings in the public, social and private sectors and speed up the pace of remediation of ACM cladding. In the private sector, although some developers said that they would meet the costs, it became clear that a significant number of building owners could not or would not do so, and therefore funding needed to be made available to enable progress. That is why in May 2019 we announced that £200 million of funding would be available for ACM remediation in private sector buildings, and the fund was opened for applications in September that year. As of May 2020, the Department expects to pay for 94 projects in the private sector where the developer or building owner has not agreed to fund remediation work themselves. The owners of 84 private sector residential buildings have committed to funding the remediation works themselves, with a further 23 self-funded through accepted warranty claims. We are working with a handful of other buildings where a funding route has yet to be agreed. The availability of funding and a direct package of support for building owners means that there can be no excuses for further delays. For those who fail to make acceptable progress, tougher sanctions are coming, first through our Fire Safety Bill, currently before Parliament, and subsequently when our new building safety regime comes into place.

We have always acknowledged that there are materials other than ACM cladding that are of concern. We have been providing advice on their removal to building owners since 2017. The highest priority has been the removal of the type of ACM used on Grenfell Tower because it poses the most severe safety risk, but there are other unsafe cladding materials that must also be removed. That is why in March this year we announced an additional £1 billion of funding for the remediation of unsafe non-ACM cladding in the social and private residential sectors. We expect this funding to be fully committed by the end of March 2021. The new building safety fund will cover high-rise buildings with unsafe non-ACM cladding, such as some types of high-pressure laminate.

The issue of waking watch was raised by the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow and by other hon. and right hon. Members. I know that leaseholders have concerns about costs of interim measures—costs that have been heightened due to the covid-19 emergency. These interim measures include waking watches. Waking watch is meant to be a short-term tool: it is no substitute for remediation. But the only way to remove the need for interim measures is to remove unsafe cladding as quickly as possible. That is why we are prioritising £1.6 billion of public subsidy on remediation of unsafe cladding. That said, my noble Friend Lord Greenhalgh, the Minister with responsibility for building safety, is investigating what we can do to reduce the cost of waking watch. This includes publishing data on the costs of waking watch to ensure greater transparency on costs. Moreover, the National Fire Chiefs Council is updating its guidance. We have asked the fire protection boards to advise fire and rescue services on how best to operationalise the revised guidance, including looking to measures such as installing building-wide fire alarm systems.

Meg Hillier: Will the Minister commit to looking at the issue of professional indemnity insurance? This does need a good political fix at the top.

Christopher Pincher: I am pleased that the hon. Lady has mentioned professional indemnity insurance. Let me assure her that following my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's commitment to review the situation on—I believe, from memory—2 April this year, my noble Friend Lord Greenhalgh has met members of the insurance industry and other fire and safety professionals. I think the last meeting was on 30 June. He is investigating, at pace, ways in which this particular issue may be remedied.

Our landmark building safety Bill, announced in December, will bring the biggest change in our building safety regime for a generation. It will build on the recommendations of Dame Judith Hackitt's independent review of building regulations and fire safety. It contains provisions to help to remedy the systemic failings that resulted in the Grenfell Tower fire. The new regime will give residents a stronger voice in an improved system of fire safety, overseen by a more effective regulatory framework, including stronger powers to inspect high-rise buildings and sanctions to tackle irresponsible behaviour.

Much progress has been made since the hon. Member secured a similar debate in April last year: we have set aside £1.6 billion of funding to support the issue and resolve it; we have appointed specialist consultants to increase the pace of remediation; and we have introduced the Fire Safety Bill to strengthen enforcement action. But the hard work must continue, and it will.

We will shortly publish the draft building safety Bill—a once-in-a-generation change to the building safety regime—that will be instrumental not only in shaping future policy to allow the new regime to prevent fire safety defects from occurring in the first place, but also in ensuring that people are safe and feel safe in their homes. We will continue to work tirelessly to bring about the lasting change we need for the future of building safety and the future of all the people living in towers in this country.

Question put and agreed to.

7.31 pm

House adjourned.

Members Eligible for a Proxy Vote

The following is the list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy:

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth)	Jim McMahon
Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield)	Stuart Andrew
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green)	Mark Tami
Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting)	Mark Tami
Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud)	Stuart Andrew
Hannah Bardell (Livingston)	Patrick Grady
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Beckett (Derby South)	Clive Efford
Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley)	Stuart Andrew
Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East)	Mark Tami
Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South)	Patrick Grady
Bob Blackman (Harrow East)	Stuart Andrew
Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North)	Patrick Grady
Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough)	Stuart Andrew
Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill)	Patrick Grady
Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire)	Stuart Andrew
James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham)	Mark Tami
Richard Burgon (Leeds East)	Zarah Sultana
Conor Burns (Bournemouth West)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow)	Patrick Grady
Sir William Cash (Stone)	Leo Docherty
Sarah Champion (Rotherham)	Mark Tami
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife)	Patrick Grady
Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire)	Mark Tami
Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde)	Patrick Grady
Mr Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon)	Alex Burghart
Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark)	Mark Tami
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East)	Patrick Grady
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow)	Mark Tami

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford)	Caroline Nokes
Janet Daby (Lewisham East)	Mark Tami
Geraint Davies (Swansea West)	Chris Evans
Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden)	Stuart Andrew
Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland)	Stuart Andrew
Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk)	Patrick Grady
Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West)	Mark Tami
Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Rachel Hopkins
Caroline Dinenage (Gosport)	Caroline Nokes
Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire)	Patrick Grady
Dave Doogan (Angus)	Patrick Grady
Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington)	Mark Tami
Philip Dunne (Ludlow)	Jeremy Hunt
Colum Eastwood (Foyle)	Conor McGinn
Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall)	Mark Tami
Bill Esterson (Sefton Central)	Mark Tami
Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth)	Stuart Andrew
Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield)	Stuart Andrew
Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw)	Patrick Grady
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West)	Patrick Grady
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford)	Mark Tami
George Freeman (Mid Norfolk)	Theo Clarke
Marcus Fysh (Yeovil)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet)	Caroline Nokes
Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston)	Mark Tami
Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham)	Stuart Andrew
Mary Glindon (North Tyneside)	Mark Tami
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Grant (Glenrothes)	Patrick Grady
Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts)	Patrick Grady
Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West)	Mark Tami
Kate Griffiths (Burton)	Aaron Bell
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish)	Mark Tami
Robert Halfon (Harlow)	Lucy Allan
Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East)	Mark Tami
Claire Hanna (Belfast South)	Liz Saville Roberts
Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath)	Patrick Grady
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham)	Mark Tami
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston)	Mark Tami
Mike Hill (Hartlepool)	Mark Tami
Simon Hoare (North Dorset)	Fay Jones

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking)	Wes Streeting
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West)	Mark Tami
Adam Holloway (Gravesham)	Maria Caulfield
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley)	Mark Tami
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border)	Stuart Andrew
Imran Hussain (Bradford East)	Judith Cummins
Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire)	Stuart Andrew
Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham)	Stuart Andrew
Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North)	Mark Tami
Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton)	Ruth Edwards
Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South)	Mark Tami
Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton)	Mark Tami
Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire)	Mr William Wragg
Ian Lavery (Wansbeck)	Mary Kelly Foy
Chris Law (Dundee West)	Patrick Grady
Clive Lewis (Norwich South)	Mark Tami
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset)	Stuart Andrew
Tony Lloyd (Rochdale)	Mark Tami
Mark Logan (Bolton North East)	Stuart Andrew
Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles)	Cat Smith
Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster)	Lee Rowley
Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking)	Stuart Andrew
Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian)	Patrick Grady
Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood)	Mark Tami
Alan Mak (Havant)	Stuart Andrew
Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford)	Stuart Andrew
Rachael Maskell (York Central)	Mark Tami
Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough)	Mark Tami
Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East)	Patrick Grady
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington)	Cat Smith
Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East)	Patrick Grady
John Mc Nally (Falkirk)	Patrick Grady
Stephen McPartland (Stevenage)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Mearns (Gateshead)	Mark Tami
Mark Menzies (Fylde)	Sir David Amess
Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock)	Stuart Andrew
Edward Miliband (Doncaster North)	Mark Tami
Nigel Mills (Amber Valley)	Stuart Andrew
Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Patrick Grady
Jessica Morden (Newport East)	Mark Tami
Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot)	Stuart Andrew
David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale)	Stuart Andrew
Grahame Morris (Easington)	Mark Tami
Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield)	Stuart Andrew
James Murray (Ealing North)	Mark Tami
John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire)	Patrick Grady
Neil O'Brien (Harborough)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon)	Rebecca Harris
Guy Opperman (Hexham)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Osamor (Edmonton)	Nadia Whittome
Sarah Owen (Luton North)	Alex Norris
Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich)	Peter Aldous
Lucy Powell (Manchester Central)	Mark Tami
Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East)	Mark Tami
Christina Rees (Neath)	Mark Tami
Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge)	Mark Tami
Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston)	Mark Tami
Naz Shah (Bradford West)	Mark Tami
Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall)	Mark Tami
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield)	Mark Tami
Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell)	Stuart Andrew
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East)	Patrick Grady
Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn)	Mark Tami
Alyn Smith (Stirling)	Patrick Grady
Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen)	Robert Courts
Jo Stevens (Cardiff Glasgow Central)	Mark Tami
Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon)	Stuart Andrew
Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central)	Patrick Grady
Gareth Thomas (Harrow West)	Mark Tami
Jon Trickett (Hemsworth)	Olivia Blake
Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East)	Mark Tami
David Warburton (Somerton and Frome)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire)	Patrick Grady
Hywel Williams (Arfon)	Ben Lake
Mohammad Yasin (Bedford)	Mark Tami

Written Statements

Tuesday 14 July 2020

CABINET OFFICE

Amendments to the Withdrawal Agreement

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): At its second meeting on 12 June 2020, the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee, which I co-chaired with European Commission Vice-President, Maroš Šefčovič, adopted one decision to correct errors and omissions in the withdrawal agreement (decision No. 1/2020).

Decision No. 1/2020 makes technical changes to part I annex I—social security co-ordination, and part 5—financial provisions of the withdrawal agreement.

The changes to part I annex I add in two decisions made by the Administrative Commission for the Coordination of Social Security Systems to the list of decisions and recommendations already set out. Decision No. F3 specifies how the amount of family benefits should be calculated for a recipient. Decision No. E7 states that, as of 3 July 2019, the transmission of data between the institutions shall be carried out by electronic means through the electronic exchange of social security information (EESSI) system and based on the exchange of structured electronic documents. These decisions were approved by the EU on 19 December 2018 and 27 June 2019 respectively.

The changes to part 5 include amendments to articles 135, 137, 143, 144 and 150 that reflect the actual date of the UK's departure from the EU on 31 January 2020. An additional amendment was made to article 145 to provide legal certainty to UK beneficiaries in respect of grants made under the research fund for steel and coal until the closure of these projects.

The decision was published by the UK and the EU on 14 July 2020.

[HCWS365]

TREASURY

Annual European Union Finances Statement

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Steve Barclay): I am today laying before Parliament the “European Union Finances 2019: statement on the 2019 EU Budget and measures to counter fraud and financial mismanagement” (CP 256). This is a routine annual publication and is the 39th in the series.

The statement gives details of revenue and expenditure in the 2019 European Union (EU) budget, recent developments in EU financial management and measures to counter fraud against the EU budget. It also includes a chapter and annex on the use of EU funds in the UK over the period.

The document also provides an updated HM Treasury estimate of the value of the financial settlement, which was made legally binding by the passage of the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020. Exit from the EU on 31 January 2020 resulted in some UK and EU payments that would originally have been paid post-withdrawal being paid while the UK remained a

member state. HM Treasury estimate that the current value of the financial settlement is £30.2 billion. This remains within the Government's reasonable central range of £35-39 billion, adjusted to take into account the UK's 31 January 2020 exit date. In annex E, HM Treasury provides an updated summary of the financial settlement, other costs set out in the withdrawal agreement and short-term public expenditure costs.

[HCWS366]

OBR 2020 Fiscal Sustainability Report and response to OBR 2019 Fiscal Risks Report

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rishi Sunak): Today's publication of the Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR) 2020 Fiscal Sustainability Report (FSR) fulfils the OBR's legal obligation to publish an analysis of the sustainability of the public finances over the long-term and an assessment of the public sector balance sheet at least once every two years. This report has been laid before Parliament today and copies are available in the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office. The OBR also produces a biennial fiscal risks report (FRR) to which the Government are required to respond within a year. This statement provides the Government's response to Office for Budget Responsibility—Fiscal risks report July 2019 [CP131], laid 18 July 2019^[1].

The action the Government have taken in response to the covid-19 pandemic was necessary to protect public health, support household incomes, and to minimise permanent damage to the economy—thereby supporting growth, employment and the public finances over the medium to long term. As the OBR has said in the FSR:

“The outlook would have been much worse without the measures the Government have taken. These have provided additional financial support to individuals and businesses through the lockdown. They should also help to limit any long-term economic scarring, by keeping workers attached to firms and helping otherwise viable firms stay in business”.

OBR 2020 fiscal sustainability report

The magnitude and duration of the economic shock caused by covid-19 will have important consequences for the medium and long-term fiscal position. In all three scenarios the OBR has published in the FSR, the level of borrowing this year is significantly higher than expected in the OBR's spring Budget forecast. Public sector net borrowing is projected to reach between 13% and 21% of GDP in 2020-21, with differences across scenarios reflecting the size of the economic shock. This in turn means that public sector net debt is also projected to be higher compared to the spring Budget forecast under all scenarios, although the OBR has highlighted that low borrowing costs help to make this more affordable in the near-term. The gilt market is deep and liquid with a good track record in responding smoothly to increases in gilt supply. Underlying demand for the UK's debt remains strong, with borrowing costs at historical lows, signalling confidence in the UK's institutions.

The Government have taken significant action to support the recovery and minimise permanent damage from the pandemic. In the long-run, the OBR also expects demographic change and other cost pressures in health spending to put upward pressure on public spending while leaving revenues broadly unchanged. The Government are committed to fiscal sustainability and ensuring the

long-term health of the public finances. The Government will set out further details on their plans to put the public finances back on a sustainable footing over the medium-term at the next Budget, alongside an updated OBR forecast. As part of this, as set out in the March Budget, HM Treasury is reviewing the UK's fiscal framework to ensure it remains appropriate for the macroeconomic context, while ensuring the sustainability of the public finances. The FSR provides important analysis and scenarios which will be used to inform this review.

Managing fiscal risks from covid-19

In July 2019, the OBR published its second fiscal risks report covering the main risks to the public finances at that time. With covid-19 now clearly the most significant immediate source of fiscal risk facing the UK, this response to the report focuses on how the Government are managing the fiscal risks associated with the pandemic.

The work of the last 10 years in bringing borrowing and debt back under control means that the UK was well-placed to respond to the immediate and long-term challenges posed by covid-19.

The Government acted quickly to implement interventions containing the initial economic shock from the pandemic. When designing these interventions, the Government drew on the experience gained from HM Treasury's Balance Sheet Review^[2] and international best practice^[3] to ensure that fiscal risks are managed effectively. The IMF commended the Government's powerful response to the initial shock of covid-19, finding the interventions to be large, substantial and carefully targeted^[4].

In the first phase of the economic response to covid-19, the Government kept people attached to their work, protected their incomes and supported businesses, delivering one of the most generous and comprehensive packages of support globally, with a fiscal response totalling £160 billion. While the economic impacts of covid-19 and the Government's necessary response have come at a significant fiscal cost, the costs of failing to act to support public services, businesses, and workers would have been much higher.

Building on the action taken in the face of the immediate threat posed by the virus, the Government are now proceeding with the second phase of their response, supporting the UK's economic recovery while continuing to prioritise people's health. The plan for jobs announced last week, made up to £30 billion available to help kick-start the nation's economic recovery while continuing to prioritise people's health by: introducing a new job retention bonus to encourage firms to keep on furloughed workers; supporting jobs with direct help to find work and to gain the skills people need to get a job; protecting jobs in the hard-hit hospitality and accommodation sectors and at attractions by supporting demand for these businesses, giving them confidence to reopen; creating jobs with action to get the property market moving, to increase and bring forward infrastructure investment, and to make homes greener, warmer and cheaper to heat.

The third phase of the Government's plan will be set out in the autumn with measures to support the longer-term recovery through a Budget and a spending review. These will detail further plans to invest in public services, to support innovation and growth-enhancing infrastructure with a national infrastructure strategy, to seize global opportunities and to level up opportunity across every region and nation of the UK.

Wider fiscal risk management

While the immediate focus of Government action is on dealing with covid-19, the management of the wider risks facing the UK public finances remains important. The Government have acted to address a number of the risks that were discussed by the OBR in FRR 2019.

To address the long-term challenge of low productivity growth, Budget 2020 announced measures investing in UK infrastructure, backing tech and innovation, making tax changes to support firms to invest, and introducing measures to support a dynamic and competitive economy. The Prime Minister also announced on 30 June that we will be improving the quality, speed and efficiency of delivering infrastructure through a new infrastructure delivery taskforce named Project Speed.

In the longer-term, climate change remains a significant challenge for the wider public finances. Demonstrating the Government's commitment to mitigating climate change, in November 2019, the Chancellor launched an HM Treasury review into how the transition to net zero greenhouse gas emissions will be funded and where the costs will fall. Spring Budget allocated £640 million for tree planting and peatland restoration, over £1 billion for ultra-low emission vehicles and introduced tax measures to encourage greater energy efficiency and reduce plastic waste. The UK is also increasing its international climate finance support for developing countries to at least £11.6 billion. To improve the UK's climate resilience, the Government announced a doubling of investment in flood and coastal defences in England to £5.2 billion over the next six years. The devolved Administrations will benefit from the Barnett consequential of this substantial increase in Government investment in flood and coastal defences.

To manage risks associated with non-bank financial intermediation and increase the resilience of the UK financial system, in the remit for the Financial Policy Committee (FPC), HMT recommended that the FPC publishes a detailed assessment of the oversight and mitigation of systemic risks from the non-bank sector. The FPC has confirmed it will publish preliminary findings in the August financial stability report, followed by a more detailed report that outlines gaps in non-bank resilience and potential measures that may be taken to increase resilience.

The OBR also highlighted fiscal risks related to tax reliefs. The Government recognise the need to monitor and evaluate existing tax reliefs; the Government will continue to monitor their use and act where appropriate, for example through the recent reforms to Entrepreneurs' Relief, and the planned changes to the entitlement to use red diesel. HMRC is committed to increasing the number of published costs of tax reliefs and in May 2020 published cost estimates for another 47 non-structural tax reliefs. HMRC will continue to build on this to increase transparency.

^[1] <https://obr.uk/frr/fiscal-risks-report-july-2019/>

^[2] The Balance Sheet Review (BSR) was launched in 2017 to identify opportunities to dispose of assets that no longer serve a policy purpose, improve returns on retained assets, and reduce the risk and cost of liabilities.

^[3] <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/SPROLLS/covid19-special-notes>

^[4] <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/04/14/tr041420-transcript-of-april-2020-world-economic-outlook-press-briefing>.

EDUCATION

Children's Social Care: Regulations

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Vicky Ford): On 24 April 2020 regulations were introduced to provide local authorities and children's social care providers with temporary flexibilities to support them to focus on core safeguarding duties during the coronavirus pandemic. We made no amendments to primary legislation, and the vast majority of statutory duties in secondary legislation remained unchanged. The regulations—the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020—are due to lapse on 25 September 2020.

When the regulations were introduced, we faced exceptional circumstances, with social workers and others facing decisions that they had never faced before. There was an urgent need to take action to ensure that local authorities and others supporting children and young people could focus on core safeguarding responsibilities should the worst-case scenario come to pass. We needed to prepare for very significant rates of staff sickness coupled with family illness potentially leading to many more children needing to be found emergency care. We were aware that the coronavirus pandemic would have a real impact on the lives of children and families, and that this would be a difficult time for them.

Protecting vulnerable children has been at the heart of the Government's response to the virus. These regulations formed part of that response, alongside keeping schools and other settings open for vulnerable children, substantial additional investment, and additional support direct to children, young people, and their families.

The Government have always been clear that these temporary amendments should be used only when absolutely necessary and only if consistent with the overarching safeguarding and welfare duties that have remained in place. Our guidance sets out clear safeguards about how and when they should be used:

where staff shortages, due to sickness or other reasons, make it difficult or impossible to meet the original requirements.

where making use of flexibilities to take a different approach is the most sensible, risk-based response in light of other demands and pressures on services, this might involve focusing services on those most at risk.

where there is a consequential reason to make use of flexibilities, for example, due to limited capacity in other providers or partners making it difficult or impossible to comply with the original requirements.

Our monitoring has shown that the majority of the regulatory flexibilities have been rarely used and only when needed in response to coronavirus.

Our approach to monitoring is based on a triangulation of information we are gathering from a range of delivery partners to understand which of the regulations are being used and why. We are actively seeking regular feedback from a variety of sources including local authorities, social workers, charities, Ofsted, and other key partners. We will continue to engage on this scale while the regulations remain in place.

Our monitoring data shows that the regulations are being used infrequently. Out of 128 local authorities we have spoken with in June and July, 87 have used at least one regulation, although many have only used them on a limited number of occasions and in a limited number of areas.

The most used related to the fostering and adoption regulations, notably allowing medical reports to be considered at a later stage in the adoption and fostering process though still prior to approval. This has minimised delays in approving adopters for children needing a new, forever, family. Similarly, relaxations around panels have allowed for the continued recruitment of foster carers and a continued functionality of processes.

Virtual engagement with children and families has often been used alongside face-to-face visits and, in some cases, this has resulted in greater levels of contact between children, young people, parents, and carers—and improved engagement from some young people.

Senior leaders in children's social care have set out to the Government and Ofsted how they have approached the use of the temporary regulations and explained that they have robust sign-off processes in place for when a regulation has been used. Ofsted reports that local authorities have said decisions on the use of the regulations are being made with the child at the heart of the case, in line with the principles in the guidance, including assessing risks and working on a collaborative basis.

We have always been clear that these temporary amendments will remain in place only for so long as they are needed.

The extraordinary measures the Government have taken over the last few months means that we are now in a much better position to ease the restrictions that everyone has faced. Given the lower level of coronavirus now present, there is a significantly reduced need for local authorities and providers to use these flexibilities. I therefore intend to update guidance immediately to make it clear that there should no longer be a need to use most of these flexibilities and will be writing to local authorities and providers accordingly. Where they do use flexibilities, local authorities and providers should ensure that they have strong justification.

I would also like to provide further clarity about the future of these flexibilities and am today announcing that, subject to a short period of consultation, the overwhelming majority of these regulations will expire as planned on 25 September.

The Government believe that there may be circumstances in which some services continue to face specific and exceptional challenges into the autumn. As more children are seen by schools, and social distancing eases further and hitherto hidden harms come to light, we must be prepared for the potential additional demands that may still be placed on services.

I am therefore minded, subject to consultation, to extend a very small number of temporary changes for a further period. These regulations specifically address the following points.

Medical reports

In order to become a foster carer or adoptive parent, one needs to provide a medical report from a general practitioner. As restrictions are eased and schools return, we expect that there may be more children needing care than is usual, and therefore there will be a higher need for potential adopters and foster carers. Our national health service still faces significant challenges as we enter a period of recovery. Therefore, I am minded to extend the amendments that allow more time for general practitioners and other health professionals to provide

information to support the process of approving much needed potential adopters and foster carers. This does not remove the requirement for medical reports to be provided but moves the time during the process that the report must be provided before the child is placed with the foster parent or adoptive parent.

Virtual visits

We must be able to keep essential services, such as social worker visits, operating during any local lockdowns, and in cases where households are being required to self-isolate due to a case, or suspected case, of coronavirus, or contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus, in line with medical advice from the NHS test and trace service. Therefore, I am suggesting that it may be appropriate to continue to enable visits in these situations to happen virtually. However, in all other situations I would expect face-to-face visits to take place. Moreover, in my view the flexibilities regarding timing of these visits should lapse, as the provision for virtual visits should now provide sufficient flexibility on the basis that workforce capacity, the original reason for these flexibilities being introduced, is now no longer the concern that it was.

Ofsted inspections

Ofsted inspections have not taken place since March so Ofsted will need a period of catch-up before it can resume normal service. As announced last week, Ofsted is planning to carry out a phased return to routine inspections. This will include risk-based assurance visits to children's social care settings, based on the previous inspection judgement, the amount of time since a setting was last inspected and other information Ofsted holds about the setting. These assurance visits will occur between September 2020 and March 2021. At this point full graded inspections will recommence. I am therefore recommending that the suspension of the existing frequency regulation for Ofsted inspections be extended until 31 March 2021, to allow Ofsted to provide the most assurance, to the sector and the wider public, about the safety and care of children.

A short consultation will launch later this week to inform final decisions and I would encourage all interested parties to respond. Should a new statutory instrument be proposed to extend any flexibility beyond 25 September 2020, Parliament will be provided with the customary 21 days opportunity to scrutinise the regulations before they come into force.

Our guidance has been clear that the regulatory flexibilities should only ever have been used with senior management oversight and that all decisions should be recorded. I am, however, considering how additional safeguards on the use of the flexibilities could be employed. Our consultation will therefore seek views on this question.

As inspections resume, Ofsted will want to be assured that any flexibilities have been used in the best interests of children, following careful risk assessment and with clear records of decisions made by local authorities and providers. As such, local authorities and providers must maintain a focus on child-centred practice and continue to record their decisions and ensure that these records are available for Ofsted. Inspectors will want to see the best possible practice for children. While routine inspections have been suspended, Ofsted has continued to inspect where it has been made aware of safeguarding concerns. It has acted swiftly and taken action to restrict children

going into a home or stop a home operating in 23 cases. It has continued to start proceedings to cancel the registration of homes or managers where this is the right thing to do. And while it has prioritised registration of new children's homes, it has still refused to register people it did not think were suitable.

Throughout this pandemic, social workers, charities, and others working to support our most vulnerable children and families have worked tirelessly to ensure that they continue to receive the support they need. I would like to place on record my personal gratitude, and that of the whole Government, for everything they have done and continue to do. I would also like to acknowledge the extremely difficult circumstances many children and families have faced during this pandemic.

Protecting vulnerable children remains our top priority, as it does for local authorities and children's social care providers across the country. As the country begins to return to a more normal way of life, it is absolutely right that this also applies to children's social care.

[HCWS368]

Higher Technical Education Reform

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson):

Today, I am pleased to launch the Government's new reforms of higher technical education in England.

Take up of higher technical education in England is low and has been falling, leading to skills shortages across our economy. Employers are struggling to access the higher technical skills they need to grow and thrive and learners are missing out on the opportunities that a higher technical education can bring. To build a more prosperous, productive and fairer country, that needs to change.

We are already taking action to strengthen technical education, with the roll-out of T-levels, investment in our further education colleges and up to £290 million for flagship institutes of technology. Now we need to take the next step in levelling up our skills system and reverse the generational decline in higher technical education.

Our vision is for higher technical education to be a popular and prestigious choice that delivers the skills employers and learners need. We want to encourage more students to continue studying after T-levels or A-levels, and we want higher technical education to attract workers of all ages looking to upskill and retrain.

At the moment, there are thousands of higher technical qualifications, with no national assurance that they provide the skills employers need. Some qualifications and courses are excellent, but overall there is low awareness and varying quality. The range of terminology, qualifications and provider types creates a complex landscape that is hard for employers and learners to navigate.

We will be establishing a high-quality system of higher technical education where learners and employers can have confidence in high-quality courses, whether they are taught in a further education college, a university or an independent training provider. The reforms being set out today are a vital first step in achieving that.

We will introduce a national scheme to approve higher technical qualifications that provide the skills that employers need, starting with digital qualifications, and followed

by health and science and construction qualifications. This scheme will be delivered through the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, and the institute will be guided by employer-led national standards.

We want providers offering high-quality higher technical courses to have access to industry standard facilities and equipment, teachers with relevant industrial experience and pedagogical expertise, and close links to employers. At the heart of this are our flagship institutes of technology and our national colleges. We will work with the Office for Students and Ofsted, drawing on their regulatory expertise, to ensure that higher technical education best meets the needs of learners and employers and provides value for money.

Finally, we will raise the profile and understanding of the best higher technical education courses through a Government-backed brand, a communications campaign and improvements to information, advice and guidance.

Reforming and growing higher technical education will be a long-term endeavour. We will continue to develop and implement our reforms carefully and work closely with everyone who shares our goal of improving higher technical education. Together we can transform higher technical education and better support learners and employers across England.

[HCWS362]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Policy

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): I recognise the immense impacts that flooding and coastal erosion can have on homes and businesses across the country. That is why this Government are committed to reducing the risk of harm to people, the environment and the economy from flooding and coastal erosion—as shown by our £2.6 billion investment in flood and coastal defences since 2015 to better protect 300,000 homes by 2021.

At the Budget we committed to double our investment in the flood and coastal defence programme in England over the next six years to £5.2 billion which will better protect a further 336,000 properties by 2027. In addition to this record funding, I am today announcing a further investment of up to £170 million to accelerate work on 22 shovel-ready flood defence schemes to boost jobs, businesses and economic growth as part of the economic recovery from coronavirus. These projects will commence in 2020 and 2021 to drive growth and unlock a range of benefits for local economies across the country—from Sheffield to Bude.

As part of the Government's continuing action to tackle climate change, we have today set out a package of measures to better protect and prepare the country against flooding and coastal erosion for the long-term. I have today published a new flood and coastal erosion risk management policy statement for England which represents the most substantive update to our national effort to tackle flood and coastal erosion risk in a decade—since the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

I am announcing further details of the £200 million programme which will support 25 local areas to drive innovation to increase resilience to flooding and coastal erosion—and I am proposing to take forward changes to the Flood Re scheme which will accelerate uptake of property flood resilience measures.

The long-term policy statement sets out the Government's ambition to create a nation more resilient to future flood and coastal erosion risk. It outlines five ambitious policies and over 40 supporting actions which will accelerate progress to better protect and better prepare the country against flooding and coastal erosion in the face of more frequent extreme weather as a result of climate change.

These actions will, not just, reduce the likelihood of flooding and coastal erosion but will also reduce the impacts if flooding does happen. They will work together to increase resilience across the country. The policy statement will encourage wider and more comprehensive action by all those with a part to play to drive down flood risk from every angle through these five policies:

Upgrading and expanding our national flood defences and infrastructure

We will continue to build the new flood defences that the nation needs, investing in more permanent, demountable and temporary defences—building on the success of our £2.6 billion investment to better protect 300,000 properties since 2015. As announced at the Budget, over the next six years, we will invest a record £5.2 billion in the flood and coastal defence programme in England. This will better protect a further 336,000 properties and reduce national flood risk by up to 11% by 2027.

Managing the flow of water more effectively

We will deliver an integrated approach to managing water to better protect communities from flooding and provide wider benefits for water resource management and the environment. As part of this, we will increase the number of water management schemes within and across catchments to reduce flood risk and help manage drought risk. We will also do more to tackle surface water flood risk.

Harnessing the power of nature to reduce flood and coastal erosion risk and achieve multiple benefits

We will double the number of Government funded projects which include nature-based solutions to reduce flood and coastal erosion risk. We will strengthen links between natural flood risk management and wider environmental and social benefits and explore how we can do more to deliver multiple benefits.

Better preparing our communities

We will ensure that every single home currently at high risk of flooding is better protected or better prepared. We will maintain and enhance our planning policies that direct new development away from areas at risk. We will ensure our communities and businesses have the information they need to take ownership of their resilience. Our policies will help to ensure that buildings, important infrastructure sites and key public services are better prepared to manage flood risk. We will work together to support communities, including when flooding happens and in recovery.

Enabling more resilient places through a catchment-based approach

We will adopt a catchment-based approach which means considering the full range of actions that could be taken in an area, upstream and downstream, by a variety of bodies to improve resilience. We will transform the current approach to local flood and coastal erosion risk planning so that every area of England will have a more strategic and comprehensive local plan by 2026 which drives long-term local action and investment. In areas facing significant coastal erosion and impacts from sea levels rising, we will support local areas to implement long-term plans to manage risk.

Alongside the policy statement, the Environment Agency will shortly lay before Parliament its National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England. The strategy which will provide direction to the work of risk management authorities on the ground and includes strategic objectives to improve the resilience of the nation through to 2100.

The new £200 million innovative resilience programme will test and demonstrate actions which are needed to deliver the ambition outlined in the policy statement. As well as delivering innovative actions in 25 selected areas, the evidence gained from the programme will enable successful approaches to be identified and implemented more widely.

In July 2019 Flood Re published its first quinquennial review into the scheme—a legislative requirement every five years—and made a number of proposals to Government. Having carefully considered these proposals I am today announcing that we will consult on a number of them, including some proposals which go further in order to increase the uptake of property flood resilience and better support customers and insurers to recognise the benefits. The proposals will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the scheme and incentivise the use of property flood resilience measures to make properties more resilient to flooding.

The actions the Government are committing to today will strengthen our approach to tackling flood and coastal erosion risk for the long-term and demonstrates the UK's world-leading work to tackle climate change. They will improve our health and wellbeing, enhance our environment and support our economic recovery. Taken together this means that our country will be significantly more resilient to flooding and coastal erosion and will ensure that every place can thrive in a changing climate.

[HCWS360]

HOME DEPARTMENT

HMICFRS Report on National Crime Agency's Criminal Intelligence Function

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): The National Crime Agency (NCA) leads the fight against serious and organised crime (SOC). It has the power to task other law enforcement partners and a capability, with local to international reach, to disrupt the impact of SOC on the UK.

This is the sixth HMICFRS inspection of the NCA and examines the effectiveness of its criminal intelligence function. The focus is specifically on capabilities, resourcing, alignment with the 2018 SOC strategy and the national strategic assessment (NSA), ability to provide a single, authoritative, strategic assessment of threat, and compliance with national intelligence standards and existing legislation.

I have asked HMICFRS to publish the report on my behalf. It will be published today and will be available online at www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk. I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The inspection found that the NCA is meeting its statutory obligation to provide a criminal intelligence function and has the resources and systems in place to effectively manage information. Some deficiencies were identified in relation to PND licence provision, the need for timely submission of regional threat assessment and ensuring staff and systems are equipped to adequately manage sensitive intelligence. HMICFRS made four recommendations which, once addressed, will improve procedures and strengthen the agency's criminal intelligence capability.

It is for the NCA's director-general to respond to these recommendations, in line with the requirements of the Crime and Courts Act 2013.

[HCWS363]

Director General of National Crime Agency (Reappointment of Lynn Owens)

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): I have reappointed Lynne Owens to be the Director General of the National Crime Agency for a further two years from January 2021. The Director General holds an extremely important position in UK Law Enforcement, leading and co-ordinating the response to serious and organised crime (SOC). SOC affects more UK citizens than any other national security threat and costs us more than £37 billion every year.

It is customary to advertise the post of DG NCA to attract the very best talent available from as wide a field as possible—and, under normal circumstances, I would pursue this approach. However, this year is different for two important reasons. First, the UK is facing a threat unparalleled in peacetime from the coronavirus pandemic, and the NCA is playing a key part by working closely with its law enforcement partners to ensure that we are stopping the organised criminals who despicably try to use the crisis to their advantage.

Second, the way in which the UK tackles SOC is at a crucial stage in its development. The independent review of SOC conducted by Sir Craig Mackey has concluded, and the findings are being explored by the Home Office. The Government will announce their response later in the year, but developing the capabilities and role of the NCA will be key to that response. The NCA must continue with its excellent work, but it must also strive to develop and improve to ensure we stay ahead of the threat from SOC.

There is an overwhelming need, therefore, for an experienced leader at the NCA to provide stability while we tackle the coronavirus pandemic and to ensure effective delivery of this Government's manifesto commitment

to strengthen the Agency. I have no doubt that in Lynne's reappointment we will continue to see the work of a fantastic leader. During a career in law enforcement over 30 years, she has built up a wealth of experience holding a variety of different positions from frontline policing to Chief Constable of Surrey and, of course, Director General of the NCA.

[HCWS359]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Planning: Cultural Venues and Holiday Parks

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick):

PLANNING UPDATE: PREVENTING LOSS OF CULTURAL VENUES AND PLANNING CONDITIONS FOR HOLIDAY PARKS

Introduction

The nation's cultural and tourism industries are vitally important to the economy and the communities they serve. Many businesses in the sector have, and are continuing to face, severe disruption due to covid-19. This statement comes into effect immediately.

Preventing loss of theatres, concert halls and live music performance venues

The covid-19 pandemic presents particular challenges for organisations that depend on engaging with audiences and visitors in person. It has forced thousands of cultural institutions to close their doors, including theatres, concert halls and live music performance venues across the country. This is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture Media and Sport announced £1.57 billion in financial support for the sector on 5 July to help these venues survive this period, and enable them to reopen when it is safe and economically viable to do so.

However, covid-19 will continue to prevent the full reopening of a number of these venues for some time. This means that previously viable businesses face unprecedented financial difficulty. The Government recognise that the temporary closure of theatres, concert halls and live music performance venues due to covid-19 has the potential to lead to permanent loss of important cultural and economic assets, and are determined that otherwise viable facilities are not lost forever.

The purpose of this written ministerial statement, is to set out how local planning authorities should approach decision making to prevent the unnecessary loss of these venues. With immediate effect, local planning authorities should have due regard to their current circumstances when considering whether to grant planning permission for a change of use or demolition of a theatre, concert hall or live music performance venue that has been made temporarily vacant by covid-19 business disruption.

Where an alternative use or demolition for a long-term vacant theatre, concert hall or live music performance venue is proposed, local planning authorities should consider the application in the normal way. The Theatres Trust is a statutory consultee under the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (S.I. 2015/595) for applications

seeking to develop any land where there is a theatre and will have an opportunity to comment on any application relating to theatres.

This policy remains in place until 31 December 2022 unless superseded by a further statement.

It is also our intention to make an amendment to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development (England) Order 2015 (S.I. 2015/596) to remove permitted development rights for demolition of theatres, concert halls and live music performance venues. *Caravan and holiday parks*

The Government also recognise that the tourism industry will need to be able to adapt to secure its financial future. In response to covid-19 the majority of UK businesses closed in March 2020, including caravan and holiday parks. This has had a significant impact on the financial viability of over 2,200 businesses in this sector that employ around 46,000 staff. These parks are a mainstay of their local economies, providing employment and supporting local services and businesses.

Caravan and holiday parks in England were able to reopen from 4 July 2020. Extending their operation beyond the usual summer season will be invaluable to parks as the sector begins to recover. We are aware that current planning conditions may limit their open season. The temporary relaxation of these planning restrictions can play a vital role in helping local businesses to get up and running again.

The national planning policy framework already emphasises that planning enforcement is a discretionary activity, and local planning authorities should act proportionately in responding to suspected breaches of planning control. Given the current situation, while local planning authorities must have regard to their legal obligations, they should not seek to undertake planning enforcement action which would unnecessarily restrict the ability of caravan and holiday parks to extend their open season.

Where local planning authorities consider it appropriate to require an application to vary relevant planning conditions (where for instance there is a risk of flooding or where parks are situated close to protected sites) they should prioritise the application and make an early decision to provide certainty to caravan and holiday park operators. In doing so, they should consider the benefits of longer opening season times to the local economy as it recovers from the impact of covid-19.

This written ministerial statement only covers England.

[HCWS367]

TRANSPORT

HS2 Safeguarding

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): I am today publishing additional safeguarding directions to protect a site in Leeds which we anticipate may be needed to build phase 2b of the HS2 project.

The site is not currently in use. Any future planning application affecting the land that has been identified in the safeguarding directions and associated map would first need to be discussed with HS2 Ltd, and if necessary the Secretary of State, before being determined for as long as the safeguarding directions remain in place.

The owner of the site has been made aware of the safeguarding directions prior to their publication as has the local planning authority, Leeds City Council. By protecting the site now, the Government guard against potentially conflicting development, which could otherwise disrupt the construction of HS2, and or increase the costs of building the new railway.

I am not publishing updated safeguarding directions for the remainder of the future phase 2b route at this stage.

The final scope and phasing of HS2 phase 2b will be determined following publication of the Government's Integrated Rail Plan, which is expected to be published by the end of the year.

The Government periodically review land requirements needed for the project and update the extent of safeguarding accordingly. It is anticipated that land requirements for phase 2b HS2 will be updated prior to the deposit of a relevant hybrid Bill.

I am placing a copy of the safeguarding directions in the Libraries of both Houses.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2020-07-14/HCWS358/>.

[HCWS358]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Future Trading Relationship with Australia: Update on Negotiations

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): Trade negotiators from the UK and Australia held the first round of negotiations for a UK-Australia free trade agreement (FTA) between 29 June and 10 July 2020.

We are now one step closer to an ambitious, wide-ranging free trade agreement with one of our oldest friends. An FTA with Australia can bring investment, better jobs, higher wages and lower prices just when we need them the most.

Both teams of negotiators recognised the unprecedented circumstances we find ourselves in and reiterated that more global trade is essential to support post-covid economic recovery.

Negotiations were conducted virtually and covered discussions on all areas of a comprehensive trade agreement.

The discussions covered the following areas:

- Anti-corruption and transparency
- Competition
- Cross-cutting general provisions

- Customs
- Digital/e-commerce
- Environment
- Financial services
- Trade in goods and trade remedies
- Good regulatory practice
- Intellectual property
- Investment
- Labour
- Procurement
- Rules of origin
- Services, including movement of natural persons and professional business services
- Small and medium-sized enterprises
- State owned enterprises
- Sanitary and phytosanitary measures
- State to state dispute settlement
- Technical barriers to trade
- Telecommunications

We also had positive exploratory discussions on clean growth, development, women's economic empowerment, and innovation.

Discussions between negotiators were productive and reflected our shared ambition to secure a comprehensive deal to boost trade and investment between our like-minded economies.

Teams discussed their respective objectives and agreed a forward plan for future talks. Our positive discussions in round one have laid the groundwork for the UK and Australia to achieve high-quality outcomes across the agreement.

The UK and Australia are aligned in many areas which will enable us to make quick progress across many chapters. In discussions, both countries emphasised a desire to be particularly ambitious in areas including services, digital trade and in supporting small and medium-sized enterprises to benefit from the opportunities that increased trade provide.

The Government are committed to negotiating a comprehensive agreement with Australia and we look forward to making further progress. We will explore the option of face-to-face negotiations when it is safe to do so. The Government will make their next statement on progress following the second round of talks, currently planned for September.

[HCWS361]

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