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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Friday 23 October 2020

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER in the Chair]

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I beg to move, That the House sit in private.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 163).

The House divided: Ayes 0, Noes 48.

Division No. 155]

[9.34 am

AYES

Tellers for the Ayes:
David T. C. Davies and

Maria Caulfield

NOES

Amess, Sir David
Ansell, Caroline
Atherton, Sarah
Bhatti, Saqib
Brennan, Kevin
Carter, Andy
Chalk, Alex
Charalambous, Bambos
Chope, Sir Christopher
Clarkson, Chris
Davies, Dr James
Davison, Dehenna
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Evans, Dr Luke
Fletcher, Colleen
Fletcher, Mark
Ford, Vicky
Freer, Mike
Gideon, Jo
Harris, Rebecca
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Tom
Johnston, David

Jones, Gerald
Kyle, Peter
Lamont, John
Loder, Chris
Mackrory, Cheryl
McCarthy, Kerry
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morrissey, Joy
Parish, Neil
Prentis, Victoria
Randall, Tom
Spellar, rh John
Stevenson, Jane
Tami, rh Mark
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Wakeford, Christian
Wood, Mike
Young, Jacob
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Elliot Colburn and
Mrs Heather Wheeler

Question accordingly negatived.

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.

Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill

[Relevant documents: Second Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee of Session 2017-19, Pre-legislative Scrutiny of the draft Animal Welfare (Sentencing and Recognition of Sentience) Bill 2017, HC 709, and the Government response, HC 984.]

Second Reading

9.47 am

Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I should like to declare that I am a tenant beef farmer's son and a former member of the National Farmers Union. I also refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I am delighted to sponsor the Bill. It is one that means a great deal to so many people. It means an enormous amount to me, to my family, who have been caring for animals for 100 years on our farm, to many hon. Members from across the House and to the many impassioned campaigners from across the nation. If colleagues support me in my quest, we can today progress this much-awaited step forward on animal welfare, delivering another important commitment from the Government Benches and helping to cement this country's place as a world leader in the care and protection of animals.

I believe that every animal deserves a dignified life and that we should use our heads as well as our hearts when it comes to taking action on this issue. That is why I have decided to sponsor this important Bill, inspired by the story of my own dog, a four-year-old springer spaniel who I named Poppy. Poppy was abandoned on a stormy night in January last year. She had been dumped at the top of a hill miles from the nearest town or village. It was at the roadside on that hill top lane in my constituency that I found her while driving home.

Poppy was in a bad state when I found her. She had clearly been mistreated. Her pads were red raw and there were cuts to her legs. She had nasty growths and needed three teeth removed. Evidence suggested that, shortly before I found her, she had given birth to a litter of puppies. My dad, being someone who has taken care of animals on our farm for his whole life, took her for the emergency veterinary care that she needed before bringing her home to live with him and my mum on our farm. She now enjoys a wonderful new life as a member of the Loder family exploring the green and pleasant land of my home in West Dorset.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): I, too, welcome the hon. Member's Bill. Does he agree that although it is very good, we need effective enforcement as well, because if we just have a Bill that is not actually enforced, that does not take us any further forward?

Chris Loder: Yes, I wholly agree with the right hon. Gentleman and I shall go on to address that in my speech.

The Bill amends the Animal Welfare Act 2006, which currently sets out a maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine for the most serious prevention of harm offences. We have in this country a legal and, indeed, moral obligation to provide for the welfare needs of animals that we keep and should be safe in our care, whether they are pets, farm animals or in other captive environments.

[Chris Loder]

Under animal welfare law, the maximum custodial sentence for the most shocking animal cruelty offences is just six months' imprisonment. If someone pleads guilty to this crime at the first reasonable opportunity, the maximum sentence can be reduced to just four months. The UK is a nation of animal lovers—44% of all households have a pet—and as the Parliament of our great nation of animal lovers, it is right that we lead the way today in challenging this gross injustice. A mere six months discourages no one, so we must establish in the law of England and Wales a much tougher maximum penalty. By increasing the penalty tenfold, we hope to suitably discourage the shocking behaviour that leads to the neglect and cruelty of animals.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing forward this extremely important Bill. Clearly, prosecutions are brought only for the most serious cases of animal cruelty, but does he have any indication of how many successful convictions at the moment result in an immediate custodial sentence, and how many do not attract even the shortest periods behind bars?

Chris Loder: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. We have in excess of 1 million reports to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals of difficulties with animals or the mistreatment of animals. It results in fewer than 100 ultimate prosecutions, so that, further to the point made by the right hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami), clearly indicates that the area of animal welfare needs much more attention, and particularly the enforcement point, as I shall come on to in my speech.

I am pleased to say that the Bill introduces one of the toughest punishments in the world and will bring us into line with the maximum penalties available in other Commonwealth countries, including those in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and India, which are all at five years' imprisonment. With this Bill, we will lead the way in Europe on animal sentencing, where the average custodial sentence for animal welfare offences is currently just two years. It is a simple, yet vital measure that will ensure perpetrators who harm an animal by, for example, causing unnecessary suffering, mutilation or poisoning, face the full force of the law. That includes cases of systematic cruelty, such as the deliberate, calculating and callous behaviour of ruthless gangs who use dog fighting to fuel organised crime. The Bill will mean that the courts will have sentences at their disposal commensurate with the most serious cases, so that the punishment fits the crime. This will send a clear signal.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Like others, I congratulate the hon. Member on bringing forward this very important Bill. He touches on something very important: the link between these crimes and other criminality. Should it not be reinforced by Government to police forces and prosecutors that those who break the law break the law and, therefore, there should be many more prosecutions, because in many cases, these people are also involved not only in other crime, but, actually, in cruelty, particularly to children and other human beings?

Chris Loder: I wholly agree with the right hon. Gentleman that those who break the law and who carry out crimes, whatever those crimes may be, should feel the full force

of the law. I am delighted that the Government support the Bill, and many other measures to tackle those crimes, to address that point.

The Bill will mean that the courts have sentences at their disposal commensurate with the most serious cases so that the punishment fits the crime. That will send a clear signal to any potential offender that there is no place for animal cruelty in this country.

Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con): On behalf of many of my constituents who have written to me about the Bill, I thank my hon. Friend for bringing it forward and the Government for supporting it. The idea that sentences need to be commensurate with the crime and, as hon. Members have mentioned, that they are actually enforced, has a big groundswell behind it.

Chris Loder: I wholly agree. Part of the reason that I want to progress the Bill is to deal with that issue. As I articulated earlier, the fact that for more than 1 million cases reported, fewer than 100 cases are prosecuted is a great cause for concern. I hope that the Bill will make progress in that area.

There have been a number of recent cases involving serious and significant levels of animal cruelty, in which the judges have commented that they would have imposed a higher penalty or custodial sentence had one been available. Only last month, a man was convicted of causing unnecessary suffering to his cat. He burned her in a hot oven, tried to flush her down the toilet, attempted to strangle her and threw her against a wall. He received an 18-week suspended sentence, was banned from keeping pets for 10 years and was ordered to pay a mere £440 in costs. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that that is totally unacceptable. The Bill will hopefully deal with that issue.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend, as all hon. Members have, and congratulate him on bringing forward the Bill. I suspect, although I am not 100% certain, that I am the only hon. Member present who sits as a member of the judiciary. When I face such cases as a sentencing magistrate, as I have on numerous occasions, they are among the most harrowing and disturbing cases to deal with.

I also recognise the court of public opinion when such cases are reported in newspapers. I have faced criticism from constituents who feel that we have under-sentenced, even when we have given the maximum sentence available—six months. There is recognition in the community that such sentences need to go beyond that. I say as a magistrate, and having spoken to many other magistrates, that we really support this legislation. It is absolutely needed and I am delighted that my hon. Friend is bringing it forward.

Chris Loder: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I wholly agree, because the example that I just shared with the House is only one of countless examples of heinous animal cruelty that happen every year in this country. I want the Bill to not just discourage that behaviour but stop it.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): It is implicit in what my hon. Friend said in reference to that case that he believes that, instead of the suspended

sentence, a sentence of immediate imprisonment should have been imposed. Yet the explanatory notes in relation to the financial implications of the Bill say:

“The increase in maximum penalties will not result in an increase in the number of offenders being sent to prison”, which implies that it would not make a ha’p’orth of difference to that case.

Chris Loder: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind intervention; I do not agree entirely. The evidence from magistrates and others makes it clear that the tools they have in their toolbox to deal with such a matter are limited. The issue is also partly that a maximum sentence of six months is not any sort of discouragement—it may be to some, but I am afraid it is clearly not working. The element of enforcement, as mentioned by hon. Members on both sides of the House, is absolutely required. This Bill is one of a suite of legislative components that the Government, and indeed my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), will look to progress in respect of animal sentence, to deal with these very matters.

Andy Carter: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Chris Loder: I am not going to give way at the moment, because I need to make a little progress, but I will come back to my hon. Friend.

Every year, animal welfare charities such as Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, The Kennel Club and Cats Protection, and many others carry out important work to rescue and rehome animals. It is clear from the amount of work they have to do that we need to discourage these acts of cruelty in the first place.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we will need to publicise and raise awareness of the maximum sentence once, as we hope, the Bill is passed and put into law, so that it acts as a deterrent to stop people even thinking about committing cruelty to animals?

Chris Loder: I wholly agree with the hon. Gentleman on that. Part of the reason this Bill needs to be put forward is that the support from the organisations that specialise in animal care, such as those I have outlined, will increase the publicity of this much more. I invite all Members, both those here today and those who are not, and everybody watching on television, to support the case and make sure that this is well known.

We now have an opportunity to deliver a strong message to animal abusers that their behaviour will no longer be tolerated. When this Bill is passed, they can expect those tougher sentences. The increase in the maximum penalty for animal cruelty will be the first increase for such offences in more than 30 years, since another private Member’s Bill, from the then hon. Member for Ealing North, increased the maximum from just three months’ imprisonment and a maximum fine of just £1,000. I know that this House contains many hon. Members who have spoken up for animal welfare over the years, and I am sure we will continue to do so again. I hope that with the support of hon. Members from across this House this Bill will reach the

statute book and make a real difference by reducing the instances of animal cruelty, as the hon. Gentleman highlighted.

Although this Bill will go some way to correct the deep injustices of cruelty to animals across this country, there are many aspects of animal cruelty that it does not address. I am sure Members on both sides of the House will speak about other areas of priority for animal welfare, such as addressing pet theft and the right to keep family and pets together no matter what the accommodation arrangements. At that point, I should pay tribute to my hon. and dear friends the Members for Ipswich (Tom Hunt) and for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), who is not in his place. I should also thank my hon. and dear friend the Member for Redcar (Jacob Young), whose kind concern, support for the Bill and help I appreciate.

John Spellar *rose*—

Chris Loder: If the right hon. Gentleman does not mind, and as I have given way once to him already, I would like to make a bit more progress.

I particularly look forward to when the Government will introduce legislation on animal sentence as well, a matter that has given the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs much cause for concern. I pay tribute to its Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton, for his work and to its members who are present, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore).

Two areas of animal welfare concern should be firmly on our list of priorities as the nation’s Parliament. The first is live animal exports. It is disgraceful that our well-cared-for farm animals can be loaded on a lorry and sent thousands of miles by land and sea to a destination in southern Europe. As if that is not bad enough, these poor animals go on to be slaughtered not even in continental Europe but in places such as Libya and Lebanon, as reported by the BBC a couple of weeks ago.

For those who believe that the National Farmers Union is on the side of animal welfare and that this Government are not, I say that it is this Conservative Government who want to stop live animal exports. Who is it that wants live exports to continue—for our cows and other animals to be subjected to a disgraceful level of care and slaughter, thousands of miles away from the United Kingdom? It is the National Farmers Union. Today I call on Members to ensure that this Parliament delivers on the Conservative manifesto pledge to stop live animal exports. Let us remind ourselves of how that pledge became possible.

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Chris Loder: No, not at the moment.

That pledge became possible because the Conservative party is delivering the democratic will of the nation to leave the European Union, which has demanded that live animal exports be permitted for so long. With the greatest respect, I suggest that the thousands of people across the nation whom the NFU have egged on to abuse my colleagues in this place and say that they have no care for animal welfare standards go back to the

[Chris Loder]

NFU and demand that it stops lobbying to continue the disgraceful live export of animals. If anyone does not believe this farmer's son who stands here today, I refer them to *Farmers Weekly*, which in December 2019 ran the headline "NFU scheme aims to avert PM's ban on live exports".

It is also high time that we address the barbaric act of non-stun slaughter of animals in this country. Let me be clear on what I mean by non-stun slaughter: an animal, fully alive, with all its senses intact, will be hung up by its hind legs, dangling in the air in the greatest of distress, have its throat slit and be left to bleed to death, hung up to die, for minutes. For me, this is a matter of great national shame.

For those who say that non-stun slaughter does not happen very often or is just a small issue, let me put it into perspective. Millions of animals are slaughtered in this way in this country every year. The latest figures from the Food Standards Agency show that an estimated 91 million chickens per year are not stunned at slaughter. Last year, the Food Standards Agency reported that a staggering 25% of all sheep that go for slaughter are not stunned—that is a quarter of all sheep. And I could go on.

The idea of a cow, so like those that my mum and dad and thousands of other small farmers in this country spend their lives taking care of, strung up and ending its life in this way is a little too much for a farmer's son like me to contemplate. As a nation we must face up to this issue. I, for one, will be joining the RSPCA and the British Veterinary Association in calling for an end to non-stun slaughter in this country, and I warmly encourage others, my hon. Friends and Members from all parties in this House to join me in doing the same.

The Bill before us today is, however, a simple measure, amounting to just two clauses. Clause 1 is the Bill's main clause and outlines the mode of trial and maximum penalty for certain animal welfare offences. As I previously outlined, under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the maximum penalty in practice is currently six months and/or an unlimited fine. This clause changes the maximum custodial sentence available for five key offences. Section 4 of the 2006 Act outlines the offence of causing unnecessary suffering to a protected animal. This offence has remained largely unchanged for more than 100 years. It is the main animal cruelty offence, for which around 800 people are successfully prosecuted each year, mainly by the RSPCA. Section 5 deals with the offence of carrying out a non-exempted mutilation. This prohibits certain procedures, such as castration and spaying, without suitable qualifications, experience or supervision. Section 6 outlines the offence of docking the tail of a dog except where permitted. In section 7 the offence is administering a poison to an animal, and in section 8 it is involvement in an animal fight, which includes dog fighting. It also includes not only organising and taking part in such events, but promoting them and possessing the instruments that may be used in those animal fights.

Under clause 1, the existing maximum penalty of six months will be retained if the offender is summarily convicted. However, offenders may now receive a higher penalty of up to five years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine if they are convicted by trial on indictment—essentially, where the case is heard by the Crown court.

Clause 2 outlines that the Bill will come into force two months after Royal Assent. The application of revised maximum penalties is not retrospective and does not apply to offences committed before the Bill comes into force. The clause also specifies the short title of the Bill, and also provides for the Bill to extend not just to England, but to Wales as well.

Animal welfare is a fully devolved matter, but, in the case of this Bill, the Welsh Government have confirmed that the new maximum penalty should also apply in Wales, and the Bill is drafted on that basis. The Welsh Government have kindly prepared a legislative consent motion, so that the Bill can indeed be extended and applied in Wales.

I know that many have campaigned hard for increased animal welfare sentencing for a very long time. Today I take the opportunity to pay particular tribute to those hon. Members who have consistently supported me, both past and present, have pressed for this Bill to be brought forward, and, in particular, have taken the time to be here today. This Bill and the proposals therein have received strong support across the House. I am grateful to them, particularly to Opposition Members, including the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), and the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), for their continued support for the Bill. I am also grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald) for steering the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019 so skilfully through this House and to all those who supported him and campaigned for stronger sentencing for those who harm service animals, inspired by police dog Finn. We are completing the increased protection of service animals with this Bill today. When the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill is enacted, those who cause injury to a service animal will receive, finally, a proportionate penalty for their horrific actions.

I should also like to pay tribute and to thank the RSPCA, the oldest and largest animal welfare organisation in the world, which deals with cases of serious neglect, cruelty and violence against animals every single day. The RSPCA has campaigned tirelessly for adequate animal welfare sentencing and has been of great support to me in bringing forward this Bill. I pay tribute, too, to the many charities to which the British public is devoted and which advocate tirelessly for animals: the Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, the Blue Cross, the Finn's Law campaign, the International Fund for Animal Welfare and the Dogs Trust. That is to name just a few, and I know there are so many more that I have not listed today. Those organisations have been incredibly effective in their support for an increase in the maximum penalties, and I praise their tireless efforts. Finally, to the many individual members of the public whose love for animals has helped us to get here today, thank you.

To sum up, our constituents care about this matter passionately. The way we treat animals reflects who we are as a nation and is a priority for the people we are so privileged to represent in this place. It is a priority for the Government, too, which is why they have taken strides to elevate our world-leading reputation for animal welfare even further and are wholly committed to supporting the passage of this Bill. I thank very much the Minister and her officials for their support.

The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill is an important landmark step in ensuring that we can have an appropriate response to those who inflict deliberate suffering on innocent animals. For far too long, the maximum sentence available has been too short, and this Bill is of great importance to this House, to the animal welfare community and to the public more widely. We need to get on, and we need to sort it out. We need to get this Bill on the statute book and that hopefully short journey begins today.

10.16 am

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on bringing this Bill forward today. I am glad we are finally in a position where an animal sentencing Bill might actually become law.

Everyone will be talking about their dogs today. I do not actually have a dog, but I have a dog in my life, which is my mother's miniature schnauzer, Teddy, although he is actually twice the size of an ordinary miniature schnauzer, which just shows that Teddy is above other dogs. I am constantly telling him that he is the best dog. We do not have dog birthdays in our family, we have dog "got" days, and tomorrow is Teddy's 12th got day. Congratulations to Teddy, who I am sure will be watching on video later.

Before we had Teddy in our family, we had a bulldog called Buster when I was growing up, and that was why the case of Baby the bulldog particularly struck home with me. It originally inspired Anna Turley's Animal Cruelty (Sentencing) Bill back in 2017 when it was brought to public attention. It was not just a horrific story of the bulldog puppy being abused—I think it was thrown down the stairs—but the fact that it was videoed and put online. The perpetrators clearly thought it was something they could boast about and joke about and that they would not be brought to justice for it.

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con) *rose*—

Kerry McCarthy: I think I know what the hon. Member is going to say, but yes, I will give way.

Jacob Young: I join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to my predecessor Anna Turley for bringing forward a previous iteration of the Bill. I am glad we are here today.

Kerry McCarthy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. I was going to say that I thought it was a little churlish of the hon. Member for West Dorset to not mention her, because she did so much work on this issue. I know he was not in Parliament at the time.

Chris Loder: The hon. Lady makes a very valid point. I would just like to say that I did not mention Anna Turley because my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Jacob Young) is here today and wanted to pay tribute to her directly.

Kerry McCarthy: Well, the hon. Gentleman did thank the hon. Member for Redcar, and he did not mention Anna, but let us not quibble over it. She does deserve a

lot of credit for her indefatigable campaigning on this issue, and I have to say with no offence to the current hon. Member for Redcar that I miss her in this place.

The Government never really explained why they would not support that Bill back in 2017, and then we got bogged down in the process of bringing in a joint sentencing and sentence Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny—the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), is nodding away, because we both went through that process. It was basically all about the sentence side, and I would argue that it was about delaying the sentence side, which I will come on to later. There was no need for pre-legislative scrutiny of one clause that talked about sentencing.

We then debated another version of the Bill on 10 July 2019. I recall the Government saying then that it was really important to legislate as quickly as possible. The Bill went into Committee, and I was on that Committee. The Government wanted to get it done and dusted before summer recess, so they did not want to talk about any amendments or complicate things. There was a suggestion that there should be a more severe penalty for those who film themselves indulging in animal cruelty and post it online, partly as a deterrent, but also because such actions encourage other people to indulge in that behaviour. I must admit that quite a lot of 2019 is a bit of a blur to me. We did not know whether we were proroguing or not proroguing, getting a Brexit deal or not getting a Brexit deal, having an election or not having an election.

That Bill did not become law either. The Government promised to legislate in autumn 2019, and then they called an election. I mean no disrespect to the hon. Member for West Dorset, but I do not see why, when this was in the Queen's Speech, it has been left to a private Member's Bill—it could have been Government legislation. I see the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) in his place. He was here when we debated this in 2019, and he joined me in saying that there was so much of this legislation—the Wild Animals in Circuses Bill was another example—where the Government kept saying, "We really want to do this, but we just don't have time to bring it forward." But there have been loads of days when we have been on a one-line Whip, having general debates. We could have got this legislation through in one day, and then everyone could have taken part, and by now it would have been law.

Although the Government will seek to get a lot of credit for supporting this Bill now, it could have become law in 2017 when Anna Turley first proposed it. That means that we have had three years of light sentences for the very worst animal abusers and three years of not being able to send out a strong message to potential abusers that they would face five years' imprisonment. That deterrent has not been there, and that is a great shame. Having said that, I welcome the fact that we are here now. I hope that the accelerator will be pressed and the Bill will get through Committee quickly and through the House of Lords, and perhaps by year end it will be law.

While we are talking about the messages that are sent out and the importance of a deterrent, I think that children should be taught about animal welfare in schools. Far too many people, and particularly young men,

[*Kerry McCarthy*]

think that the way to treat a dog is to be very harsh with it, to abuse it and to almost beat it into submission, as if that is the way to train a dog. There are others who abuse animals because they find enjoyment in it. Discussing animal welfare at an early age—particularly for children from families that do not have pets—would be really important in instilling the right behaviour and helping people to understand what owning a pet is all about.

I would not want to do anything to delay the Bill, but I hope that reports of a far more comprehensive animal welfare Bill are true, because they have been kicking around for quite a while—I see the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), smiling. Animal welfare is about a lot more than being nice to puppies or pets generally. There seems to be a focus on what I would describe as the low-hanging fruit, which is the “being nice to puppies” end of the spectrum. It is great that we have legislated for things such as Lucy’s law and trying to crack down on puppy farming, although I understand from Marc Abraham, who promoted that campaign through Pup Aid, that there are still some concerns about loopholes, so there is a new petition about the need to tighten that up. Finn’s law was a really good step. A petition on pet theft was discussed earlier this week in Westminster Hall, and there are also debates about ensuring that the law on microchipping is enforced.

John Spellar: My hon. Friend rightly mentions microchipping. It appears that there has been very limited enforcement of that by the police. Does she agree that the Home Office ought to give clear instructions to police forces that this is the law of the land and therefore they need to enforce it? I suspect that the police will find that the perpetrators are often subjects of interest in other criminal matters as well.

Kerry McCarthy: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. He is absolutely right, and of course there is the whole question about how animal welfare is enforced at a local level and what resources that are made available. In the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, we have also debated the dangerous dogs legislation—the breed-specific legislation and things like that—and it really is a question of resources on that front.

As I said, there is a lot going on about being nice to dogs, in particular, and to pets, but at the same time as we talk about Britain having the highest animal welfare standards in the world we still allow hunts to flout the hunting ban. We repeatedly see stories of people basically getting away with chasing a wild animal and ripping it to shreds; they are not being prosecuted for that. Millions of game birds are raised in factory farms in France, Spain, Portugal and Poland and imported into the UK every year and shot in the name of sport. People will have different opinions on shooting as a sport, but I think we can all agree that the conditions in which those birds are raised in those factory farms and in which they are imported are very questionable, aside from the separate issue of driven grouse shooting, which we have discussed in Parliament recently. We are also allowing the “unscientific, inhumane and ineffective” badger cull, to quote the experts, to go ahead, with thousands more badgers due to be slaughtered this autumn.

We have also seen a failure to curb the unnecessary rise in animal experimentation and to address what leaving the EU means for the duplication of experiments if we are not subject to REACH, the EU regulation on the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals. I always feel that I have to say this when I speak on this issue: I am not totally opposed to all animal experimentation. I have a niece with cystic fibrosis, and I would want to see whatever is possible done to procure medical advances that might help solve those genetic issues, but I think most people would agree that a huge number of unnecessary animal experiments are still being carried out. There is so much duplication and so little data-sharing, and that will become worse once we leave the EU because we will not be part of the same regime. That is a cause for concern.

The hon. Member for West Dorset mentioned live exports. Again, a promise made during the Brexit referendum campaign was that we would end the practice. I would argue that we could have done a lot more, because the EU set minimum standards that governed the export of live animals and we could have gone further. As I understand it, there were efforts in the EU led by, I think, Germany and the Netherlands, to reduce the number of hours for which animals could travel, but the UK opposed that in EU negotiations before the Brexit referendum. Before the general election, the latest news was that the Government were going to ban live exports for fattening but not for slaughter, and there was no real explanation as to why that was the case, but we may have moved on.

Jo Gideon: I particularly want to speak on live animal exports, because a few years ago I was a councillor in Ramsgate where we had the live exporting of sheep to the great distress of everybody who live there. People blamed the council and the Government, and it was very clear at that point that there was no possible intervention that even the council, as the owners of the port, could do to stop the practice because of the EU legislation. I think we have to acknowledge that it was something that we tried to act on and would have loved to have done more about, but that was impossible under EU legislation. This is a real opportunity for us now that we are leaving.

Kerry McCarthy: I think that the hon. Lady is talking about a ban on live exports, but I am talking about the standards that govern those exports, the inspections of the trucks and the conditions in which animals are transported. My understanding is that we could have done quite a bit more to at least alleviate the issue. Now, although I am not looking forward to the end of the transition period for many reasons, I hope that one thing that the Government will legislate on very early in the new year will be a ban on live exports for both fattening and slaughter. I have read about some loopholes—for example, breeding chicks might not be covered—but I hope that there will not be exceptions.

Chris Loder: Does the hon. Lady agree that regardless of all the things have happened before, here and now we should just be stopping live animal exports? Will she join me in challenging the NFU in that respect?

Kerry McCarthy: I think that it is wrong to blame the NFU, because I doubt the Government’s will on this. I know that the hon. Gentleman does not want me to

look back, but we have to judge a Government's intentions by whether their deeds match their words, and I have doubts.

As we are talking about the NFU and about farming let me say that I sat on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, I chair the all-party parliamentary group on agroecology, and I spoke on Second Reading and served on the Public Bill Committee for two iterations of the Agriculture Bill, so I have lost count of the number of times I have heard Government Ministers say that there would be no lowering of standards in any future trade deals. However, as we saw with the vote the other week—I hope that the Chair of the Select Committee will back me up on this—the willingness to enshrine that in law was not there, so I think I am right to doubt any other promises that the Government may make when it comes to protecting animal welfare. On that, the NFU was certainly on the right page, along with the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton.

Chris Loder: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way again. The point that I am making is that those of us who do farm and are from farming backgrounds take this matter very seriously indeed. It is really important to note that it is in law today that chlorinated chicken is not permitted to come into this country, and it is exactly the same for hormone-injected beef—it is not allowed. I do not understand why the Opposition and others keep saying that it is, because it is a matter of fact that it is not. That is in legislation today. Does she agree that it is utter hypocrisy for the NFU on the one hand to lobby for live animal exports to go thousands of miles across Europe, yet on the other hand to accuse my colleagues and me of not caring at all about animal welfare?

Kerry McCarthy: When we return after the half-term recess, the Agriculture Bill will come back from the Lords, so we will have another opportunity to debate the amendments on protecting standards.

What this is all about is that under future trade deals this could all change, and we know that the Americans want to be allowed to export such products to the UK. We know that was a sticking point. We also know that the former Secretary of State for International Trade, the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), was rather keen to open the doors to such exports—he and I were in Washington at the same time a couple of years ago, and we were both on social media saying very different things about chickens. I just do not agree with the hon. Member for West Dorset that there is not a risk from those products.

There are many other examples of animal abuse that we need to crack down on. We need to enforce the existing law and to strengthen it. We are still seeing undercover footage emerging from so-called high welfare farms, so red tractor farms. I mentioned this the last time I spoke on the subject in 2019, but a different case emerged over the summer, at Flat House farm in Leicestershire. The hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) said that the footage contained

“some of the most disturbing images I have ever seen... We cannot allow farms like this to operate in the UK.”

It was a pig farm, and we know that pigs are incredibly intelligent animals. I think they ought to be treated on a par with dogs. We saw that they had bleeding hernias, lacerations, bites and deformed trotters. There were

dead and dying animals being dragged into the walkway and left there to rot. My concern about not having protection for standards in the Agriculture Bill is that that sort of industrialised farming, with very small profit margins, and therefore with corners cut and welfare standards not adhered to, will become the norm in this country. I do not want to see that happen.

The Government brought forward the dual Bill on sentencing and sentience because they had promised, during the discussions on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill in late 2017, to legislate for animal sentience before we left the EU. The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) had tabled new clause 30, which I seconded, and the Government voted it down. There was immediately an outcry—I would have preferred to have the support before the vote—because the Government had whipped their Members to vote against the new clause, and they were forced to say that they would legislate for this. They then brought forward the draft dual Bill, which went through pre-legislative scrutiny, and the sentience bit was not very well drafted. We have since had nothing. I brought forward my own animal sentience Bill—I have lost track of when; probably somewhere in 2019 when everything disappeared into the black hole. I was, for a very short while, on the Petitions Committee earlier this year, and I had the pleasure of speaking to a petition that received 104,000 signatures calling on the Government to legislate on animal sentience. My one question for the Minister is: what on earth happened to that legislation? A clear promise was made to this place and to the public that there would be legislation.

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a great contribution to the debate. I am sure she agrees that the Bill is completely worthwhile, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on bringing it forward. However, does she agree that it is slightly disappointing that only one Opposition Member—herself—is contributing to the debate? While the Government side of the House is full of people contributing to the debate, it is slightly disappointing that the other side of the House is empty.

Kerry McCarthy: Perhaps my colleagues are all worn out from trying to get hungry children free school meals earlier in the week. The fact that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) has the next Bill on the Order Paper may have something to do with the packed Conservative Benches. I say that as a former Government Whip for Friday sittings. That may be churlish of me.

I think I was reaching my peroration, as the former Speaker used to like to term it; the intervention that I very generously allowed has rather put me off my stride. I conclude by saying that I hope the Minister will answer the question on what on earth happened to the sentience provision. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Dorset on bringing the Bill forward. I very much hope that it becomes law, and that we will soon see animal cruelty in this country treated with the seriousness it deserves.

10.36 am

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in the debate and to back the Bill from my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder), who is my neighbour and my friend. I

[*Neil Parish*]

am delighted that he has brought this Bill forward. Many things have been discussed, but we must remember that the Bill is about bringing in five-year sentences, so that the courts have the chance to give a good, long sentence to those who abuse animals. That is not available yet, but I would very much welcome it.

Before I start my main speech, I will diversify for a moment and raise halal slaughter. After leaving the European Union, we can introduce New Zealand's system, which allows animal to not feel pain and be recoverable. It deals with the religious side, and the animal is all but stunned at slaughter. We cannot do it under EU law at the moment, but we will be able to when we leave. That will be a real opportunity, and I look to the Minister. I have many scars from dealing with this issue, not only here but in the European Parliament. I want all animals stunned at slaughter. We have a real opportunity as we leave the EU to get that sorted.

Chris Loder: I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour very much indeed. I wholly agree with everything he says. The Bill was not introduced just for religious reasons. A whole host of other matters have been highlighted, including that 25% of all sheep are slaughtered without being stunned, and that there are quite clearly other loopholes that some are taking advantage of. It is just a point-blank issue and is not specific to religion or anything else.

Neil Parish: One thing I have learned about this issue over many years is that the religious side has to be dealt with as well as the animal side. We have a real opportunity to bring the two together, because if we do not, I assure him that he will bear many scars, as I do, into the future. We have to deal with this, and I really think we can sort it.

It is also good to follow the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy). She did a lot of good work on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, and I miss her being on it. I agree entirely with her that we need to get more dogs into schools. We have a charity in the west country that gets dogs into schools, so that children can see the right way to handle a dog and look after it. Most of us were brought up and live in families that look after pets properly, but there are children who are not reared in the same way and who see cruelty to animals. If we are not careful, that will carry on over the generations, so getting dogs into schools is so important.

This is a very great day; we will get the Bill through, and I gently chastise the Government that we have taken rather a long time to get here. We could have tagged it on to one or two other Bills over the years, but it is a delight that we have it here today. The UK is, without question, a nation of animal lovers. Some 50% of adults own a pet: 9.9 million of us own a dog, while 10.9 million own a cat. By the way, Wilberforce, our dog, who was Westminster dog of the year in 2011, is delighted that today's debate is taking place. He is sitting on the couch in our flat in Battersea watching it as we speak. Seriously, though, this is a great moment.

Too often we hear reports from animal welfare charities of mistreatment and neglect. Last year alone, the RSPCA brought 1,432 convictions for animal welfare offences

to the courts. Such offences range from neglect, often where the owners do not have the means to care for the pet, to cases of excessive violence and cruelty. We always have to differentiate those, because there are some people who do not necessarily understand what they are doing or have the resources. I do not justify it for one moment, but there is a great difference between that and the cruelty that is out there. Some do not mean to be cruel but are; others really go out to beat the dog to death. Those are the ones we need to ensure do not get away with a four-month sentence. I am adamant about that.

Animal cruelty can have a lasting impact on an animal's physical state and temperament, affecting their ability to trust and function. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset made that point about the dog that he has now, which had obviously been very badly treated. Such abhorrent crimes have no place in our society, and we should do our utmost to prevent and punish such behaviour. In the 2019 general election, I, like all Government Members, and I suspect all Members across the House, stood on a manifesto that committed to introduce tougher sentencing for animal cruelty. This is a moment at which the House can come together in the very best way, and we can unite all parties, because we need to sort this out once and for all.

I strongly support the Bill, not only because it strengthens penalties and offences, but because it creates a stronger deterrent against animal abuse. In 2016, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee published our "Animal welfare in England: domestic pets" report, which examined the legislation in place to ensure the welfare of pets. The report found several flaws in our current legislation and called for current measures to be strengthened to protect animals. One key recommendation was for tougher regulation of the buying and selling of pets. That could be puppy smuggling or all sorts. People need to be able to see the mother when they buy the dog. They should see the mother of the kitten as well, if they can, because they need to know whether the animal has been properly socialised.

Mark Tami: On the importance of seeing the mother of the puppy, does he agree that there are still very bad practices where dogs in particular are brought in from abroad, reared in very bad situations, and then placed in what appears to be a nice, clean environment, when the history of that dog and those puppies is in fact very different?

Neil Parish: The right hon. Gentleman is right. Unfortunately these gangs—because that is what they are—of criminals set up almost a sting operation. There is a dog there, obviously not the mother, and they have imported the puppies or brought them in in vans, very often under seats and all sorts of things, in very bad conditions. They could be suffering from quite a lot of disease and people do not realise that they are buying a smuggled puppy. Of course, a lot of the breeds are very expensive. We are talking about big money. Unfortunately, there is a lot of money to be made in smuggling in puppies and selling them illegally, and that is why it is something we need to take very seriously.

As I said, a ban on commercial third-party sales is now in force. Again, we have to ensure that that actually works. I question whether we need to be able to bring in

five puppies legally from the European Union or anywhere else in the world. I do not think we need five puppies for domestic use. Very few people buy five puppies to keep themselves; if they wanted to do that, they could have a special licence for it. Let us reduce the limit to two. I think two puppies would be fine, but five is unnecessary; again, it is a legal loophole.

The Committee also recommended that animal welfare should be included in citizenship classes in schools and that DEFRA should continue to work alongside animal welfare charities to create public awareness of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

Mark Tami: The hon. Gentleman is being very kind. One issue that I have been worried about for a long time, which relates particularly to dogs, is the fashion situation: a breed becomes very fashionable and its value leads to a lot of the illegal trade and puppy farming. However, when those dogs become unfashionable, we have only to go to Battersea dogs home to see that, for all sorts of reasons, people no longer want them, and they end up looking for other homes.

Neil Parish: The right hon. Gentleman is right. Dogs become fashionable—perhaps a particular film is on television and everybody wants that particular dog—but then they go out of fashion, or they are very expensive to keep because they need to be clipped all the time and all these sorts of things, so they are discarded. There has also been a problem with pugs, where the fashion is to have them with shorter and shorter noses. The trouble is that eventually they cannot breathe. Breeders have even done that in this country. The Kennel Club has done quite a lot to try to improve that; but in the end, all these sorts of things are a form of animal cruelty. Some do not mean to do it, but again, we must be careful that we do not, through fashion, create a certain amount of animal cruelty by default.

The Committee also called for

“the establishment of an animal abuse register of those convicted of animal cruelty offences and who have been disqualified from keeping animals.”

It is very difficult for authorities to track people who have been banned. The Americans have done quite a lot of work on following those people. People who abuse animals often abuse people, too, and it is key that we make sure that we follow those who have been very cruel to animals.

The current penalties for animal welfare offences are feeble; the punishment does not fit the crime. Sentences for animal cruelty are woefully low. How is it right that a person in this country can maim, torture and murder a pet and receive a maximum sentence of only six months? Too often, those charged with the most violent animal welfare offences do not even receive a custodial sentence.

During the Committee’s evidence sessions, the British Veterinary Association pointed out that the maximum custodial sentence of six months was very rarely given, as the sentencing guidelines gave a starting point of 18 weeks for serious offences—a point that has already been made. I welcome the review of the sentencing guidelines in April 2017, which sought to ensure that the most serious cases of animal cruelty received appropriately severe sentencing, within the available maximum penalty.

Animal welfare offences continue to rise, however. As RSPCA prosecution figures show, from 2016 to 2018, the number of prosecutions secured in magistrates courts rose by over 200 to 1,678. Of the 1,000 or so people who are prosecuted for animal cruelty each year, on average only 10% are given custodial sentences. In 2018 alone, 862 people were found guilty of animal cruelty offences.

We have already heard of some horrible cases in recent years. In 2016, a pair of brothers filmed and sent images of themselves throwing a bulldog terrier down several flights of stairs. They then stamped on the dog’s body and viciously headbutted it. The terrier suffered serious injuries to her back, losing all ability in her hind legs, not to mention the terrible emotional trauma inflicted on the poor creature. Unfortunately, the dog, whose name was Baby, had to be put down due to her injuries. The fact that the dog was called Baby makes one wonder what these people could be capable of and whether that could include violent actions not just towards animals but towards humans, too.

Jacob Young: Does my hon. Friend agree it is shameful that the two individuals involved in Baby’s case did not serve any custodial sentence?

Neil Parish: My hon. Friend is right, and we are here today to try to put that right. This cannot go on. Those brothers received only suspended sentences, and such cases demonstrate why we need much stronger sentences in legislation, to ensure that the courts can punish animal abusers in the way the public would expect. The courts need stronger sentences in their arsenal. The Bill will ensure that the most violent acts of animal abuse are dealt with accordingly, and it will make individuals think twice before neglecting their responsibilities or causing harm to animals. As the number of animal abuse cases increase, we need a stronger deterrent across England and Wales.

Last year the RSPCA was called to a property in Wales, and inspectors found 35 ponies trapped in dilapidated barns, outbuildings and overgrown paddocks. During the inspection, three other ponies were discovered trapped underneath a fallen metal roof, pinned to the ground by its weight. The trapped ponies could not move and were found with lacerations and injuries across their bodies. Elsewhere on the property, starving ponies were found in tiny paddocks, and all had overgrown hooves and various injuries. Six of the ponies were lame, and another horse was found dumped on a rubbish heap. It is just horrendous. In that case, the owners were sentenced to 16 weeks and 12 weeks respectively, suspended for one year. It seems that the courts are not taking animal cruelty offences most seriously, and we need to change that in Parliament. As has been said, we must also ensure that we enforce these regulations, not just bring them in.

Tougher sentences are urgent, and I welcome the Government’s great ambition to set the global gold standard for animal welfare, with the protections set out in the 2019 Conservative party manifesto. However, England and Wales remain gravely behind in their sentencing laws, compared with the other nations of the UK and across Europe. A survey of more than 100 jurisdictions carried out by Battersea Dogs and Cats Home showed that we have the most lenient sentencing regime, with a six-month maximum custodial penalty. No other country has a lower maximum sentence.

[*Neil Parish*]

Ireland and Latvia have introduced sentences of five years, and other European nations are not far behind, with most countries having sentences of between one and two years. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand all have sentences of up to five years, and in Northern Ireland, following a review of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the maximum sentence was increased to five years. In Scotland, a consultation is taking place for a maximum of five years, so we must get up to speed and get that five-year sentencing. England and Wales are not only behind our European partners, but we are falling behind the rest of the UK.

We must have a gold standard for animal welfare across the whole United Kingdom. We are a nation of animal lovers, as indicated by the number of Members here today to support the Bill. We need to get this right. We have a very able Minister, and I urge her to say to Government lawyers that there is a way of getting the Bill through. They do not need to make it hugely complicated, as they have done in the past, and—dare I say it?—they need to get on with this, deliver it, and support the Bill. Let's get it done!

10.54 am

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on his success in his first ever private Members' Bill ballot and on having chosen a subject that is obviously dear to the hearts of so many of our constituents and to those of so many hon. Members.

Sometimes, Madam Deputy Speaker, people say that a Bill that has universal support and nobody opposed to it ought to be allowed to go through on Second Reading on the nod, but as you know, I have always been against that proposition. Today demonstrates why that is a bad proposition, because however good or popular a Bill is, it is always better for it to be properly debated and scrutinised on Second Reading, and that is what is happening today.

The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) thinks that the fact 32 Back Benchers are wishing to speak on this Bill has something to do with the Government not being too enthusiastic about some of the Bills later on the Order Paper in my name. I am assured by the Government Whips that that is not true at all. Indeed, if one looks at the Bill that is due to follow this one—the Mobile Homes Act 1983 (Amendment) Bill—it is actually four-square in line with Government policy. It would be very interesting if the Government actually oppose a Bill that they are already committed to introducing when there is parliamentary time. I mention that because if some of my hon. Friends think they are doing the Government's bidding by speaking for unnecessarily long in this debate, all I can say is that I am not sure that is actually what they are doing, because the Government have assured me that they support the provisions of the second Bill, but leave that as it may.

My daughter is a vet. I obviously take a lot of parental responsibility, and we must have been very good on animal welfare when we were bringing her up. As we have, she, with her husband, also has rescue dogs.

They are rescue Staffies, which seem to be among the worst breeds for the suffering they often undergo in their lives.

It is important that we do not mislead the public and raise expectations beyond what is reasonable. That is why I made the intervention I did on my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset. In the correspondence we have received from the animal charities and in their campaigning, they are almost implying that there are people who are against this measure, but I have yet to find anybody who is against it. Those animal charities seem to be using this as a means to try to raise money for their own causes, and that is fine—they can raise money if they want to—but to raise expectations that this will somehow be a panacea for improving animal welfare is going slightly over the top.

Indeed, half of my hon. Friend's speech was about all the things that he could have put into his Bill, but it is implicit that he did not put them into his Bill because he was told by the Government that if he did so, his Bill would not get Government support, and I sympathise with him on that.

Chris Loder: I would just like to say for the record that I did not ask the Government to put those matters into this Bill, because I know full well that they are matters to come forward—with, I hope, the support of my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish)—when we can address some of these difficult matters of animal sentience properly, rather than just in this Bill. If I may, I just want to make the point that I am afraid what my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) said was not correct: it is not the case that I asked the Government to do that and that they refused.

Sir Christopher Chope: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for putting that fair and square on the record. So he exercised self-discipline, and I must congratulate him on that. We will live in hope, as the hon. Member for Bristol East said, about when, if ever, the Government bring forward some of the other measures that she and, indeed, my hon. Friend talked about.

The Bill leads people to believe that our prisons will be filled up with a lot more people who are guilty of abusing animals. The explanatory notes are not just notes made up by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset. They come with the authority of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which provided them. They explain what each part of the Bill will mean in practice and provide background information on the development of policy.

Mark Tami: Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that it is about not so much putting people in prison, but trying to stop them doing these crimes in the first place?

Sir Christopher Chope: Absolutely. I agree that the deterrent effect of legislation is a very important aspect of it. However, there is nothing clear as to what the evidence is on that. One of the shortcomings of private Members' Bills is that there are no procedures to enable us to have a regulatory impact assessment. We would not have known about the financial implications of the Bill unless they were set out in the explanatory notes.

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): Like my hon. Friend, I support a strong legislative framework and good laws, having attended the same university as him, the University of Dundee—Queen's College as was. Does he agree that the Bill still represents a step-change in the way that we treat animal welfare in this country and that any improvement in the sentencing framework has to be a positive thing?

Sir Christopher Chope: Obviously, I accept that raising the maximum penalty from six months to five years is quite a dramatic change, although it is significant, as is clear from the notes, that the Government could have doubled it from six months to one year if they had implemented section 281(5) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003. That could have been done years ago. It still has not been done and perhaps the Minister will address that issue in her remarks.

I am not suggesting that the Bill is not better than nothing, but I am suggesting that it is being used to suggest that there will be a lot more people sent to prison as a result, and the reality of the policy is that there will not be any more people sent to prison, but that those who are sent to prison will be sent for longer periods. That is what it says here. That will be very welcome and the increase in the maximum penalties will be part of the deterrent process, but how many more people will be sent to prison? We know that they say the cost will be £500,000 per annum. As it costs about £45,000 a year to keep somebody in prison, we are talking about between 10 and 12 persons in prison per annum as a result of the Bill.

Chris Clarkson: I thank my hon. Friend for indulging me a second time. To use the technical legal term, I believe the best way to see whether that would actually happen is to “suck it and see”. I have some sympathy for what he says about a legislative impact assessment. If he wants to bring forward a private Member's Bill on that, I would be inclined to speak to it.

Sir Christopher Chope: Well, that is another one on the agenda for the next Session of Parliament, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I will just conclude by saying that there is another element to this: the Sentencing Council guidelines for dealing with animal welfare offences. They say that a period of imprisonment should be merited only in the most serious offences. My concern about the Sentencing Council guidelines—perhaps the Minister could address this, too—is that they constrain the ability of magistrates in particular to impose the penalty that they think is appropriate, having regard to all the circumstances. If this House decides, as it wants to do today, to impose a maximum sentence of five years, is it reasonable for the unaccounted people who deal with the sentencing guidelines to bring in guidelines that suggest that there should not be many penalties of five years imposed by the Crown courts? So we have a real problem: the legislature has ceded control, or a significant part of control, over sentencing to the Sentencing Council.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): My very good and hon. Friend is making good points. Do the sentencing guidelines actually say, “If you cut off the tail of a dog,

it's this. If you kick an animal down the stairs, it's that”? Are they the sort of sentencing guidelines that he is expecting?

Sir Christopher Chope: I am not expecting them at all. I am criticising the fact that they are no longer just regarded as guidelines, but accepted by many magistrates and judges as tantamount to instructions. If my hon. Friend looks at the sentencing guidelines for animal welfare, which I commend to him, he will see that they are not that specific, but they do give some general parameters that place constraints on the discretion of magistrates. The current guidelines impose severe constraints on the magistrates' ability to impose an immediate custodial sentence for any offence of breach of animal welfare. That is another issue that needs to be raised.

We need to work with public opinion on that and not allow the public to be disappointed. They should not think that we are offering a panacea for improving animal welfare and reducing animal cruelty. Let us hope that the Bill does deter some of the most heinous offences, but let us not think that it is the full answer to all the problems.

11.6 am

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), but I am going to take the debate back to our dogs, if I may. I am delighted to support the Bill in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder). It was disappointing, to say the least, that the Bill fell in the last Parliament due to timescales, so I am delighted that he has picked up the mantle and will see through its implementation.

In the spirit of fostering European relations, I am owned by three French bulldogs, although, judging by the photographs I am sent from home when I am working away in this place of them taking over my sofa, they appear to own my whole family. If you will indulge me, Madam Deputy Speaker, Mimi, Olly and Piper are delightful little dogs, each of them champions, not in a Crufts sense but, respectively, in snorting—and worse—laziness and annoyingness. But no matter how annoying, smelly or noisy they are, and no matter how many times I tell them that I am sending them to the dogs home, I could obviously never do that and would certainly never wish harm on them.

As a child, I always wanted a dog. When I was in secondary school, I volunteered on Saturday mornings with a local charity called Animal Concern, which at the time was based in Northside in my constituency of Workington. It had kennels in what were originally allotments with a fence that was 8 or 9 feet high topped with barbed wire.

Not many weeks or months went by when volunteers did not find a dog thrown over the fence or tied to the gate during the night. What is most depressing about that is not a single dog would have been turned away at the gate, no questions asked. Some of the residents had incredibly depressing stories, and some we would never know the background of, which made 12-year-old me wonder how some people could inflict the harm that they did.

When I was only a few years older, my mother deemed me responsible enough to get my own dog—a decision she no doubt came to regret. Even today, I am

[Mark Jenkinson]

not entirely sure that she would deem me responsible again. Since Jess, there has been only one small stint when my home was without a dog. I was supported through the shock of the first 10 years of my married life by a wonderful English springer spaniel called Ben, who took his last walk over the rainbow bridge a couple of years ago. As we have heard, the love of a rescued springer spaniel puppy inspired my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset to take up this Bill.

The love between a dog and their family should never be underestimated. The youngest of our three dogs, Piper, was born in our house when our youngest daughter was a toddler. They are now inseparable—the best of friends—and I am sure that Piper sees Olivia as any other litter mate, as well as a source of food when Piper is hiding under the table. Olivia sees Piper more like one of her dolls that she can attempt to dress up and place in a cot, but Piper's a bit too wily for that. For those reasons, among many others, I despair of anyone who can inflict deliberate cruelty on an animal, and I warmly welcome the provisions of the Bill.

The working title of the Bill—Finn's law part 2—takes its name, as we know, from a tremendously courageous police dog who was horrifically attacked in the line of duty. It is right today that we pay tribute to the work of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald) in marshalling through this place the original Finn's law, the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Bill, in 2019. It sought to provide increased protection for service animals, abolishing the abhorrent defence that a defendant could claim that they were protecting themselves.

Finn and his handler, PC Dave Wardell, have shown extraordinary determination and resilience in the past four years, dedicating a huge amount of time in ensuring that the animals that serve us on the frontline and in other service roles and also those at home that provide us instinctively with the love and affection that we need when we require it are protected in law. My inbox tells me that this is an issue that a large number of my constituents in Workington care deeply about. They were delighted when the original Finn's law gained Royal Assent and they will be even more delighted, I am sure, when this Bill does.

Across the House, Members will have been shocked by some of the stories of animal cruelty we have read, and in every instance we will have asked ourselves how anyone could do such a thing, but it happens and it is right that we in this place be the voice of those who cannot speak for themselves. While I talk mainly of my own experience as a dog owner, it is not just about dogs of course, in my home or in the general debate. Our house is also home to three goldfish. The latest addition had to have the colours of Spiderman or Batman, at Olivia's request. We have Spike, a bearded dragon belonging to Harry. We previously had Ezra, a royal python of Elliott's. We have had ferrets, rabbits, chickens, quail, ducks. We have rescued hedgehogs, blackbirds, seagulls, and I have lost count of the number of caterpillars we have raised to butterflies and tadpoles to frogs.

My constituency of Workington has many organisations and animal rescuers only too willing to rush to the aid of an animal in distress. I speak not only of Animal Concern, where I spent some of my childhood Saturday

mornings—it has long since moved from Northside to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison)—but of organisations such as Knoxwood Rescue, which works tirelessly with injured wildlife and pets and has a marvellous centre that is always worth a visit. There is the ubiquitous RSPCA, which has a branch in West Cumbria, and smaller organisations, often headed up by solitary or small numbers of dedicated individuals such as Mel of Ani-Mel Haven in Mawbray, which is raising funds for a brand new state-of-the-art rehabilitation centre, and Jade of West Cumbria Wildlife and Rehab in Northside, who works as a vet by day and rescues wildlife, but also volunteers for Cats Protection in what might normally be deemed her spare time. I also speak of Pet Encounter in Workington, whose work with animals to educate young people has led them also into pet rescue. I speak of Whinmill Farm Canine Centre, which deals with stray dogs, and of countless other volunteers who go unnamed.

I also had the pleasure earlier this year of visiting a fantastic racehorse rescue centre in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson), himself an equine vet, accompanied by the Minister for Civil Society in the other place.

Mark Tami: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about racehorses. I am one of the few in the House who has spoken about greyhound welfare. There is an onus on the owners of racehorses or greyhounds, who often make a lot of money out of them. They owe them a duty of care after they cease to earn money for them. There is a big difference between the number of greyhounds racing and the number who are rehomed when they finish. There is a big question there.

Mark Jenkinson: I agree that there is an onus on any owner, breeder or racing stable that rears these animals to make sure that they are looked after later in life once their duty is done.

I also take the opportunity to thank our vets, such as Millcroft, who without question will take an injured animal in at the door, recognising that it is unlikely that they will be paid for the work that they undertake. It is due to these people and many other thousands of paid staff and volunteers across the country that animals that suffer horrendous attacks are cared for and in many cases rehabilitated back to health and go on to find the forever home that they deserve. It is to those animals, and those volunteers, vets, veterinary staff, and animal rescue staff, alongside our military and emergency services, that we owe the duty of passing the Bill today and in its further stages.

11.14 am

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): If Patti Boulaye were a Member of Parliament, she would probably try to burst into song with the Etta James version of "At Last". At last we are doing something on this issue—at last. The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) was absolutely right when she said that in that last, useless, ineffective Parliament that ran from 2017 to 2019, when we wasted so much time—I know that a number of colleagues were not Members then—we could have gone on and done something and made a real difference. We wasted so much time.

The Government announced in September 2017 that they intended to increase the maximum sentences to five years. In 2017, the draft *Animal Welfare (Sentencing and Recognition of Sentience) Bill* was published for consultation. This found that 70% of people supported the proposals for tougher prison sentences. What Member of Parliament is in favour of animal cruelty? It is ridiculous. This is an animal love-in—we are all against cruelty to animals. The *Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill* was published on 26 June 2019, and its Second Reading took place in the House of Commons on 9 July 2019. The Committee stage of the Bill took place on 23 July, and it was due on Report on 4 September 2019. However, the Bill fell at the end of the 2017-2019 parliamentary Session. While I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Jacob Young), I pay tribute to his predecessor, who is a thoroughly decent woman. She would have joined us in our report on endometriosis this week, if she had been here, and I think we are right to pay tribute to her.

Moving on to my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder)—only my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) will know what I am talking about—he has not been here a year and he has had the enormous privilege of piloting this Bill. I had to wait 18 years until my name was pulled out of the hat—I think I was No. 4—and I was pressurised on what subject to choose. Because the back-up for the Bill was superb, I chose fuel poverty.

What went on that year was just horrendous. My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch will realise that there were two doughty fighters on our side—one who is no longer with us, but one who is in the House of Lords—who did everything they could to stop my Bill getting on the statute book. However, as I look around the House this morning, even with social distancing we are a little short of Members. These used to be huge occasions, packed to the rafters. Friday was an essential part of the working week. This does not feel like it. I know the modern Member does not have a letter anymore—it is all done through emails—but I am sure we are in the same position, where we have hundreds of emails from constituents telling us how important this piece of legislation is.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset—I know he got 48 people here for the earlier business—that this is an enormous privilege and honour, and I am so glad that he has chosen this subject. Over the years, we have had some people high up in the ballot who have chosen a subject that they feel strongly about on a matter of principle. Principles are wonderful, but our time here can be very short as Members of Parliament—I hope that the newly elected Members of Parliament are here for 10, 20, 30, 40 years—but while they are here, it is very important to make a real difference. It is not vanity to pilot something to get it on the statute book, but we all say we came into politics to make a difference, so I think my hon. Friend, even if there might be imperfections in this short Bill—although I cannot see them—has done a wonderful service to the House, and I share and feel his pleasure.

Chris Loder: I give heartfelt thanks to my hon. Friend. It is a pleasure to be in this place with him and to share this journey. I know how strongly he and his constituents feel about animal welfare. Going back to what he said

earlier, I am not sure there are too many spare seats on this side of the House—there are a few more on the other side. I know full well how strongly the House feels about this, and it is an honour for me and my constituents to be piloting this Bill forward on behalf of the nation.

Sir David Amess: I agree with everything my hon. Friend has said. This is not an opportunity to have a go at the Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), because as he jousts with the Minister he might have some good things to say about badger culls, and I support him on that.

Let us consider what my hon. Friend is trying to achieve, as a number of Members have mentioned people going to prison. I do not rejoice in normal people going to prison. When I had a meeting with Cressida Dick's deputy about the endless protests that were going on outside in Parliament Square, they thought I would be delighted that they have arrested all these people and they would be going to prison. Mummy and daddy would doubtless be paying the fines in any case, but I do not want that sort of person to go to prison. Prison should be for people who are violent and dangerous; it should be there to protect us. As I develop my speech, I wish to give a little detail on how I think being cruel to animals leads to being cruel to human beings.

I was glad that my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset touched on live exports, as what is happening is absolutely unacceptable. He was entirely right to say that by the end of the year, when we have concluded our negotiations with the EU, we should be able to do much more on the issue. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), has something in her brief on that issue. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset, together with the Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), was also right to talk about animals not being stunned and all the cruelty that goes along with that. I endorse everything that my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset said. He is a farmer's son, so I am disappointed that he does not walk around the parliamentary estate with a bit of straw coming out of his mouth. If he was going to be an authentic farmer's son—

Chris Loder: It is difficult to respond to such comments. I want to let my hon. Friend know that I have my Wellington boots in my office here. I was a little concerned about even thinking about wearing them into this House, as I thought the Serjeant at Arms may tell me off for that. If my hon. Friend would like any verification as to my authenticity, he is welcome to visit my office a little later to check those Wellington boots.

Sir David Amess: I may well take up the offer.

We are talking about the terrible crimes that are committed, one of which has been spoken about already. The wonderful brief from the House of Commons Library tells us that there have been a number of shocking cases when courts have said that they would have handed down longer sentences had they been available. Such a case occurred in April last year, where a man had bought a number of puppies just to brutally and systematically beat, choke and stab them to death. That would lead on to other things with human beings. I think someone has mentioned this next case, but how

[*Sir David Amess*]

absolutely vile it is that on 7 September a man burned a cat in a hot oven, tried to flush her down the toilet, attempted to strangle her and threw her against a wall, but was given only a suspended prison sentence. The cat was taken to the vet and was found to have third-degree burns and loss of skin. The owner admitted putting her in the oven for up to five minutes. That is beyond the pale, yet it has taken this mother of Parliaments until now to get tough on this issue.

Just this month, a dog suffered horrific injuries suspected to have been caused by badger baiting. The RSPCA has described it as one of the worst cases it has seen in 20 years. Fig the dog was rushed to the vets with shocking injuries to his jaw and nose. In April, the RSPCA was left searching for the perpetrators after a cat was found burned and with a skewer through his body on a disposable barbecue in South Yorkshire.

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, we have seen a rise in the number of cruelty incidents against swans, including a spate of incidents over the past few months in Dorset in which the birds have been shot with arrows. In August in Rochford, which is near Southend West, the area I represent, three spaniel puppies around eight weeks old were found abandoned on a roadside. They were discovered with a highly contagious virus that causes vomiting, diarrhoea and dehydration. It is believed that they were imported from abroad to sell in the UK and left to die when they became sick. I could just go on and on with these shocking examples of cruelty, and I am very glad that the measure proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset will deal with the matter.

In the UK, it is estimated that 44% of households have pets and that people own about 51 million pets. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) spoke about all his pets; I am not going to try to outdo him, but I think that over the years I have probably had just about everything other than a lion and a tiger—you name it, I have had it.

Jacob Young: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I am just down the corridor from him in 1 Parliament Street, and I can confirm that he does indeed have all manner of pets in his office on the estate.

Sir David Amess: My hon. Friend has just well and truly put his foot in it, because of course no animal, in any circumstance, is allowed on the parliamentary estate. I am afraid that my hon. Friend has had a bit of a hallucination.

Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): Does my hon. Friend believe that animals should be allowed on the parliamentary estate?

Sir David Amess: My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Dr Offord) has been involved in a bit of a battle over the years, particularly about dogs, and I am not sure where we are with that at the moment. Obviously, we have the sniffer dogs, and I think a couple of ducks live on the estate. Of course, we welcome all the mice, and there are a few rats about the place, I think. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Jane Stevenson) makes a good point; perhaps that is something for the Administration Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington spoke about his French bulldogs. My wife and I look after one of our daughter's French bulldogs, called Vivienne, and although she does not know it yet I look forward to a fair battle at the Westminster dog of the year show. I am very jealous that my hon. Friend the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has already won that contest.

I want the United Kingdom to lead the world on animal welfare. We have some of the most progressive animal rights legislation in the world and I can tell my hon. Friend the Minister that I am looking forward to improving it even further at the end of the year. I do not understand why, although the Republic of Ireland and Scotland have recently increased the maximum sentence for animal cruelty to five years, sentences in England and Wales are still among the lowest in the world and the weakest in Europe.

The RSPCA deals with severe cases of animal cruelty every day, and on average someone in England or Wales dials its helpline every 30 seconds. It is absolutely shocking to think that that amount of cruelty is going on. In November 2019, a man admitted to beating his 11-month-old German Shepherd puppy to death. He was sent to prison for four months. Cases such as this are all too common. Currently, the average sentence for animal cruelty is about three and a half months' imprisonment. An average of just over three people per year over the past three years have received the maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment for animal cruelty.

Bob Stewart: I thank my very good friend who represents Southend—the city—for allowing me to intervene. I am absolutely surprised that more people are not brought to court for animal cruelty in this country, given the number of people found by the RSPCA doing despicable and very cruel things. The RSPCA can bring people to court, so I just do not get why there are not many more people in magistrates' courts facing—soon hopefully increased—sentences.

Sir David Amess: I absolutely agree. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter) said in an earlier intervention that he is a justice of the peace and mentioned how frustrating dealing with these matters is. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), and he is also right, of course, about Southend West and our determination to become a city. In fact, when we become a city, everyone will understand that my constituency is full of animal lovers.

Bob Stewart: Forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker; I did not mean to give my hon. Friend another opportunity to lobby for Southend West. I am very sorry.

Sir David Amess: Well, I am not sorry. In fact, one of my hon. Friends just suggested that I should have a logo on my face mask. They have been ordered, and they will be available to colleagues when we return.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 makes it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to domesticated animals or animals under the control of man. However, the punishment currently really does not fit the crime. Our sentencing system does not adequately protect animals and fails to deter perpetrators from committing animal cruelty offences. The current maximum sentence for animal cruelty is

just 10% of the maximum sentence for crimes such as fly-tipping, which is absolutely ludicrous. The Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset will, I understand, amend the 2006 Act, raising the maximum penalty for animal cruelty in England and Wales from six months in prison and/or an unlimited fine to a penalty of five years in prison and/or an unlimited fine. I commend him on that. No doubt in Committee and on Report, he may be open to the suggestions of others. However, his overall endeavour is to get this legislation on the statute book as quickly as possible.

I referred to this point earlier, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister agrees that evidence shows that animal cruelty offenders often go on to commit violent crimes against human beings, so it is absolutely essential that courts have the ability to give these perpetrators sentences that match the severity of their actions. There were one or two interventions earlier on enforcement. In the bowels of this building are piles and piles of statutes. Laws are often already there, but there is no point in spending hours and hours legislating unless that legislation is enforced. I do not mean this unkindly to new Members, but they will learn in time that, although we think we do, none of us really has anything original to say. It has all been said before in different ways. It is like the call list: Members who are earlier on the call list get to say all the things, and people later think it has all been said before, but obviously their constituents very much want to hear their voice.

Chris Loder: May I lightly say to my hon. Friend that the new Members of this place from 2019 are full of energy and fervour? We are here today to help him, and his colleagues who have been here for many years, to ensure that we get stuff done.

Sir David Amess: That is wonderful. Now that we have had a clear decision after the general election on 12 December, and we have a majority, we must deliver on our manifesto commitments.

To get back to the business of enforcement, I heard a colleague say, “David—we have to do something about cruelty to horses, ponies and donkeys.” Years ago, I got a ten-minute rule Bill on the statute book, which became the Protection Against Cruel Tethering Act 1988, preventing people from not feeding and watering donkeys and ponies properly. It is already there; the fact that it is not enforced is rather depressing. It is wonderful that my hon. Friend is piloting this legislation, but if it is not enforced we are all wasting our time. We will have to, through our constituents and our constituencies, give more and more publicity to his measures.

Chris Loder *rose*—

Sir David Amess: Is my hon. Friend seeking to intervene, or is he just uncomfortable?

Chris Loder: In the presence of my hon. Friend, I am never uncomfortable. Having formerly worked in his constituency, it is always a delight to intervene on him. I hope that he will agree that leaving the European Union is much more significant in terms of animal welfare than we may all give it credit. We are escaping the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy, and some of the awful rules that have demanded that we have free movement of live animals across the

channel. I look forward very much, and I hope that he does too, to supporting the Government to ensure that that comes to an end.

Sir David Amess: I do, and I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend in his endeavours.

Research shows that tougher prison sentences do act as a deterrent to would-be perpetrators and can help to prevent animal cruelty abuses from taking place. In 2019, over half of immediate custodial sentences imposed for animal cruelty were at the upper end of the scale of over 17 weeks. In cases where sentences are near the six-month ceiling, this new legislation would allow greater flexibility for the courts to decide an appropriate punishment. I very much welcome that.

Although the process for this Bill began in 2017, it has been delayed time and again, most recently by the December election. I am so pleased that this moment has come. There is huge cross-party support for this legislation, and I was very pleased to hear the Government announce that they would back it. The coronavirus pandemic has only made the need for tougher animal sentencing laws more urgent. During lockdown, the RSPCA dealt with more than 21,000 animal cruelty incidents and the number of animals in its care rose. Evidence shows that family pets are often part of the domestic abuse cycle, which sadly we have seen greater reports of during lockdown.

I would very much welcome a clear commitment from my hon. Friend the Minister on the timetable for the passage of the Bill and when it is likely to reach its next stages. Obviously, we have people on the Treasury Bench, and there is lots of timetabling to think about, but given that this measure has taken so long and there is enormous frustration I hope that the Government will do all that they can, working with the Opposition, to speed this legislation on to the statute book.

Scientists have proven that animals are capable of feeling pain and, like humans, experience fear and stress, as well as joy and comfort. Now it is widely agreed that animals are sentient beings—I am very pleased about that progress—we must do more to prevent their suffering. As patron of the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation, that is another issue that I would like to see enshrined in law. I say to those on my own Benches that is wonderful to see the ebbs and flows in terms of Conservative Members feeling strongly on animal welfare issues. I want my colleagues to be on the right side of this argument, and much as there is perhaps some dispute, we are not going to return to fox hunting, and we will deal with the management of badgers in a sensible way. I know that for those who represent farming constituencies these are huge issues—indeed, I was intrigued by the earlier attack on the NFU—and I understand those matters. Nevertheless, as a Conservative it is good to see so many colleagues recognising that animals are so important to our constituents.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset, I congratulate Battersea Dogs and Cats Home on its campaign on this issue. People used to think that it just looked after dogs, but it has as many cats and does wonderful work on animal welfare. It has campaigned on this issue for the past three years. Its vital work in caring for animals has brought to light many distressing cases, and I know it is pleased about the Bill. I have had

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a long association with the RSPCA, and the wife of Lord Stockton, Lady Stockton, is one of its trustees. It has also done a marvellous job on this subject.

Like many other Members, I had the honour of meeting Finn the dog—we have already heard about him from my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mark Jenkinson)—when he visited Parliament earlier this year. We were all delighted when, following the hard work of Finn and PC Dave Wardell, the first part of Finn's law, the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Bill, was enacted last year to protect service animals such as police dogs and horses.

In conclusion, we must increase the penalties for cruelty against our much-loved pets, so as properly to reflect the seriousness of the crime, and we must send a clear signal to perpetrators that cruelty against any animal will not be tolerated. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset on promoting this Bill, and I join others in wishing it swiftly to become law.

11.42 am

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): It is a truly an honour to speak in this debate, and the Bill is supported by Members across the House. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) for promoting the Bill, and for his thoughtful and comprehensive speech. It covered many topics that concern us all, and I truly appreciate it.

We are a nation of animal lovers, and the correspondence I have received from my constituents in advance of this debate is clear evidence of that. Like my hon. Friends the Members for Workington (Mark Jenkinson) and for Southend West (Sir David Amess), earlier this year I had the wonderful opportunity of meeting Finn, a retired police dog, and his handler, PC Dave Wardell. After defending his handler from a knife-wielding criminal, Finn located the suspect and grabbed hold of his leg as he tried to escape over a fence. In an attempt to free himself, the knife-wielding criminal stabbed Finn in the chest with a large knife multiple times. As a result of his life-threatening injuries, Finn was rushed to the vet where he underwent surgery, and ended up having part of his lung removed. Thankfully, Finn made a full recovery from his injuries, and is now a remarkable mascot for why there should be tougher sentencing for those who harm service animals.

However, these heartless criminals do not draw the line of their heinous crimes at service animals, and I wish to speak particularly about crimes against domestic and household pets, and give an example of something that took place in my constituency over the past year. It is important to increase criminal sentences for those who commit crimes against any animal, and we must ensure that they no longer receive some of the lightest sentences in the world.

Earlier this year, a Staffordshire terrier called Snoop was found abandoned on a railway track in Stoke for the fourth time in as many weeks. Snoop's overgrown nails, yellow stomach and emaciated paws were evidence that his owners—or rather, abusers—had kept him in a cage for his entire life. Luckily, in this case, the local North Staffs RSPCA branch, which had been investigating the case, caught the culprits dumping Snoop under a bridge on the A527 on CCTV. I am grateful to the

excellent RSPCA centre in Staffordshire, which has helped Snoop to recover from his lifelong ordeal. He is still being trained and reconditioned in preparation for being rehomed.

It is deeply depressing to me that only 80% of the 1,000 people who are prosecuted for animal cruelty each year are convicted and, worse still, that just 10% of those are given custodial sentences—on average, of about three and a half months. It is abundantly clear to me and to most of my constituents in Stoke-on-Trent Central that a maximum sentence of six months is not long enough by any stretch of the imagination as punishment for what are often lifelong ordeals of abuse, violence, cruelty and torture for these poor animals.

To conclude, there is no place in this country for animal cruelty, and we must ensure that those who abuse animals are met with the full force of law. Pet owners around the country support the Bill, the people of Stoke support the Bill, and I wholeheartedly endorse the Bill. The maximum sentence for animal cruelty must be increased, and we must do whatever it takes to deter all serious cases of animal cruelty from ever happening in the first place.

11.46 am

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): I support the Bill, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on securing a position in the private Members' Bill ballot. This is a fantastic opportunity for us to discuss these issues. I would like to pay particular tribute to the animal welfare charities that have been lobbying hard on this issue for many years, including Cats Protection and Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, both of which I have had the pleasure of speaking to over the last couple of months; I made it clear to them that I would be here today to support my hon. Friend in taking forward this important Bill. I also pay tribute to the amazing animal welfare charities in my constituency, such as Wallington Animal Rescue, which has done incredible work to look after animals at a local level.

This Bill is incredibly important to me, because, like so many other Members here today, I am a pet owner, and I have been blessed to be in a home with animals ever since I was a child. It began with just a few rabbits—that is all I could manage, according to my parents—and then when I became a teenager, we were given the opportunity to own a dog for the first time. Nothing brings more joy to a family's life than bringing a pet into their home, and I recommend it to anyone who does not yet own one.

I was lucky a few years ago to meet Jed, who—I should probably clarify, given the topic we are debating—is not an animal. [Interruption.] I will leave that to my hon. Friends' imagination. I had no idea that, in agreeing to marry Jed and let him into my life, I would be taking on responsibility for looking after not only two additional dogs, Willow and Lola, but also horses, sheep, pigs and—Jed's real passion—chickens and ducks. It is more animals than I ever thought I would have in a lifetime, but they are part of the family, and I love having them.

I want to talk about the first dogs that arrived in our lives, Snoopy and Jazz, who were both rescues from Battersea Dogs and Cats Home. It is hard to believe from meeting him, but Snoopy was an unwanted Christmas present and ended up in Battersea after being left there by a previous owner. Snoopy and Jazz, like so many

other residents of Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, were Staffordshire bull terriers, which sadly have quite a bad reputation across the country. They are seen as somehow more violent and as inappropriate pets, whereas anyone who has ever owned one will tell you that they are some of the most loving dogs you can have. I am so pleased that they were named the UK's favourite breed of dog last year.

Bob Stewart: There are no bad dogs; there are bad owners, and dogs take after their owners when they do something very bad.

Elliot Colburn: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. It is a testament to the work that animal charities such as Battersea Dogs and Cats Home do that they are able to find new, loving, permanent homes for dogs like Snoopy and Jazz.

Jazz came to us because she had been passed around many different homes—she had been to around three or four—because some of her previous owners had found her behaviour challenging. She was described as a “bin raider” when we took her on, and I can confirm that that description was accurate. Sadly, some of the behaviour that she displayed when we took her on, particularly her apparent fear of men, suggested to Battersea, when eventually it let us take Jazz home, that she had probably been subject to some level of abuse in the past. I am pleased that we managed to give Jazz a good home and that she is still with us today.

I know just how devastated my family and I would be if any of our animals were to be taken from us and abused by others. Unfortunately, there were a number of quite high-profile animal-abuse cases involving cats in my constituency and surrounding areas—the Minister may know of this already. What is known as the “Croydon cat killer” case started a few years ago; unfortunately, it is still an open investigation and we are no closer to finding the truth. It started off in Croydon, funnily enough—it got its name from the borough bordering my constituency—but this spate of cat killings, which involved cats being beheaded, spread to other parts of south London, including Carshalton and Wallington.

There was an investigation and the conclusion was that it was down to urban foxes. The cats' owners find that a bit fanciful, and I have to say that I agree. The pattern of behaviour, particularly the cats being beheaded and left there, with no evidence of their being eaten, does not suggest to me that it was urban foxes. It suggests to me that systematic abuse is going on, and I sincerely hope that the investigations can be reopened and that the cats' owners can get a bit of justice and a bit of an answer as to what happened to their beloved pets.

Let me bring my remarks back to the Bill. As we heard in earlier contributions, it is evident that a six-month sentence is certainly not enough. If we look into the statistics in a bit more detail, we see that in the past 10 years only 6% to 11% of all people convicted of animal cruelty offences were given an immediate custodial sentence. The current maximum sentence is clearly not a deterrent, which is why I fully support the measures in the Bill to increase sentences to five years. Notwithstanding the concerns that we have heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Southend West (Sir David Amess) and for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), who are no

longer in their places, I think that will go a long way towards acting as a deterrent to people who want to commit these heinous crimes.

I am very pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset has brought the House together today. I fully support the Bill and look forward to seeing it through to Royal Assent.

11.53 am

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): It is an absolute pleasure to speak in this debate and to support my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder), who I know is a keen animal lover.

I have had a few pets in my time. I have had a few hamsters: I had one hamster called Harold, who lived to three and then passed away, sadly, and then we had another hamster, called Trevor, who lasted only six months, sadly. Then, we got a dog called Lucy, a black-and-white springer spaniel who was incredibly intelligent and impossible to train. I used to take her for a walk and she used to literally spring across the ditch on to the golf course. On some occasions, I just walked off and thought, “Right, I've had it,” but Lucy would always find me—she would always find out where I was and track me down.

I already know a bit about Poppy, the dog owned by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset, and I am very keen to meet her. I have seen lots of pictures of Poppy and, on a serious note, when I look at some of those pictures and the way that Poppy looks at my hon. Friend, I am pretty sure Poppy knows that her owner made a decisive intervention in turning her life around. I think Poppy is completely aware of how my hon. Friend saved her and transformed her life.

I would almost say that, right now, our pets have never been more important to us than during covid-19. Often, during periods of isolation, they have been there for us. I had a service called Talks with Tom, where I spoke to elderly constituents who were self-isolating. I spoke to one elderly man, and he said to me that his wife passed away about eight months ago, and she had a cat. It was very much her cat, and he absolutely could not stand the cat. He reluctantly inherited the cat when his wife passed away, but actually since lockdown he and the cat have been inseparable. The cat has been there, and it has been really his only source of company.

Unfortunately, I do not have a pet now. Recently, I had self-isolate for 11 days. I did not have covid, but I was required to self-isolate for 11 days. My hon. Friend sent me an envelope, and I thought, “I wonder what this is.” I opened it and it was a picture of Poppy, saying “Poppy wishes you well.” So even when it is not our pet and the pet cannot be there physically, we have examples of them extending their love to other people across the country.

I could not agree more with the Bill. When I was elected as a Member of Parliament, I had, as many hon. Members will know, quite strong views on law and order. I often talk about law and order and the need for tougher sentencing for those who commit crimes against other human beings, are found guilty of burglary or whatever else. However, I honestly did not think that what I would probably be most active on was cruelty towards animals, because I did not really know the situation at the time, but needs must. There is probably no greater example of such a disconnect on where the public are when it comes to sentencing and law and

[Tom Hunt]

order than the sentencing for those found guilty of crimes and cruelty towards our animals. This incredibly important Bill is a start of the move forward in response to this problem.

I became a member of the Petitions Committee after I was elected, and again I did not really know what to expect. Petitions signed by over 100,000 people come in to the Committee, and we allocate those petitions to a member who will lead on one of the debates. There was one on pet theft, and I assumed that, as we are a nation of animal lovers, the law on pet theft would be pretty robust anyway, so I did not think it would be a massive issue. I saw that petition and said I would lead on the debate. When I looked into it, I just could not believe it. I could not believe how, as a country of animal lovers, we have individuals found guilty of stealing pets and, more often than not, getting away with a slap on the wrist.

What is very sad is that the law as it stands is all about monetary value. It is all about comparing a beloved dog or cat to an expensive watch. It is ludicrous, and if the pet in question is worth less than £500—in category 3 or 4—we are talking about, at most, a fine of about £250. Of course, the reality is that we cannot put a monetary value on pets. If we look at Poppy—we heard in my hon. Friend's incredibly eloquent and powerful opening speech about the state Poppy was in when she was found—the reality is that if we had asked at that moment, "What's Poppy's monetary value?" the answer would probably would have been net negative, because of the various injuries she had sustained. But try telling that to my hon. Friend, who has a huge love for Poppy. The journey Poppy has been on and the fact that her life has not been straightforward, I am sure means that she is probably the most charming, beautiful dog in the world, and eventually I will meet her.

I touch briefly on pet theft because it is so wrong at the moment that there are so few occasions where those found guilty of pet theft actually end up receiving a custodial sentence. They virtually never receive a custodial sentence. It is very handy that the Minister is in her place, because she was the Minister at the Westminster Hall debate on Monday, where there were 16 other colleagues. We had strong cross-party support, with the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) speaking powerfully about how he supported what was being called for in the petition. It really came across that something needed to be done and that that could not just be another example of a debate where we all profess our love for our pets and animals but nothing really changes.

This is a critical Bill, but as my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset said, it is incredibly important that it is coupled with movement on pet theft. Before the debate on Monday, I had the opportunity to meet virtually with my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor to discuss pet theft. I also bumped into my hon. Friend the Minister in the Tea Room and had a quick chat with her while I was ordering—well, I do not know what I was ordering. I think I tried to order salmon and scrambled egg, but they were out of scrambled egg, so I had some kipper. Anyway, we had a quick chat about it, and I am confident that my right

hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor will communicate with the Sentencing Council.

My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) started a debate today about the Sentencing Council, and that is an issue. Someone who is found guilty of pet theft is sentenced under the Theft Act 1968. The Theft Act actually allows individuals to be sentenced to prison for up to seven years, but in reality that has never happened; it is virtually all done in magistrates courts, and it never goes further than a £250 fine at best. My right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor will, I hope, express his view to the Sentencing Council that the guidelines connected to the Theft Act need to make specific reference to pet theft and strongly communicate the emotional trauma to the pet and its owners and how distressing it is to have a pet stolen.

Returning to the Bill, I am shocked, just as I was with pet theft, by the status quo with regard to animal cruelty and the fact that there is a maximum sentence of six months' imprisonment for some of these crimes—we have heard some of the stories today—that make our skin crawl and make the skin of virtually everybody else in the country crawl. A five-year maximum would be a huge step in the right direction, but again, the fact is that even when we have custodial sentences, the maximum that is given is never more than three months.

In conclusion, I am a huge animal lover, and we need to see movement on pet theft; we need to see those guidelines. I pay immense tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset, whom I have the privilege of knowing well. I know his passion for Poppy and his passion for animal welfare, and I think he has done a very good job moving this Bill forward. I will be monitoring developments with close interest.

12.3 pm

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I join my colleagues in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on his excellent and passionate speech in opening this debate. This is a hugely important issue, and he is clearly very passionate about animal welfare. It sounds as though his springer spaniel, Poppy, lives a very happy life indeed.

This is the second time I have spoken in a debate on animal welfare this week. I had the opportunity to speak in the Westminster Hall debate on pet theft, which came about as the result of an e-petition. My hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt), who has just spoken, spoke passionately in that debate, too. The most signatures for that petition came from my constituency in the Scottish borders, so it is clear that the passion my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset has for animal welfare is shared by my constituents, and I want to echo that passion.

It is absolutely right that the most serious perpetrators of animal cruelty are properly punished. I completely agree that increasing the current maximum sentence from six months to five years will ensure that the punishment fits the crime.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) spoke well about the need to ensure that people who might not have been brought up around animals have an opportunity to have them in their lives

and to learn how they are looked after. In my constituency, the Border Union show, which runs the normally magnificent Kelso show—sadly, it has not taken place this year, for obvious reasons—runs an annual schools day event, where hundreds of local school kids are invited to meet farmers, vets, butchers, food producers and other people from the rural economy, to learn how food is produced, how animals are reared and how good animal welfare is maintained. It is an invaluable opportunity, particularly for young people from urban settings, to learn about country living and animal welfare.

For audiences in Northern Ireland and Scotland, this is a devolved policy area, so I want to pick up on how policy has evolved elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The House might not be aware that a few months ago the Scottish Parliament passed the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Act 2020, which, among other things, increased the penalty to five years for the most serious animal welfare offences. That Act had the unanimous support of the Scottish Parliament, and I hope that this Bill will enjoy similar support today. I note that Members across the Chamber stood on manifestos that supported what is in the Bill. It has had long-standing support in Scotland, and I know that it has similar support from colleagues from England and Wales. We should note that we have all been beaten to it by our friends in Northern Ireland, who increased the maximum sentence for this offence back in 2011.

I want to highlight to work of my MSP colleagues, who used the opposition majority in the Scottish Parliament to force the SNP Government into a consultation on animal welfare. I will take a moment to make the point, which others have made, that we receive a lot of emails and correspondence from constituents highlighting, rightly, the issue of animal welfare. Often it is the Opposition parties that like to take credit and associate themselves with this cause, but the Opposition Benches are noticeably empty today, by contrast to the Government Benches. We should also bear in mind everything that this and previous Conservative Governments have achieved on animal welfare since 2010. There is much that we should take credit for, and I am pleased that so many Conservative colleagues are speaking on this important issue today.

It is also noticeable that Members from the third largest party in this place, who like to make so much noise generally, are completely absent from this debate. I do not believe that 48 SNP Members have not received the same amount of correspondence on this important matter that I have received, so it is right that we call out their lack of voice in the Chamber today.

The public response to the consultation that the Scottish Parliament undertook demonstrated overwhelming support for increased sentences for animal cruelty offences. I am glad that it is now law in Scotland. MSP colleagues have also worked tirelessly to promote other animal welfare issues, such as better protection for police dogs and other service animals—known as Finn’s law—the improvement of pet shop licensing and the compulsory use of CCTV in abattoirs. I am pleased that the Scottish Government have now agreed to implement those proposals.

The Bill has been in the works for some time, so I am glad that the House now has another chance to consider it. As pointed out by the Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, there are stronger penalties currently in place for fly-tipping than for animal cruelty. That is clearly wrong. Do not get me wrong, fly-tipping is an awful blight on

our countryside and leads to wildlife being harmed, but it is clear, none the less, that the abuse of a living, breathing sentient being is, at the very least, something that deserves the same protection.

I have a few points about the Bill that I would like to raise. We welcome hearing from the Minister in her closing remarks, and perhaps also from my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset in his remarks, on a couple of points. First, I am concerned about the difficult passage that this Bill has had in previous Parliaments. Most recently, the Bill fell at the end of last year due to the December general election, so this is the second time that we have considered it. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, in his first speech as Prime Minister, spoke about the importance of the welfare of animals and how it is

“close to the hearts of the British people”.

I could not agree more. With the support of this Government and, I assume, of this House, it is important that we just get on with it and get it on the statute book as quickly as possible. I would therefore be grateful to hear from the Minister about what can be done to support this Bill’s safe passage through the remaining stages as quickly as possible.

Another point on which I would like some clarity is the Bill’s likely impact on the prison population. It has already been touched on, but I want to deal with it from a slightly different perspective. Again, I would be grateful for some clarification from the Minister about the predicted number of people who will see increased sentences who otherwise would have received a current maximum of only six months. I obviously do not want the Minister to try to second-guess the courts, but from reading the explanatory notes to the Bill, the Government consider that any extra cost to the criminal justice system will be less than half a million pounds per annum. It is important that the Bill does not just signal good intentions, but actually puts the cruellest animal abusers behind bars for longer.

I am sure that all Members receive a considerable amount of correspondence on animal welfare and specifically on the Bill. It is important that the UK, especially as we embark on life outside the European Union, pushes our animal welfare credentials. I know that some people in this House are not huge fans of the term “world leading” but on things such as the illegal wildlife trade, I believe that we are at the forefront of the international community in regulating the trade of wild animals. That is not to mention plans for stopping the import of hunting trophies from endangered species. It is wrong for endangered animals, especially those that are bred specifically to be hunted, to be imported into the country as trophies. Back in 2018, the UK introduced one of the world’s toughest bans on ivory sales and set up the Ivory Alliance 2024, protecting the most imposing and majestic species on the planet.

Over the past few years, this place, as well as the devolved Parliaments in the United Kingdom, have banned wild animals in circuses. There are also calls for evidence that could see having a monkey as a pet banned and restrictions on the ownership, sale and breeding of primates. However, there is obviously more to do, and I am pleased that the Government have achieved what they have so far, but we should keep pushing forward. Continuing to improve our animal welfare standards is a hallmark of our civilised society,

[*John Lamont*]

and protecting animals by putting abusers behind bars is a huge step along that journey. The calls to lengthen sentences have gone on for too long. I look forward to all parts of the UK standing together to show that animal abuse is met with robust punishment.

12.13 pm

Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (*John Lamont*). I echo the point that he made about the value that animals have on the wellbeing and the learning of children. In his constituency, in mine and across the country, animals play a hugely significant role in learning and development. In that light, I mention West Rise Junior School in my constituency, which, perhaps unusually, has a farm where children can learn about the lifecycle and welfare of animals. Perhaps more unusually, it also has, to its credit, a small herd of water buffalo that grazes the marshland and that inspires the children's artwork, poetry and creative writing. Right across the curriculum, the herd's presence and inspiration is felt.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (*Chris Loder*) for bringing this Bill forward today. It is hugely important. He is absolutely right when he says that it means a great deal to very many people. My last email before I rose this morning came in at one minute past midnight and urged us to make this change.

The change would promote our ambition and aspiration to be a world leader in the care and protection of animals. My hon. Friend's story about Poppy was distressing, then infinitely heart-warming. He is right when he calls on us to recognise our legal and moral responsibility, and this Bill will send a powerful message. I was pleased, too, that he signposted pet theft, animal slaughter and animal sentience, which are all hugely important.

I will pick up on two points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (*Neil Parish*), one lighter and one darker. I echo the concern about the link between the abuse of animals and the later and longer abuse of people. The link is well established, so it is critical to take action on that front.

Perhaps as a point of information—I congratulate my hon. Friend on his success in Westminster dog of the year—I would like to raise in the name of cats everywhere whether there could not be an equal and opposite competition, or whether it was by dint of their aloof and disobliging nature that there was no such show. I have not always, I confess, been a cat lover.

Neil Parish: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Caroline Ansell: I better had. I think I am in trouble.

Neil Parish: I thank my hon. Friend very much for giving way. I will pass on her good regards to Cats Protection. I suspect we will be able to have a Westminster cat of the year. We will work on that.

Caroline Ansell: I thank my hon. Friend.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Lady has made some strong points. There of course is a cats competition ongoing at the

moment, which Mr Speaker's own cat is in, as is my cat, Charlotte, who is a rescue cat. On a serious note, she suffered significant abuse in the first few months of her life. I rescued her. She was extremely timid and extremely difficult and I have worked with her over the last few years to get her to a much better place. I really want to commend all the cats organisations, including Wood Green, Cats Protection, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, which is running the cat of the year competition, and many others.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Chair shows no partiality whatever, but the Speaker's cat is a very fine cat.

Caroline Ansell: I will give way to the Minister.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): I, too, am very fond of the Purr Minister competition, which is run by Battersea, which I had the privilege of visiting several years ago, when Midnight, who I certainly do not own, but do have the privilege of looking after, was elected as Purr Minister. The competition is very fierce, and I know there are several cats available this year, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Caroline Ansell: In this fast-moving situation, I am pleased that this seeming injustice and omission has been so roundly satisfied, and I wish the very best to Members' cats everywhere and give a huge apology to my own for failing to put them forward.

I confess I have not always been a cat lover. In fact, quite the opposite. In times past they would seek me out, smelling the fear, but all that changed with one tiny rescue kitten from Cats Protection. It all started in a surgery recovery room not far from here, when my little boy, who was then five—he may not thank me for telling the story, but he did say it would be okay—had just come through brain surgery and was coming round. I sat by his bedside and he looked to all intents and purposes like a little marionette. He had leads and cannulas coming from every part and a brain drain. He could have asked me for anything and I would have moved the world for him. He asked for a little black boy kitten. Thus began my story. I duly took him to Cats Protection in Hailsham in the next-door constituency, where a little girl tortoiseshell kitten chose us, only for us to find that she came with a sister, and both came home.

I tell that story because every day that followed, this little kitten, just like Nana from "Peter Pan", would pad up the stairs after my little boy, curl into a ball at the bottom of his bed, wait until he had fallen asleep and then pad back down. When people say animals are sentient, absolutely they are, but they are more than that. This little kitten, faithful and true, tirelessly devoted, hugely loyal to my boy and very protective, helped him to recover. My cat story changed.

It is not just in health terms that animals enrich our lives, but they do. Whether they are seizure alert dogs, whether they simply reduce stress, anxiety and depression, whether they provide people with a connection to their community and the natural world, or whether around security and safety, animals enrich our lives. Today's Bill is an opportunity for us to recognise all of that and

to step into that legal and moral responsibility, which my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset so eloquently described, to show how we care.

12.21 pm

Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell). I was delighted to hear her cat story.

This is a very short Bill, but it will have a huge impact on animal welfare. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on his work in bringing it to this place. Sentences for animal cruelty in the UK have been woefully lenient and I am delighted that the Government are supporting the Bill to increase animal sentencing from six months to five years.

We have heard already today some horrific stories of animal cruelty and I would like to mention a couple. In 2018, there was the Northampton cat killer, a man who killed and mutilated seven family pets before leaving them outside their homes for their owners to find them. That case was horrific, but he was sentenced to just three months in prison. In 2019 in Wellingborough, a man stabbed a miniature horse over 20 times with a kitchen knife. He also cut the wings off three chickens. All those animals had to be put down. He received just a two-month sentence and, in fact, a longer sentence for carrying the knife, which is obviously a serious offence as well. I do not think anyone would consider two or three-month sentences at all appropriate in both those cases.

We heard, in the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset, about the further work that needs to be done on animal welfare, live animal exports, conditions for slaughter and pet theft. On Monday, I spoke in a debate on pet theft secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt). I spoke of my beloved two Cavalier King Charles spaniels, Cromwell and Bertie, and how, under current sentencing, the fact is that older dogs with various health issues are worthless in monetary terms. That means that someone who stole my pets would basically face a slap on the wrist. Maybe someone stealing an expensive puppy with a receipt for £3,000 would face a harsher sentence. While punishments are linked to the monetary value of pets, we will not see fairness in pet theft. The impact of that is devastating on owners and I still feel that we need a specific offence for pet theft. I welcome some Government movement on that and I know the Lord Chancellor is speaking to the Sentencing Council about whether stricter sentencing could be imposed.

On Monday, much was said by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the impact on owners. Today, maybe we need to consider the impact of pet theft on the animals. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 makes it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to domesticated animals. I would argue that stealing an animal and ripping it away from its loving family not only devastates the owner, but causes unnecessary suffering to the animal. I wonder, therefore, if the Bill could be used to sentence in cases of pet theft on that basis. The public want harsher sentences for pet theft. I do not care which Bill enables that to happen, but I certainly want to see it.

The Bill has been dubbed Finn's law.

Jacob Young: Part 2.

Jane Stevenson: Part 2, of course. PC Dave Wardell and his beautiful police dog Finn have been tireless campaigners on the issue. In 2019, we welcomed the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act, which means that people who injure a service animal now face a sentence of up to five years. Finn and Dave achieved their initial goal to protect animals like Finn, but they did not stop there; they want all animals to be protected. I know that they will be watching this debate with great interest.

I first had the honour of meeting Dave and Finn before I came to this place. I had been booked to sing at a gala concert in the Royal Albert Hall with the British Police Symphony Orchestra, which I was very excited about, but I was even more excited when I found out that PC Wardell and Finn would be taking part. I should possibly apologise to Dave for launching at him backstage with a box of dog biscuits that I had packed with my concert dress. I imagine it was a surprise to him a few months later when the same crazy soprano appeared in Westminster Hall as a newly elected MP.

Having signed petitions and written letters in support of Finn's law, parts 1 and 2, I am incredibly privileged to be here to help this Bill to become law. I pay tribute to everyone who has pushed for it, including many hon. Members on both sides of the House, many animal welfare groups and many individuals who have struggled to get it this far.

Of those individual campaigners, I mention Lisa Garner, who campaigned for Lucy's law to end puppy farming. I met her in 2015 at a Cavalier spaniel charity event. I congratulate my dog on winning the ultimate prize of dog with the waggiest tail, which, hon. Members will appreciate, was a fiercely fought competition in a room full of Cavalier spaniels. Campaigners such as Lisa Garner and Dave Wardell do tireless work. All hon. Members will join me in thanking them.

I am proud that the Government have made significant progress on animal welfare issues such as microchipping, which is so important, the import of hunting trophies, and puppy farming, but there is still work to do. I urge the Government not to rest on their laurels and I hope we get the Bill enacted very soon. The vast majority of the public, including many of my constituents in Wolverhampton North East, want people who commit awful acts of animal cruelty to be prosecuted and punished for them.

12.28 pm

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on bringing forward this life-changing private Member's Bill. I say life-changing because it is life-changing for our animals, who are sentient beings who can feel and have emotions. We must do all we can to protect them.

I thank my predecessor, Anna Turley, who introduced the Animal Cruelty (Sentencing) Bill with similar aims in the 2016-17 Session. I paid tribute to her earlier, but I put on record again my thanks for her work on animal welfare. On this issue, I am proud to follow in her footsteps. On the same day, my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) introduced the Animal Fighting (Sentencing) Bill, for which I thank him as well. It is clear that proper sentencing for animal abuse unites hon. Members on both sides of the House.

[*Jacob Young*]

I also pay tribute to and congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald), who is not in the Chamber, on his work on Finn's law, the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019, to which this is the sister Bill in many ways. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Jane Stevenson), I congratulate the police dog Finn and his owner Dave, who I had the privilege of meeting earlier this year.

In the short space of time I have known my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset, I have found him to be an equally fierce advocate for animal welfare. His story about Poppy the dog, his inspiration for the Bill, is incredibly moving, and I am sure that we are all glad that Poppy now has a safe home with him. As I said, an iteration of the Bill was first presented on the Floor of the House on 4 July 2016, and I regret that it has taken so long for it to pass through this House, while abusers have continued to evade proper justice for their crimes against animals. However, we are here now, and I hope that we can finally make history by delivering on our manifesto promise to increase sentencing for animal abuse.

I believe that animals are sentient beings and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) said, they are more than that. They deserve our full protection and respect. My predecessor introduced her Bill following two tragic cases of animal abuse in Redcar and Cleveland. The first was of a bulldog called Baby, who was lifted above her owner's head and thrown down the stairs repeatedly. I am grateful to hon. Members for mentioning that case already, and I apologise for the upsetting details.

Not content with simply abusing Baby, the two young men video-recorded their actions for further entertainment, and thank goodness they did or perhaps they would have never faced justice. The RSPCA investigated the case of Baby and took forward a private prosecution after a secure digital card was found in a supermarket some three years after the original incident, which had the video evidence filmed by one of the abusers. I pay an enormous tribute to the RSPCA for the amazing work that it does, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset on securing its full support for his Bill.

The RSPCA inspector Gemma Lynch described the clip for the court, saying that Baby was

"totally submissive throughout, not even making a noise when she lands on the stairs, bouncing to the foot of them where there is a baby gate which she crashes into before hitting the ground."

She described how a second clip showed Baby's abuser "stamping on her neck repeatedly at the bottom of the stairs, then picking her up and throwing her to the ground with force over and over again...Another clip shows him standing on Baby's chest...before jumping up and down on her. This is the only time you hear her make a noise, and she is crying throughout."

During the RSPCA's investigation, it discovered that Baby had to be put down three months following the incident, after losing the use of her hindlegs. The two men pleaded guilty to animal cruelty and were sentenced to 21 weeks in prison, suspended for two years, given a six-month tagged evening curfew, and ordered to pay £300 in costs. They were also banned from keeping animals for life, with no appeal for 20 years. I am sure that across the House we are all left with the question: has justice truly been done for Baby in that instance?

The second case happened later that year, though three years since the original incident with Baby, when a little terrier called Scamp was found buried alive with a nail hammered in his head in a shallow grave in Redcar. Scamp was discovered by a walker who heard grunting from a mound in Kirkleatham woods and took the animal to a vet. The vet who examined the terrier described the abusers' actions as the worst case of animal cruelty that he had ever seen. The two men who admitted the charges and pled guilty to the offence relating to the dog's death were jailed for just four months, the maximum that they could have received owing to their guilty pleas, and banned from keeping animals for life. Again the question is: has justice been done for Scamp?

The then chief executive of Battersea Dogs and Cats Home said:

"The unimaginable suffering Scamp endured at the hands of his owner, a person he should have been able to trust implicitly, will horrify the nation. The two men responsible have been sentenced to just four months in prison. Why? Because magistrates are unable to issue anything more than six months for even the most appalling and callous acts of animal cruelty. England and Wales' maximum sentence simply must change. Four months for what was done to Scamp is neither a fitting punishment nor a deterrent."

As I said, that was in 2016. When interviewed, the abusers told the RSPCA inspectors that Scamp had started to go blind, deaf and incontinent and that they thought that killing him was the right thing to do. They claimed that they acted as they did because they could not afford euthanasia for Scamp and that the dog was starting to suffer from illnesses.

The question of animal welfare and the proper prosecution of animal abusers raises many other questions, including the availability of information for owners who want to do the right thing if their animal is suffering but do not necessarily know what to do. Greater education when it comes to keeping animals is incredibly important and it should start at a young age, with us teaching our kids about animal welfare in schools. The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), who is no longer in her place, mentioned that earlier. I would also like to see us use the data afforded to us through microchipping to communicate with animal owners on what to do when they do not know or cannot afford to look after their animal. There are so many incredible charities that will support them, whatever decision they need to take about their animal. At this point, I am pleased to say that the remainder of my speech is a bit more upbeat and less graphic.

When it comes to dealing with the aftermath of abuse and helping animals to recover and find a loving home, there is so much goodwill and so many positive achievements in my community of Redcar and Cleveland. I pay tribute to the incredible work that Maxi's Mates does as our county pound. Maxi's Mates, which sits just outside my constituency, began only in 2012, but it has gone from strength to strength, taking over as the pound in 2016, with 39 kennels for dogs needing to be rehomed. It holds the contract to attend to stray dogs in the area and insists on never putting a healthy dog down. In my constituency, we also have the amazing Saltburn Animal Rescue Association in Kirkleatham, which has operated since 1995. It offers to shelter cats and dogs who require rehoming and works with other pounds across the country to house animals that were not able to find a home elsewhere.

Both those charities operate largely on donations from the public and work with a large volunteer base, which has been incredibly stretched during the pandemic, as have all charities. However, we are a community of animal lovers in Redcar and Cleveland, and for that reason I believe that this legislation will be welcomed across my constituency as a crucial step in addressing the principal injustice in sentencing. However, after speaking to a number of organisations regarding the Bill, there are some wider elements I want to raise, and perhaps the Minister, or my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset, can give me some assurances about them.

Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, an animal can be removed from an abusive owner by the police or an inspector on the authority of a vet certifying that the animal is suffering or is likely to suffer if its circumstances do not change. If an animal is seized under section 20 of the Act, there is a concern that animals may end up spending an extended period of time suspended in the system, unable to be rehomed. This is particularly relevant to dogs, who may spend months, if not years, in kennels while a case goes through court. Many dogs find kennels difficult to cope with, and this can prove a distressing experience for them. In the instance of a puppy breeder, it is unhealthy for a young group of pups to grow up in kennels and can lead to further complications in their later rehoming. Further to that, the cost of housing these animals, while we are unable to rehome them, is growing all the while. A side effect of increasing the length of sentence provided by the courts could see more cases going to the Crown court, which in turn could lead to longer waiting times.

The Animal Welfare Act already provides for animals to be cared for or humanely destroyed under section 20 and seems also to suggest that a seized animal can be, in a sense, fostered but simply not adopted. In my view, that could be amended to include, as the Act puts it, “disposing” of an animal—in other words, rehoming in these circumstances. In Scotland, the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Act 2020 gives authorised persons the power to transfer, sell, treat or humanely destroy animals that have been taken into possession to alleviate suffering without the expressed will of the animal’s owner. We should do what we can to replicate that in English law, and I ask the Minister to consider the feasibility of such a change in Committee.

I have spoken with Dogs Trust, which has suggested that to help with enforcement, which the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) raised, the creation of an animal welfare inspectorate would reduce the disparities that currently exist between the level of animal welfare support provided by local authorities. Under the Animal Welfare Act, local authorities must appoint at least one qualified animal welfare inspector. The latest data available shows that in 2018-19, 111 of 343 local authorities did not record any animal welfare inspectors, although in some cases they could be shared between local authorities. Effective enforcement could even help to uncover other forms of abuse and neglect, as studies have shown the long-term link between animal abuse and human abuse, which my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) referenced.

Abusers are not always owners. Dog walking and dog sitting have become popular side jobs in recent years, and those activities remain largely unregulated. The RSPCA has recently exposed cases of abusive dog sitters

being caught on camera and stressed the need for pet owners to be extra vigilant when trusting a stranger to look after their animals, even for a short time. Questions also need to be raised about pack walking and whether dog walkers should be limited to walking a certain number of dogs at the same time, to avoid stress for the dog and walker and avoid any aggressive behaviour among the dogs. That is an emerging area of concern, particularly in areas such as Redcar and Cleveland, where we have fantastic beaches and beautiful countryside.

I was incredibly pleased when, in 2016, it became compulsory for dogs over eight weeks of age to be microchipped in England, Scotland and Wales. Like the right hon. Member for Warley, I would like to see greater enforcement of that. Microchipping is so important because it means that owners who abuse and abandon their dogs can be traced and found and no longer avoid any responsibility. I also welcome the Government’s commitment to introduce compulsory microchipping for cats, so that they enjoy the same level of protection as dogs. I understand that the consultation on that has finished, and I would be grateful if the Minister could update us on progress.

There is clearly plenty more to do if we want domestic, commercial and wild animals all over the country to be treated with the dignity and care they deserve. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset spoke passionately about non-stun slaughter, on which I wholeheartedly agree with him. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Jo Gideon) spoke passionately about live animal exports. My hon. Friends the Members for Ipswich (Tom Hunt) and for Wolverhampton North East spoke passionately about pet theft, on which I wholeheartedly agree with them.

Animal welfare covers so many different areas, and this Bill offers a chance to look at those areas again and make the improvements necessary to give pets and other animals the best possible environment throughout their lives. The existing six-month maximum penalty for animal cruelty is the weakest in Europe. Our neighbours in France have been enforcing maximum sentences of two years and fines of €30,000 since 2018. That makes a change in the law even more pressing, and we cannot delay any further. Should the Bill fail, I urge the Government to bring forward this legislation in Government time urgently, as this cannot wait any longer.

12.44 pm

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Jacob Young). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on his tireless work on this issue, and on the Bill in particular. It is clear from his contributions today how passionate he feels about animal welfare. I place on the record my admiration of and thanks to the Finn’s law campaign. I was proud to meet Finn and his handler when he visited Parliament at the start of this year. Since Royal Assent was given to the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019, the Finn’s law campaign has pushed hard for increased sentences for the worst cases of cruelty and neglect, which the Bill will of course bring into being.

For too long, the most violent abusers of animals have been able to stain the UK’s otherwise proud record on animal welfare. The current array of potential deterrents,

[*Dr James Davies*]

including fines, a ban on keeping animals and a maximum of six months in prison, has simply not been strong enough, with calls to the RSPCA cruelty line increasing by almost 50,000 between 2018 and 2019, to a shocking 1.2 million. In preparing for the debate, I learned of some examples where punishments were not, in my opinion, in any way adequate; we have heard some of those already.

In one case, a cat was left in a washing machine for hours before it ultimately died. The perpetrator received only a disqualification from keeping animals for five years.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): We have spoken a lot already about enforcement. Part of the problem with enforcement is in people given banning orders on owning pets. What would my hon. Friend think about bringing forward greater enforcement powers to make sure that that is kept to, and that people who commit these most heinous of crimes are no longer allowed animals?

Dr Davies: I absolutely agree. We should discuss that further as the Bill progresses.

Sadly, that particular individual was punished with a four-month detention training order and the requirement to pay £200 compensation to the cat's owner. We should not and cannot allow the perpetrators of such acts to receive overly lenient punishments. This Bill, which will increase the maximum sentence for animal cruelty offences in England and Wales from six months to five years, is absolutely necessary to deter people from inflicting harm and death on defenceless animals. My Vale of Clwyd constituents agree.

Canine behaviourist Adam Hobbs has worked alongside rescue centres, including North Clwyd Animal Rescue, for more than 15 years, and often helps to rehabilitate dogs that have been the victim of sustained neglect or acts of violence. He told me that one of the most difficult aspects of working on cruelty cases is trying to comprehend how the perpetrators face no real consequence or deterrent from repeating their atrocious behaviours. Rehabilitating and caring for victims of animal abuse takes a huge emotional toll on those involved. Knowing that the evil people who cause such suffering face almost no barriers to causing such dreadful acts again is simply soul-destroying.

The Bill will form a vital pillar of our national approach to animal welfare matters that will be respected the world over. At present, we stand woefully behind other countries, as we have heard, such as Australia, Canada and India, where the maximum punishment for animal cruelty is five years in prison. We must address this, and I believe that in doing so we can also help to reduce the scourge of domestic abuse, which is often linked—another issue brought up by hon. Members.

However, two additional points should be considered. Even under the rules that we are discussing, if an individual is convicted of the most serious violence towards animals, I suggest that they should not be trusted to keep animals again. The Dogs Trust is calling for an automatic ban on owning animals for a person convicted of animal cruelty offences. I am sympathetic to its justification that the change would not only be

preventive, in that it would stop the worst abusers keeping animals, but would also add an extra layer of deterrent. Like all colleagues, I do not want to see the passage of the Bill disrupted—we have waited long enough to see this change—but I would be grateful if an automatic ban could be considered in greater detail in Committee.

Rather than a comment on the provisions of the Bill, the second point is more a plea that the powers in the Bill are used to their full extent. In England and Wales last year, there were 1,218,364 reports of animal cruelty, but that translated into just 661 convictions in court. Unless there is monitoring and enforcement of the new legislation, the advantages brought by the Bill will be negligible. By working with local authorities and relevant organisations, and by ensuring clarity on sentencing guidelines, as called for by Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, I hope the Government will be able to ensure that the benefits of this Bill are seen throughout England and Wales. This Bill is a valuable tool in our fight against animal cruelty. Clearly, the provisions have support from across the House and the Government, as they have done for many years, and I very much look forward to seeing the Bill progress.

12.50 pm

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on bringing this good Bill to the House. Given that we get so many emails on so many campaigns every week and month, it is nice to be saying, for once, “Yes, I agree”, rather than the usual, “No, I don’t”.

About 15 years ago, I was involved in a project looking at charitable giving, comparing the UK and other countries. There were some notable differences between the UK and the US. People in the US tended to give more money to charity than people in the UK. When we talked to the wealthy about why that was, there was a feeling here that they paid higher taxes and it was government's job to sort out the various issues that charities were focusing on with that tax money. In the US, they were much more likely to give money to local causes, with a feeling that charity began at home, whereas in the UK they were much more likely to give it to international organisations. One of the biggest differences between charitable giving in the UK and such giving in almost every other country was the amount given to animal charities, which is always one of the highest proportions of charitable giving; the project I refer to was about 15 years ago, but that has always been consistent. Giving to animal charities has often been at the top, along with giving to health charities—those are usually the top two. That says something important about the UK's relationship to animals. Some people in this country love animals as much as people, and we probably all know individuals who love animals more than they love people. So it is right that we are introducing this legislation.

Animals run through a lot of aspects of life in my constituency of Wantage and Didcot, including, of course, as pets. How often someone sees me might depend on how nice their pet is. I really like our friends Juliet and Jeremy, but I really love their dog Mabel. Animals run through businesses; we have a small brewery in our constituency called LoveBeer, where all the beers are named after dogs—their dogs and the dogs of

people they know. People can buy beers such as Purdy Peculiar and Doctor Roo. Ours is a rural constituency, so animals run through the farms. We have a lot of farms and people cannot drive far through the constituency without seeing animals on farms. Of course, animals are a factor in crime as well; like many rural constituencies, we face an issue of hare coursing, which is covered by different legislation.

It is fair to say that our maximum sentences for animal cruelty have been out of kilter, both with how the country feels about animals and with the maximum sentences in other countries. It is right that we are going from having one of the lowest maximum sentences to having one of the highest in the world. It is also right that we remedy some of the inconsistencies about a dog harming a service dog incurring a higher sentence than a human being harming a dog.

In preparing to speak in this debate, I did as I usually do and spoke to some of the organisations with expertise on these issues. Charney Romanian Rescue Dogs in Faringdon completely supports this Bill. The Oxfordshire Animal Sanctuary, which is not in my constituency but has a presence in it, also completely supports this Bill.

Another organisation that supports the Bill is the Island Farm donkey sanctuary, which is one of the leading donkey sanctuaries in the UK, and probably in Europe. Indeed, it has more than 120 donkeys from all across Europe. The people there do a great job. Periodically, they receive a donkey whose limbs have been slashed with a knife. They had a donkey called Midge whose four front teeth had been knocked out because Midge had been hit full in the face with either a hammer or a piece of wood—they are unsure which. They do a great job and can repair donkeys physically in a matter of months, but the mental damage takes a good deal longer. They have donkeys who have been there for years and years who are still nervous when humans approach them.

I agree with all the comments that have been made about it being a mark of a civilised society to treat animals well and to punish those who do not treat animals well. It is clear why charitable giving to animal charities is as high as it is. Because of the tales of those donkeys and all the other tales of animal abuse that we have heard in the House today, I strongly support the Bill.

12.55 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Until this summer, my family had two gorgeous, slightly geriatric rescue dogs that we had had for around four years. Like most old dogs, they could be smelly and often plonked themselves in the middle of the room, in the way. Frankly, I think they thought similarly about me. Above all, they were an important part of our family. They were massively loved and the love that they gave in return was clear for everyone to see. When we lost one shortly after the other, over the summer, it was a big loss to the family and everyone was extremely sad.

Spider and Willow had spent their first nine and a half years as breeding dogs. They had a tough start in life but, as far as we could tell, other than the enormous physical toll that serial litters take on bitches in particular, they were not mistreated. Of course, a number of other animals, particularly rescue dogs, have an even more difficult and tragic start and, often, sadly, end in life.

It is right that the Bill, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder), seeks to introduce penalties that will start to be proportionate to some of the horrific harm and cruelty that is caused to animals. It is almost a habit on a Friday morning to stand up and preface any speech on a private Member's Bill with comments on how wisely the Member has chosen the legislation, how important it is and how it will make a massive difference. Rarely can those comments have been as heartfelt from Members on both sides of the Chamber as they are for this legislation.

Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that today's debate is about proportionate sentencing for some heinous crimes, and that we should fully support the Bill? I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder).

Mike Wood: I could not agree more and find it hard to imagine why anybody would disagree with our hon. Friend's Bill. I am delighted that Ministers are giving it such strong support and hope that means it will progress through its parliamentary stages in a timely fashion.

I pay tribute to and give huge thanks for the work of so many animal charities, but particularly the Dogs Trust and the Kennel Club, for the way they help to raise issues relating to animal welfare and cruelty to animals—in the case of those two charities, to dogs in particular.

Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) spoke about how he definitely does not have animals in his office, and he suggested that animals are not allowed on the parliamentary estate under any circumstances. That is not quite true because, as you may know, Mr Deputy Speaker, and as my hon. Friend also knows, there is a dog in my office upstairs. Bella is an officially accredited office dog, with her own pass. She is my assistant's therapy dog, following brain surgery, and she is a familiar sight around the Committee corridor and on the way to the office. Her work was recognised in last year's Westminster dog of the year competition, in which she was the runner up. As hon. Members across the House who have had the fortune to meet Bella will know, Bella was robbed, and I trust that a full and independent inquiry will follow to look into how Bella received only the prize of second place, rather than what she was due.

On a more serious note, we in the United Kingdom pride ourselves on being a nation of animal lovers, but every case of extreme cruelty that Members have referred to today is a scar on that claim. We must ensure that such crimes attract the length of sentence that is clearly due. My constituents in Dudley South struggle to understand why impersonating a customs officer, serious crime though that is, currently attracts a higher maximum sentence than that available for the most extreme, sadistic, and sickening cruelty to animals, such as the offences we have heard about today. The Bill seeks to put that right, and it is long overdue.

Many hon. Members have referred to service animals, and to the incredible story of Finn and PC Wardell, who are both clearly heroes. The issue of service animals is particularly dear to me because my father was a mounted police officer with West Midlands police for many years, and he also worked with the dogs in that police force. During his time on duty—this is going

[Mike Wood]

back more than a couple of decades—there were a small, sickening number of people who somehow thought that a police dog or horse was a legitimate target for attack, whether during a protest or riot, or whether because of common criminality.

Violence towards service animals has always struck any right-minded person as unacceptable, and it is pleasing that the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019 is now in statute. I look forward to this Bill joining it, to ensure sentences that are appropriate for the most sickening cases of animal cruelty. I know that many other Members wish to speak in this debate, so I will not detain the House any longer. I look forward to my hon. Friend's Bill proceeding to Committee. It cannot come into force a day too soon.

1.4 pm

Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) and hear of Bella, his office dog. I concur; she was robbed.

I rise to support the Bill proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) to increase the sentence for animal cruelty to a maximum of five years' imprisonment. Mr Deputy Speaker, I must declare an interest, as for the past 20 years I have been the proud mum of a tortoise. A love of tortoises is something that I share with Mr Speaker. I may suggest that we arrange a play date and, who knows, we might hear the pitter patter of tiny shells.

On a more serious note, the Bill is extremely important and if enacted it would mean sentencing was the same for cruelty to all animals. Under Finn's law, there is a five-year maximum sentence in place for cruelty to service animals, such as police horses and assistance dogs used by the sensory impaired. The Bill would extend Finn's law to all animals and would mean the increase of the maximum sentence to five years. It would be one of the toughest punishments in the world, and it is right that we now seek parity.

I would not want to deprive my hon. Friends of my pet story. When I was a child, a small scruffy black-and-white dog limped through the back door of my family home. He was a Heinz 57 varieties—some of us are old enough to know what that means—and he was in a sorry state of affairs and in desperate need. We took him in and looked after him until we could find his owner. My mother was convinced that he would be claimed, so referred to him as Hound. She was hoping we would not get too attached. He was malnourished and in pain, and Hound had been cruelly mistreated. Both his back legs were dislocated and beyond rectification. The vet's conclusion was to put him to sleep, but that was not going to happen in our household. Hound was a member of our family for the next 15 years. Yes, he would run like a crab, but he was our crab and we loved him. Even now, 30 years later, there is a picture of Hound on my fridge.

A pet gives unconditional love and companionship, and what I am describing is the positive long-term impact a pet can have on a child. It is beyond comprehension that someone would mistreat or abuse a child. As a former social worker, I am aware of a correlation between

perpetrators of animal cruelty and those of violence towards humans, to pick up on the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Jane Stevenson).

When I was preparing for today's debate, I spoke to vets in my constituency of Wrexham. They tell me they are concerned about what are termed as covid pups. I take the opportunity to highlight on their behalf that a dog is for life, not just for lockdown. My local vets have raised concerns about dogs purchased since March. The pets have not had the opportunity to be raised and socialised within the wider community, but have been brought up in a solitary household. Let us hope we do not see an increase in abuse and abandonment of pets due to possible behavioural problems or the cost of looking after them as covid restrictions continue.

Mr Mohindra: Does my hon. Friend agree that today's debate allows us to continue to publicise that exact point about pet ownership coming with responsibility? We all remember the strapline in the ads we see coming up for Christmas; a pet is not just for Christmas. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) again, as today's debate allows us to go back to our communities and remind our residents of that fact.

Sarah Atherton: I absolutely concur. I am pleased that we are all in the Chamber today to have this debate, particularly on the Government Benches.

Today, we all condemn cruelty to animals. The Bill will act as a punishment and a deterrent. However, I would sound a note of caution. The Bill, if enacted, should not become a tool through which land management techniques or the use of animals as part of our nation's security are compromised. Further consideration of and guidance on these issues would be required. Put simply, it is not right in an animal-loving country such as our own that a person can get a custodial sentence of up to two years for urinating in public but only six months for dog fighting.

In conclusion, for the animal lovers of Wrexham, of which I am one, for the people who seek parity of sentencing across the UK, for the people whose lives are enhanced and enriched by the guidance and love of animals, and for the people who find it abhorrent to harm any creature in any form, I support the Bill.

1.9 pm

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Sarah Atherton) and to hear her tale of Hound, as it was to hear the tale of Poppy from my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder), who has secured this Bill and is moving it forward. I thank him for bringing in tougher sentencing for animal cruelty.

I know my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset is a champion of animals, and the son of a farmer. I am not the daughter of a farmer, but I certainly inflicted my love of animals on my family. I, too, had two rescue dogs—they were Alsations—that we found in the back garden. They appeared out of nowhere, and much as my father tried to find their home, they were abandoned and they became our dogs. I also convinced my family to adopt an ex-racehorse, and what better horse for a

nine-year-old than an ex-racehorse. It did go well, and it was a wonderful family pet, along with our one-legged duck and every other animal I brought into the home.

There is nothing that brings greater sadness to me than to see an animal abused or a child abused, so I am very supportive of this Bill, and I hope—and I am glad to see—that the Government are as well. I would like to highlight the excellent contributions that my constituents in Beaconsfield have made to this debate. They have written to me many times to ask that I speak in this debate, particularly in relation to the issue of warfare experiments on animals and the cruelty that seems to be inflicted on them as a result, and the issue, as the pandemic progresses, of lockdown pets.

Many people have bought pets out of wanting some comfort at home and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham said, these covid pets are not just for lockdown; they are for life. I hope that we will see a better understanding of the long-term needs of animals, and particularly of dogs and cats, which really bond with their owners, but do need every day love, care and attention.

The animal cruelty issue of warfare experiments was brought to my attention by one of my constituents, and I would like to thank Linda Stockton for telling me about experiments being conducted on living animals. Rats are shot in both eyes, being given injections into their eyeballs, with another injection seven days later. Then they are killed a week later, and there is no mention of painkillers in these experiments. I understand the scientific value of certain things, but I just hope that in the future we can look at this and create a world where, at least in the UK, all animals are treated with the respect and decency they deserve for the love and devotion they give to us. I think it is our responsibility to give that back to them.

I hope this Bill will be extended not just to those who abuse animals, but to those who abandon them. We have an issue in Beaconsfield where, in Traveller encampments and sites, people abandon their horses and dogs, and oftentimes leave them malnourished and mistreated. They are simply left either on the side of the road or in a field, and I thank my constituents for helping to take care of those animals. I would like to see tougher sentencing for those who abandon their animals in a cruel way, as we have seen in my constituency.

I thank the Minister for her support for the Bill, and I welcome any changes that we are going to see for tougher sentencing.

1.13 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, having heard many positive contributions from Conservative Members, many of which I agree with.

Can I make the mandatory pet declaration? Trevor the chicken has turned up in a number of my discussions with the Minister on previous occasions, but I can introduce Brian the female cat—[*Interruption.*] Yes, Brian—Members can see I have no career in sexing animals in the future. Brian the female cat turned up outside our house many years ago. In the same way as many other Members have described, when we see an animal in a desperate situation, our hearts go out to it, and inevitably we did what so many others do. This

poor creature's tail was barely there, its nose was falling off, but with love and care, that cat lived a happy life for many years. I suspect that many people across the House and across the country have similar experiences.

It is a pleasure to speak today for the Opposition and to offer our enthusiastic support for a Bill that we know is supported across the House but also right across the country. Frankly, it is long overdue. The only real question is why it has taken so long. It has been a long road, and many Members on both sides of the House have taken up the baton. It has been three years since the previous Member for Redcar, Anna Turley, tabled the first iteration of the Bill. I am grateful to the current hon. Member for Redcar (Jacob Young), who is not in his place at the moment, for the gracious comments he made about her.

The sense of frustration about the delay is captured rather well by an excellent piece in this week's edition of *The House* magazine, which some may have seen. The League Against Cruel Sports took out a full page, and I will quote Andy Knott, the chief executive, whose account puts it very well. He says:

“When training as a young officer in the Army, our instructors had a wheeze to grind us down and test our resolve.

It usually involved going on a long march with full kit, and at the end, just as you thought you were about to reach the truck and return to barracks, it would speed off into the distance.

You would be left downhearted to trudge, desperately seeking said truck around the next corner. And so it seems with the Animal Welfare (Sentencing Bill), a simple piece of draft legislation that has long enjoyed cross party support, and has the entirety of the animal welfare sector calling for it.

Already on its fourth delay this year alone, it is a truck that nimbly manoeuvres tantalisingly just out of reach to those of us wanting to get on board.”

Hopefully, that truck has finally been reached, but he is right: we, and the animals that have suffered in the meantime, have endured a number of wasted years and false starts.

As we have heard, back in 2017, the Government tried to fit animal welfare sentencing and provisions for the recognition of animal sentience into one draft Bill, until the EFRA Committee strongly recommended that they should be separated out to ensure that the maximum penalty was available to the courts as soon as possible. The Committee was absolutely right to demand urgency, but how wrong it was in thinking that it would work. Here we are, years later, still talking about it—and, worse still, about to lose the vital protection on animal sentience that was at that time linked to it.

Under European law, article 13 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union requires Governments to have “full regard” when formulating and implementing policy to the fact that “animals are sentient beings”. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) for explaining that very well earlier in the debate. Without equivalent UK legislation in place by the end of the year, animals in the UK will lose that protection, and I think probably very few people in the House want to see that happen.

The Government promised three years ago, after much pressure from the public and animal welfare organisations, to include animal sentience legislation in UK law post Brexit, but here we are with the end of the transition period almost upon us, and that legislation still has not been introduced and is nowhere in sight. We

[Daniel Zeichner]

know from a wealth of scientific evidence that animals can think, feel, experience pain and suffer, and we know that we must adopt that recognition in UK law to move forward on animal welfare rather than going backwards. I was struck by the contribution from the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell), who is not in her place. She has had a rough week, but her account of the role that that cat played in her child's life absolutely made the point about sentience.

We have since seen two Government Bills on sentencing fall due to the volatility of the parliamentary timetable in the lead-up to our withdrawal from the EU. I commend the hon. Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) for bringing the measures forward again as a private Member's Bill, but frankly, even this Bill is late, because today is the fifth date set so far this year for its Second Reading. It is very good that we have finally got to this point because, as we all keep saying, cruelty to animals is abhorrent and despicable, and it has no place in our society.

I would like to go back a bit, to the landmark Animal Welfare Act 2006, because that is the starting point for our discussion. As a Labour Member, I am extremely proud that it was a Labour Government who brought that Act into law. It was introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) long before I had the privilege of coming to this House, but I was involved in discussions with him and others at that time. I particularly remember pressing him on the issue of tethered horses, because at the time I was a rural district councillor and that was a pressing issue in my area. I was also struck by the comments of the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) earlier. He is not in the Chamber at the moment, but he pointed out to us that he had introduced legislation on tethered horses as much as 30 years ago, yet still we face a problem with enforcement.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the key issue of the badger cull, and it is disappointing that we have not had an opportunity to discuss what is going on in our countryside at the moment. Earlier in the year, after a long wait following the Godfray review, many welcomed the Government's move towards a vaccination policy and away from a culling policy. Sadly, we have discovered that in the interim they have embarked on the biggest culling exercise ever known. It led me to reflect that on national badger day they were actually killing more badgers than ever before. Now, bovine TB is an extremely serious disease, and we all want to see it tackled, but we want it tackled in the right way. We want it to work. I do think—where have we heard this before?—that the Government should be following the science and the advice.

The Animal Welfare Act has been providing penalties for 14 years for those who commit cruelty against animals under human control, tackling cases related to dog fighting, the abuse of pet animals and cruelty to farm animals. But with the passage of time it is clear that updates are now needed and it is right that we should increase the maximum penalty for cruelty offences.

I was about to embark on recounting some of the awful cases that we all know about, but a number of them have already been referenced in the debate and actually just seeing them on paper and reading them is

pretty upsetting, so I see no need to repeat some of them. However, it is important to point out that, while around 80% of the 1,000 people prosecuted for animal cruelty each year are convicted, only 10% get custodial sentences—a point that has already been made—and, although the maximum sentence is six months, as we have heard, many get much less than that, with the average sentence being about three and a half months. We had a discussion earlier on the Sentencing Council, and it has been pointed out that defendants who plead guilty at the first reasonable opportunity can have their sentences cut by a third, which means that the punishment gets smaller and smaller. The key to this, for us certainly, is that it is not a deterrent if the punishment looks so short.

Magistrates often clearly find themselves in a difficult position when faced with these kinds of cases. One told one of the offenders that he was extremely dangerous and that she would have liked to put him in prison for as long as she could. Another said:

“Due to your guilty plea you are entitled to a reduction of one third, to 18 weeks. ... However, due to the circumstances we would, if we were permitted to do so, have imposed a far greater custodial sentence.”

So it is clear that there is a call coming from the people who are trying these cases.

There is clear support for longer sentences and I suspect Members' inboxes will have been overflowing in the run-up to today's event. I have had over 100 emails from constituents in Cambridge, and I am told that more than 68,000 people in total from every constituency in Parliament have emailed their MP asking for their support for this measure. The previous public consultation saw more than 70% of people supporting proposals for tougher penalties, so it is clear that people want it to happen.

The reality is that, while we do have some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world, our maximum penalties in England and Wales are currently among the lowest. A substantial number of EU countries have maximum sentences between two and three years, including France, Germany and Italy, while Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and Latvia, all have maximum sentences of five years. It has also been pointed out that the six-month sentences are out of kilter with the rest of the UK. In Northern Ireland it is five years and Scotland is following suit in the same way this year.

So Labour strongly supports the Bill, as we have done all its previous iterations, but we are disappointed that it has been relegated to the status of a private Member's Bill and has not been allocated proper Government time or reintroduced as a Government Bill. The shadow Environment Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), has written to the Secretary of State numerous times this year calling for the Bill to be expedited by the Government, as have a coalition of 11 animal welfare organisations that support the Bill. I am afraid that instead we have seen further postponements and delays; it is quite extraordinary that it is taking so long. That is despite the growing importance of this legislation over the past few months, given that we know that animal welfare support services are already very concerned that the covid-19 pandemic and lockdown are leading to a rise in the number of incidents of animal cruelty and neglect.

We have heard some of these points already, but let me say that the RSPCA reported in May that since the lockdown began, rescuers have dealt with a worrying 27,507 incidents of animal cruelty and neglect. A sector-wide survey led by the Association of Dogs and Cats Homes and the National Equine Welfare Council has further found that 14% of equine rescue organisations are already reporting more calls about cruelty to animals. Sadly—this point was well made by other Members—there is a correlation between animal cruelty and domestic violence. I am told that women in domestic violence shelters are 11 times more likely to report that a partner has hurt or killed a pet. This legislation is urgent.

Why have we struggled with these delays? The Government may well cite the current pandemic and the run-up to Brexit, but, frankly, those issues are just as real and live north of the border, and the Scottish Parliament has managed to pass the equivalent legislation this year, raising maximum sentences to five years. Put all together, I am afraid that—despite the protestations there will be from the Conservative Benches—it really seems to many of us that animal welfare is not high enough up the priority list for this Government. We are just weeks away from the end of the Brexit transition period and, as I have said, we still have no measures to ensure that animal sentience is recognised in UK law. Perhaps the Minister will explain how that is going to be addressed.

I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) for her speech. As she so powerfully pointed out, the Government have consistently failed to put into law their manifesto promise not to undermine standards relating to animal welfare in future trade deals. Of course, they will once again have the opportunity to do so in the coming weeks.

Chris Loder: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is wholly misleading for the Opposition to continue to put forward these mistruths? The standards in law today prohibit—they do not allow—chlorinated chicken or hormone-injected beef to come into this country. It is most regrettable that the Labour party continues to mislead the nation on that point.

Daniel Zeichner: I am very grateful to the hon. Member for giving me the opportunity to explain why it is actually Government Members who have been misled. At the moment, the protections are absolutely cast-iron, of course, but the day following the end of the transition period, all those cast-iron guarantees slip away. They can be changed and undermined by secondary legislation—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I will allow the hon. Gentleman to respond to the intervention but let us not go too wide of the Bill, please; this has nothing to do with the Bill.

Daniel Zeichner: I am very grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I do think that it is important to address these points when they are made.

We share the deep concerns of the animal welfare organisations that, once again, the Bill may run out of time. A letter sent to the Secretary of State this July, signed by a coalition of 11 organisations—including the RSPCA, Blue Cross and Dogs Trust—has been candid about this, saying that confidence in the Government's commitment

to deliver the Bill is starting to diminish, and what has been promised on so many occasions over the last three years has not materialised. What is needed is a clear timeframe for the passage of the Bill, including when the next stage will be scheduled, because we do not know how long this Session of Parliament will run. Would it not be extraordinary if the Government once again allowed this simple piece of legislation to fall through a lack of Fridays? What a feeble excuse that would be. Can the Minister provide a concrete guarantee that this Bill will now finally get the time it needs, and ensure that those tougher measures will be available to the courts in 2021?

We are supporting the Bill today, but will seek to improve it in Committee. We have concerns, which are shared by a number of stakeholders, about the scope of the Bill. The proposals apply only to the Animal Welfare Act 2006, and therefore do not apply to wild animals in the way in which they apply to domestic animals. Our concern is that this will create a two-tier system, even if that is by oversight rather than intention. In discussions around previous iterations of the Bill, we have had good debates about this issue. It is not always a simple or easy distinction, but it does raise possible cases. For example, torturing a pet cat and torturing a feral cat could lead to different penalties. They are both cats, they have both been tortured and they both suffer, so why the distinction?

There are also questions about the different penalties for organised crime. Cases of organised cruelty, such as gangs perpetrating dog fighting, would, we think, come under the Bill, but what about the equally serious and equally organised crime involved in hare coursing? We believe that the same sentences should be available to judges for similar or identical crimes, regardless of whether the animal is domesticated or wild.

Guilty offenders might well seek to persuade a court that a lesser sentence should be imposed if the victim can be classed as a wild animal, but animals have the same welfare needs and any attack on them has the same impact on their welfare, regardless of whether they are a domestic pet, a police dog or a wild animal. They all feel pain, they all suffer, and the people who harm them should feel the full force of the law.

I know that stakeholders have raised a number of additional issues, so I encourage the Minister to consider these carefully. First, will it be necessary to review and revise sentencing guidelines, once the Bill is passed, to enable the courts to establish clearly which offences would merit the toughest available penalties, which may not require a custodial sentence? Secondly, we will need to ensure that bans on keeping pets are properly monitored, recorded and enforced. Thirdly, will she consider the situation of dogs seized during proceedings, who will spend protracted time in kennels while cases go through the courts? Fourthly, will she consider whether filming animal cruelty offences for entertainment should be considered an aggravating factor in crimes, as raised earlier by the hon. Member for Redcar.

It has taken a lot to get the Bill to this stage. I thank the many Members across the house who have campaigned on the issue for many years, including, of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), and the previous Member for Redcar, Anna Turley. I also pay tribute to the animal welfare organisations that

[*Daniel Zeichner*]

work so tirelessly on the ground to mend the animals that come to them abused and neglected, that have campaigned so successfully to see the Bill come to fruition, and that have continued to inform our debate today. In particular, I thank the RSPCA, Blue Cross, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, Cats Protection and Dogs Trust for all their hard work.

I will conclude where I began, with Andy Knott of the League Against Cruel Sports. It has indeed been a long trek and, as he suggests, the truck always seems to be parked around the next corner. He says:

“Hop on and get this Bill back to barracks where tea and medals really do await!”

It is time to get on with it and get the legislation on the statute book. The Opposition will do all we can to make that happen and end the scourge of animal cruelty in our country.

1.32 pm

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak in this debate. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder). I share multiple things with him, but two are particularly relevant to this debate: first, I have a Welsh springer spaniel and he has an English springer spaniel—I will not start my contribution with the question of which is better, although clearly I have a view—and secondly, as we have a pet, the Bill is very important to my family. I know that all my constituents in Montgomeryshire want the Bill passed at pace. I will therefore not speak for long, because I know that other Members wish to speak and there are other Bills to consider.

This issue has been going for a long time, so I commend the Bill. During that time, organisations such as the RSPCA, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and Cats Protection have kept the issue alive and very much at the forefront of public policy, so I pay particular tribute to them. Earlier this week we were jousting with the Minister over the matter of pet theft. Although that is not covered in the Bill, I very much hope that once this is available to the courts it could help tackle the menace of animal fighting, which is a driver of pet theft. I cannot think of a sentence long enough for those who organise animal fighting and steal family pets from their homes.

I promised not to speak for long, so I will wrap up my remarks by commending the Bill at pace, commending my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset and wishing the Minister a great response and a timescale for getting on with this important Bill.

1.34 pm

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): Not only is it a great pleasure to speak in the debate and give my full support for the Bill to my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder), but the Bill has special relevance for me for two very sound reasons. First, my family extends to two furry friends: a cocker spaniel and a cockapoo. As any dog owner will know, they really are a part of the family. Secondly, as I said a little earlier, I think I am the only Member speaking today who may actually have to use the Bill if it becomes law.

As a magistrate sitting on the Merseyside bench, I have on numerous occasions had the misfortune to hear cases where the sentencing powers that currently exist are simply not sufficient.

When I first started to sit as a magistrate, I remember being warned by a very experienced presiding justice that dealing with cases involving animals were some of the most difficult hearings I was likely to experience. That is absolutely the case—she was right. My first time listening to a case at Birkenhead magistrates court under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, was a case of causing unnecessary suffering to a cross-breed dog called Jimmy. I recall the details even though it is four and a half years ago. When magistrates review their court lists and receive a briefing from the legal adviser on the cases they will be dealing during the course of the day, they tend to give them a feel for the kind of issues they will come across. I recall that the court clerk’s words were, “If you could send this one to the Crown court, you would do it straight away.” However, magistrates do not have the option to do that, because of how the law is currently shaped.

If I may, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will briefly tell you that Jimmy was a cross-breed dog who had been mistreated for some time. Eventually, his owner had strung him up in the garden, taken a hammer and an air rifle to him, and then left him to experience what must have been a truly horrific and painful death. When we got into court, we were presented with photographs and mobile phone footage recovered by the RSPCA, which was bringing the prosecution. It was one of the most harrowing, deliberate and gratuitous attempts to cause suffering to an animal that I could ever imagine. The deliberate and prolonged nature of it, alongside what had obviously been neglect as a result of malnutrition for some time, was truly harrowing for everyone in the court. Jimmy the dog died a painful, slow and deliberate death as a result of a barbaric and irrational act by a 23-year-old man.

Magistrates consider harm and culpability when sentencing. We use guidelines to try to ensure consistency across the country. Under the Animal Welfare Act, the starting point for offences that show culpability to be high and harm at the greatest level is 18 weeks. It rises to 26 weeks custody in the most serious cases. There was no doubt that this was a most serious case. Magistrates, however, only have a maximum sentencing power of 26 weeks in a single case, or an unlimited fine. Where guidelines allow for sentencing to exceed that level, we would want to send them to a Crown court for a judge to consider. As the law currently stands, however, we cannot do that.

On this occasion, the individual on trial pleaded guilty at the first opportunity and was being convicted for a first offence. The sentence he received after mitigation was nowhere near the level that any one of us may have wanted to award, even within the current guidelines. I am very aware of the court of public opinion. Having seen the comments on a newspaper’s online message board, once the case had been reported and the photographs printed, there was no doubt from the views expressed by the public that the punishment did not fit the crime.

The Bill is relatively simple and that is how it needs to stay to get the measures implemented quickly. The changes are long promised, long needed and long overdue.

I again thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset for his passion and commitment in driving these issues forward.

1.39 pm

Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): It is a pleasure to rise to speak in this debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on bringing this Bill to the House. I also pay tribute to current and previous hon. and right hon. Members for bringing the Bill this far and I urge Ministers to continue to take it forward.

Thinking back to February—it seems like such a long time ago now—I was lucky enough to join one of my RSPCA officers on her round in Truro and Falmouth and beyond to see what kind of visits they do on a daily basis. Claire Ryder was the officer and she took me to various houses. After listening to today's debate, I am very grateful that all we had to do was to visit a man following a report on his dog. Thankfully, that dog was very well fed and very well cared for. Perhaps his neighbour had made a malicious call—who knows? Thankfully, though, on that day, no harm had been done.

We do hear of some harrowing cases in Cornwall. I will not go into any details because I have been very disturbed by some of what we have heard today. Last year, the Cornish courts heard about dogs being starved, cattle, horses and ponies being kept in mud up to their bellies, and a bull that had been so mistreated that it ended up impregnating its own mother, so uncared for were the cattle. It would be remiss of me not to mention the ponies on Bodmin moor on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann). People often see the moors as dumping grounds for ponies. The fantastic charity, Redwings, is looking out for these ponies now and making sure that they get good veterinary care. The point is that that should not have to happen.

I will join the debate about springer spaniels. We have an English springer spaniel, but, because he is black and white, which is the same colour as St Piran's flag, we like to call him a Cornish springer spaniel, and what else would you call a springer spaniel if you have a husband who is a fisherman but Kipper?

Kipper is nine, so we had Kipper before we had my daughter. He has gone through the tutu-wearing stage of his life, and all he did was give me hand-dog looks as if to say, "When is she going back?" She is not, thankfully, and neither is he. This raised an important point in our house and we had discussions about how this lovely gentle dog of mine has a mouthful of teeth and how he could quite easily break my wrist should he choose to do so. The same applies to some of the harrowing stories that we have heard today, particularly the one about Baby, who was just so awfully treated. He also had a mouthful of teeth with which he could have done some quite nasty damage, but we have bred these dogs to be so loyal and so caring of us that, when they are turned on in that way, they choose not to fight back. We must do better in looking after them.

I am also concerned about the lockdown puppies that we are seeing now. A year ago, a Labrador would probably have cost about £750 and now we are probably looking in excess of £2,000 from the same breeder. I do not have a problem with breeders charging what the

market is demanding, but, obviously, this is encouraging illegal trade in backroom breeding, puppy smuggling and the importing of puppies. Dogs Trust said it is concerned that there will be up to 40,000 dogs abandoned in the coming months as a result of people buying puppies during the covid pandemic. Although there are many responsible sellers out there, sadly there are plenty who are looking to tug on the heartstrings and exploit the situation for their own profit. With puppies in such high demand and selling for such high prices, it is creating a lucrative market for cruel puppy smugglers. Sadly, we have rescued many dogs that have been imported into the country destined to be sold during lockdown.

At some point in the future, I would like to see something else added to the microchip of a dog. I would like it made compulsory for a dog to be microchipped on its very first visit to the vet as a puppy. On that information, I would also like to see where it was bred and who it was bred by, so should we see, down the line, unscrupulous owners abandoning and mistreating dogs, we know where that dog started its life and we can ask the breeder what went wrong. Perhaps we can learn from good breeders who are scrupulous about finding very good homes for their dogs, regardless of what they are charging.

In conclusion, I say well done to my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset for bringing this Bill to the House. I would also like to associate myself with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams) who said that no sentence would be long enough, and I urge anyone in the judiciary to use these new powers to the best of their ability.

1.44 pm

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): I heartily congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on bringing the Bill to the House. It is an oft-repeated trope that the British are a nation of animal lovers and that is largely true. A 2019 report by the Charities Aid Foundation contained the results of a survey that found that of those who had donated to charity in the previous week, more than a quarter had donated to animal welfare charities, which was on a par with charities for young people and children and more than had donated to medical research or hospice charities.

As we have heard, however, the trope is sadly not universally true. Although examples of animal cruelty are rare, they are horrific. I particularly remember a case from late last year in Nottingham. Benny, a nine-week-old kitten, was found dumped in Radford city centre covered in mud and faeces. The kitten was taken for emergency treatment at Arnold and Carlton vets where the vet found severe internal damage. It is suspected that Benny had been sexually abused. Despite the amount of bad news that we see, such cases still have the power to shock and make one stop what one is doing. It is entirely right, therefore, that those who perpetrate such awful acts are suitably punished.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 makes it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to domesticated animals or any animals under the control of man. This Bill builds on that Act. As the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee noted in its 2016 report on animal welfare,

"a person could go to prison for three years if their dog injured a guide dog but only six months for beating their dog to death".

[Tom Randall]

In line with the recommendations of that report, the Bill would increase the sentence from six months to five years, which would take England from having some of the lowest penalties in Europe for animal welfare offences to being in line with the maximum penalties available in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Ireland.

It is unfortunate that the Bill has had some false starts, but I am confident—I hope—that it will make it to the statute book this time. I am pleased that it has cross-party support. A number of my constituents have written to ask me to support it, and I am very happy to do.

1.46 pm

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) for bringing forward the Bill. I hope that Poppy the dog is doing well and has a long, happy life. I am confident that, as we have heard many times, we are a nation of animal lovers. I, for one, celebrated Finn's law part 1 coming to fruition and making it harder for criminals who harm service dogs to claim it was in self-defence. I am proud to play my part in trying to get the second part of Finn's law through this House. A number of my constituents have spoken to me, written to me, telephoned and emailed to ask me support the Bill and I am proud to stand here and do so.

Animal abuse is a cowardly act and a horrific evil. While researching the topic, I found any number of stories on Google. There is the story of Chunky, the family pet who was taken and beaten so badly by a gang that he had a broken neck and leg. He was drugged and set on fire before being dumped. Another example is Peggy, a dog who experts believe was used as bait and was described as being at death's door. There is also the puppy Millie, who was beaten outside a bus stop in front of traffic.

There are many more stories, but one that stood out was that of Archie, a dog who was so badly beaten, almost literally to a pulp, that only the whites of his eyes and his fast breathing could be seen. He suffered severe swelling on the left of his face, his neck, his left eye, the left side of his jaw and the base of his skull. An X-ray showed that Archie had a fractured spine and blood was also found in his urine. Hon. Members will agree that if someone had done that to a human being, they would meet the full force of law. The man who had beaten Archie and put him in that life-threatening state, who was his former owner, his carer and the man responsible for his wellbeing, was sentenced to just 18 weeks' imprisonment—18 weeks for all that—and ordered to pay £500 in costs.

I am delighted to support the Bill to make sure that people who commit such callous acts meet the full force of law and are in prison for as long as possible under the legislation. I also highlight the mental health impact on animals after they suffer abuse. Much like humans, they experience a fight or flight response. Anything that we can do to help to protect the mental health of animals is certainly welcome. I am conscious that there are many other speakers who will have much better speeches to give than me, so I will just say that I support the Bill and thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset.

1.49 pm

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) on introducing this important Bill. As a fourth-generation farmer's son and a lifelong advocate for animal welfare, I do not believe that the Bill could have found itself a better champion, and neither could Poppy.

I strongly agree with colleagues who have articulated the view that more stringent sentencing will act as a greater deterrent against animal cruelty. The maximum five-year sentence will become one of the toughest punishments in the world, bringing us in line with countries such as Canada, New Zealand, Ireland and India, and will further enhance the United Kingdom's reputation as a world leader in animal welfare—a badge that we should wear with pride. My hon. Friends the Members for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) and for Wolverhampton North East (Jane Stevenson) have articulated the link between animal abuse and domestic abuse and violence. It is important to bear it in mind that in supporting this Bill we could also be stopping that behaviour in the future.

We are a nation that is proud of being known for our affection for animals. I assure my hon. Friends that the Bill has my full support and, judging from my inbox, that of my constituents in Heywood and Middleton. They are clear that there is no place in our society for cruelty to animals, and those who choose to inflict terror on animals should be met with the full force of the law. It was a great shock to me—this has been referred to by many other hon. Members, but I believe it worth repeating—that in 2019 the RSPCA investigated more than 130,000 complaints of cruelty to animals and secured only 1,678 convictions.

This Bill sends a clear message that the inhumane treatment of animals has no place in a civilised society. It builds on the excellent measures introduced in the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019, which made it an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to service animals, and addresses the concerns raised by the Finn's law campaign. My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams) pointed out that this is an urgent matter for his constituents; it is an urgent matter for mine in Heywood and Middleton, as evidenced by the amount of biro on what was a very long speech.

One of the earliest proponents of animal rights, Jeremy Bentham, said that

“the question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?”

Ending the cruel and inhumane suffering of animals must surely be one of the yardsticks by which we judge the civility of our nation. I believe that the Bill goes some considerable way to achieving that goal.

1.51 pm

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): I rise to support the Bill in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder). I am aware that time is of the essence so, for the sake of getting it through, I will try to be brief.

As many Members have rightly said, we are a nation of animal lovers, and rightly so. Animals deliver not only comfort but companionship to many across these

isles, whether they be children, the elderly or those who would otherwise be lonely. We owe a lot to the animals of this country. I recently arrived home after a late Thursday session to find that my home had a new addition in the form of a nine-month-old kitten called Maya. In the couple of weeks that we have had her, she has already become a very close friend to my two-year-old daughter Lavinia, although trying to teach Lavinia not to shout at her and how to play properly while she is shouting “dissy dat” rather than “pussy cat” is a very heart-warming scene to come home to every week.

The thought of cruelty to our new addition fills me with concern and dread, not only of the impact that it would have on Maya but of the psychological effect that it would have on my daughter. We need to remember that it is not only the animals that suffer; as any animal lover, in this Chamber and outside, will know, we suffer when we see animals suffer, because we have empathy and we take that seriously.

Without changing the law, as the Bill would do, people are getting away with cruelty and in some cases even the murder of animals. That needs to stop. Only 10% of reported cases result in prosecution and, even then, few people end up imprisoned. That is not right, and it needs to stop. Away from this place, there is a huge amount of support for protecting animals from cruelty, with all key stakeholders, such as Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and the RSPCA being incredibly supportive. It is clear that the Bill is not only wanted but needed to protect our animals. There needs to be one clear message from this place: “If you are going to be cruel to animals, we will not tolerate it, society will not tolerate it, and you will face the full and strengthened weight of the law.”

1.54 pm

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): When I saw that my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) had introduced this Bill, I was thrilled to be able to support it. As someone who grew up in Dorset and walked our harlequin Great Dane and pointer across Maiden Castle in his constituency, it is something close to my heart.

Those lucky enough to come to my constituency of Bosworth will see that we are animal lovers. Everywhere they look, they will see people walking their dogs, tending to their horses and looking after their cats. It was therefore no surprise to me that when the pet theft petition was debated at the start of the week, Bosworth was 10th on the list, with 345 signatures.

I personally have recently had two new additions to my house, both in the form of whippets. The first one, Roux, came just before lockdown and was named after Michel Roux in the same week that he unfortunately passed away. We now have a new addition during lockdown called Ada, after Ada Lovelace, who has a special place in my constituency’s heart given her scientific background.

The thing that most struck me picks up on a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Cherilyn Mackrory) made. In buying two whippets in the space of six months, the price was more than 200% different, and that is something we really need to look at, because whippets are not the most popular breeds out there. Looking into the research before the debate, I have seen 400%, 500% or even 600% increases in the price of puppies.

I would be interested to know whether causing unnecessary suffering will extend under clause 1 to the breeding side and dealing with some of the puppy farming. If not, I would be grateful if the Government would take that away and look at how we can cut down on puppy farming, because in my experience of speaking to breeders, many reputable breeders were choosing not to breed at this time to make sure that they were not dealing in profiteering, and that is really important.

In my role in the medical profession, I have seen the positives of dogs going into care homes to brighten people’s days, and that is what they do for people up and down the country. The thought of anyone harming them is absolutely despicable, so I am so happy to stand here and support the Bill to make sure that those who commit animal cruelty feel the full force of law. I have a saying for whippet lovers, “A house is never lonely where a loving whippet waits”, and I cannot wait to get back to my two tonight.

1.56 pm

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder), who I know has worked incredibly hard in getting this Bill off the ground and getting it through to this stage. I thank him myself and on behalf of my constituents from across Keighley and Ilkley, who have contacted me on this specific issue.

We all love our pets. Whether it is cats, dogs, guinea pigs or, as our right hon. Friend the Education Secretary might say, a tarantula, we all seem to have that bond. I just want to outline a very tragic story that I picked up in my constituency. It was to do with an American bulldog, Smiler, who was unfortunately found by the RSPCA in a bath with her head bloodied. She had physically been abused and was found in a state where the owner had tried to clean her with bleach. That story illustrates the necessity of this Bill and how important it is that we strengthen the sentencing measures to give a clear demonstration that any animal cruelty will not be tolerated at all. Strengthening the provisions up to five years will go a long way to doing that.

I want to conclude, because I am conscious of time. On the Conservative Benches, we are animal lovers, and we are on the side of animal welfare through this Bill being pushed through the House. I am very pleased to see that it has been supported by the Government, and we have also seen the Ivory Bill, CCTV in slaughterhouses and an aspiration and a desire to stop live exports, which I am wholly behind. I am pleased that the Conservative Government will be driving this Bill through.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I will call the Minister next and then Chris Loder, and then the question will be put. Then we will just suspend for a brief moment for the sanitisation of both Dispatch Boxes before we move on to Sir Christopher Chope’s Bill.

1.58 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): It is great, after a rather fractious week in the Chamber, that peace and love have broken out on Friday. I think everybody here would like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder) for introducing this immensely important Bill and for the commitment he has shown to bringing in more stringent sentences

[*Victoria Prentis*]

for animal cruelty. It is right that we should also thank the former Member for Redcar, who was instrumental in the Bill's initial stages and worked hard on it, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald), who helped with the production and passage through the House of Finn's law. I, too, was privileged to meet Finn. I spoke several times in favour of Finn's law from the Back Benches, and he is a mascot for why this Bill is necessary.

This Bill has the full support of the Government, and we will do all we can to support its swift passage without amendment through the Commons and the Lords as soon as possible. During the debate, we have heard some really horrible examples of animal cruelty, and we have also heard that judges have said in many cases that they would have given longer sentences had that been possible under the law. The Bill gives the courts freedom to do just that, and it introduces one of the highest punishments for animal cruelty in the world.

I would not be doing my job if I did not mention the furry friends we have heard about today, some of whom are loved and happy, some of whom have been rescued and some of whom, sadly, were abused and died. I should mention Lola of Castle Point, the twice-rescued dog belonging to the Government Whip on Fridays; I know that her owner would have loved to mention her. We should talk about Poppy in particular. I fear that this may become Poppy's law, as well as Finn's law part two; I can see Poppy's name all over this legislation.

We have heard about Teddy from Bristol East; Wilberforce from Tiverton and Honiton; Mimi, Olly, Piper and, I am particularly proud to say, the ferrets from Workington; Snoop, who was so cruelly abused in Stoke-on-Trent; Willow, Lola and the rest of the menagerie from Carshalton and Wallington; Harold, Trevor and Lucy from Ipswich; a tortoiseshell kitten from Eastbourne who is very important; Midge the donkey, who my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (David Johnston) talked about passionately; Spider and Willow from Dudley South, and Bella, who hangs around Committee Corridor; Hound, who is still loved and remembered by my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Sarah Atherton); Brian the female cat from Cambridge; a springer spaniel from Montgomeryshire, and a cocker spaniel and Cockapoo from Warrington South—I am not getting involved in the debate on which is better; Kipper from Truro and Falmouth, who obviously belongs to a Cornish fishwife; Benny the kitten from Nottingham, who was horribly abused; Maya from Bury South; Smiler from Keighley; and Roux and Ada, who, appropriately enough, belong to my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans).

We really are a nation of animal lovers. Many of us—44%—keep a pet. This subject clearly touches hearts and minds not only in this House but across all our constituencies. I will whizz through some of the points made in the debate. If I do not answer a Member's specific question, it is not because I do not want to; it is just in the interests of time, and Members are welcome to contact me later, if necessary.

On live animal exports, we have a manifesto commitment to end long journeys to slaughter and fattening, I say to the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy). I am pleased to say that we will launch a public consultation later this year. That is a real gain, and I am thrilled by that. On pre-stunned slaughter, the Government encourage

the highest standards and would certainly prefer animals to be stunned prior to slaughter, but we accept the right of Jewish and Muslim communities to eat meat killed in accordance with their beliefs. We will work further on that, and I look forward to taking that forward with Members across the House. It is a difficult and sensitive area.

The EFRA Committee suggested that we should split sentencing from sentience, which is why that has come about. Of course animals are sentient—I cannot say that frequently enough—and that certainly will not change at the end of December. They will continue to be sentient, and in due course, we will find a way of putting that into law. I hesitate to say that DEFRA is “hogging” the Order Paper at the moment, but last week saw consideration of both the Agriculture and Fisheries Bills—it could be described as the “loaves and fishes week” or the “surf and turf week”. Our Department has had a great deal of legislative time recently, and I, of course, think that Parliament should be legislating on these issues. I smiled when the hon. Member for Bristol East asked about the animal welfare Bill to come, because I very much hope to have good news for her on that shortly.

A number of Members talked about how abusers of animals go on to hurt humans. That is undoubtedly true, and it is something I know from my previous life as well. A number of hon. Members talked about whether this piece of legislation would increase the spend necessary in prisons. We feel, having assessed this, that it would probably not increase vastly the number of people who go to prison for animal cruelty offences, but it will certainly increase the length of time that they could spend there. The hope is, of course, that longer sentences will deter other criminals—we feel that very strongly.

I think we have covered pet theft thoroughly this week—my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt) had an excellent debate—and I am pleased to say that I have spoken to the Lord Chancellor since then, and we have a bit of a plan, as my hon. Friend outlined. On microchipping for cats, we have done a call for evidence. We will shortly publish the responses and we will then consult on the issue, which I have previously campaigned on. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) asked whether feral dogs and cats would be covered by this legislation. Yes, normally, domesticated animals such as dogs and cats are covered, whether or not they are currently under control, so that is useful.

I am very proud that this Government are taking steps further to elevate our reputation for animal welfare in this country. In 2018, we modernised the regulation of dog breeding, pet sales, animal boarding, horse riding and performing animals legislation. On 26 February this year, we published a new welfare code for pigs and, as a former pig keeper, I was very proud of that. In April, we introduced a ban on the commercial third-party sales of puppies and kittens in England, and the Government launched a national communications campaign to help people to make more informed choices when sourcing a new pet. The Government have made CCTV mandatory in slaughterhouses, a requirement that goes well beyond any EU rule.

We are planning further improvements to animal welfare in a number of other areas. We have begun steps to ban primates as pets, and we will certainly make good on our manifesto commitments to introduce compulsory microchipping for cats and on excessively long journeys

for slaughter and fattening. Our farming policy, about which we have spoken at length in this Chamber, also includes supporting a range of farm animal welfare enhancements, and I stress that that is a way of reaching a large number of animals and should really help with animal welfare.

I appreciate that many Members wanted to get on with this Bill much earlier. I say gently that it has experienced delays during its time in Parliament but none of that is due to a change in motivation on behalf of the Government or our priorities. It was due for Second Reading this time last year, but Parliament was prorogued. The Bill was then scheduled for Second Reading in the summer, but it was then a victim of the coronavirus, and today has been one of the very first opportunities available to us.

As with any primary legislation, I cannot absolutely promise that it will get the necessary legislative slot in the next few weeks, but I give every commitment I have to do what is in the Government's power to ensure that it gets before a Committee as soon as we possibly can. The EFRA Committee Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), said that I could talk to Government lawyers—well, I know a few of those and I will certainly do my best to ensure that this goes through.

I am very glad, and so are the animals that, I fear, are waiting for me on the sofa at home—though I do hope that Gerald the pet lamb is not actually on the sofa—that my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset found Poppy and that she inspired his choice of Bill.

2.9 pm

Chris Loder: I just want to say to the House that this is an incredibly moving moment and a moving day for me. It has been very clear from the contributions from Members on both sides of the House how important animals are to our lives, our families and, of course, to our constituents. Today is a really important milestone that means we can move forward, finally, with sorting out this legislation. I particularly thank the Minister for her kind support, and my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), who has been very supportive in making arrangements for today. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson), who is a staunch supporter of his constituents and has championed many aspects of this issue. Particularly this week, the fact that he is making sure that the voice of his constituents is heard in this place on this important matter is much appreciated.

We now go forward, I hope, to Committee stage and Report. I hope to be back in the House again for Third Reading in the not too distant future. All that remains for me to say at this point is to once again thank everybody here for their contributions. I am delighted that there are so many Government Members here that some of our colleagues are having to sit on the Opposition Benches.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).

2.11 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We now suspend very briefly for the sanitisation of the Dispatch Boxes. Will those leaving please do so socially distanced?

Sitting suspended.

Mobile Homes Act 1983 (Amendment) Bill

Second Reading.

2.13 pm

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is a pleasure to introduce this Bill. It is a two-clause Bill, but the second clause covers only the Bill's extent, commencement and short title, so it essentially has only two provisions. It arises directly from my long-standing interest in the welfare of park home residents. I have been privileged to be the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on park homes for more years than I can recall.

Mobile and park homes provide residential accommodation for about 85,000 households on some 2,000 sites in England. Most of those residents are of pensionable age. They normally own their own home, and they pay rent to the site owner for the land on which the home is stationed. Let me put it on the record that they are not bungalows. Some rogue firms out there are marketing new park homes as bungalows. I have written to the Advertising Standards Authority on the subject but have yet to receive a satisfactory response.

The Bill will make two changes to the Mobile Homes Act 1983 that will help all residents. The changes were set out by the Government in their response to their own call for evidence in their 2017 review of park homes legislation. On page 6 of the response, which was published on 2018, it says at paragraph 12:

“Some site owners pass on their repair, maintenance and other ad hoc costs to residents by requiring them to pay variable service charges in addition to the pitch fee.”

The Government response goes on to say, in a subsequent paragraph, that the

“Government wants to ensure that residents only pay for services that they are required to pay for through the pitch fee and will introduce legislation in due course to amend and clarify the definition of a pitch fee and prevent the use of variable service charges in written agreements, when parliamentary time allows.”

Well, parliamentary time does allow; it needs the will of Government. I hope we will hear from the Minister that the Government do have the will to implement what they said they wanted to do.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman referred to the charges that are made; does he agree that quite often those charges are made but the work is not actually carried out? Many owners are just interested in cramming as many mobile homes on to sites as possible.

Sir Christopher Chope: The tenor of the hon. Gentleman's intervention is that there are a heck of a lot of rogues out there and they are up to no good, and he is absolutely right. There are, however, quite a lot of good park home owners, and it is important that we try to support them and to prevent the rogues from taking over the whole industry. That is why it is so important that the Government take seriously the changes—albeit quite modest—in the Bill to try to improve the lot of residents on park homes sites.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that we want to help the good park owners. Changing the index of calculations from the retail prices index to the consumer prices index will obviously reduce the income for improvements. I am sure we will consider the matter in Committee, but will he assure the House that he will allow good park home owners the latitude and finances necessary to make necessary improvements to the site?

Sir Christopher Chope: I do not think the good park home owners have any problem about trying to make ends meet. It would be much more difficult for them were we to, for example, change the 10% commission that is payable on the sale of any park home. My right hon. Friend refers to the matter going into Committee; let us hope that in due course that will be possible.

I have made the point about the service charges sometimes including repairs and maintenance that should already have been paid for in the pitch fees, and that is dealt with in clause 1(2)(a). The second issue—the change to CPI indexing to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) referred—is dealt with in clause 1(2)(b).

On the pitch fee review, the Government concluded, in their 2018 response, that they had

“considered all the arguments put forward including concerns about affordability for both residents and site owners. We also considered the merits of using CPI or RPI as the pitch fee review inflationary index and have concluded that CPI is the most appropriate inflationary index...The Government will introduce legislation in due course to change the pitch fee review inflationary index from RPI to CPI, when parliamentary time allows.”

That is exactly what the Bill does: it enables the parliamentary time to be found to make that change.

Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this Bill forward. It is a matter of regret that there has not previously been parliamentary time. I sincerely hope that the Minister, with her good civil servants working hard behind the scenes, will find a way to do a write-around or whatever is needed to move forward on this issue. The important thing is that there are really good mobile park owners and there are absolute rogues. Our first interest is the consumer protection of our constituents, so I wish my good friend all the best with the Bill.

Sir Christopher Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. She is a long-term champion of park home residents and I hope that, with her encouragement, the Government will give the Bill their support. They are not going to allow the Bill to go through today, but they have said to me that there will be a write-around because they are supportive of its principles. I hope the Opposition are supportive, too—*[Interruption.]* I am grateful to see that they are nodding. If that is the situation, there is no reason why, if the debate is carried over to another day after this short debate, the Bill may not then get its Second Reading. I am grateful to the House for its indulgence and look forward to having the opportunity to hear briefly from the Opposition spokesman and our Minister.

2.19 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): Labour welcomes the chance to debate this Bill. We would have welcomed sight of it sooner in order really to understand the

implications of the measures it contains and to ensure that relevant stakeholders could have made their views known. We would like a full impact assessment of the proposed changes, to understand why they are needed and to ensure that this is a fair deal for all involved. It is important that people pay fair fees for their pitches each year and that there is no chance they can be taken advantage of.

2.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Kelly Tolhurst): I thank the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) for her comments and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) on securing this debate. I also thank him for his tireless work as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on park homes. He should not have admitted to being the chair for so long, but all Members of the House recognise his work in this area and he has been a consistent and powerful voice on these issues.

As my hon. Friend outlined, the Government are committed to effective reform of the park homes sector. As he has outlined, I have been unable to support the Bill's current drafting, but I have agreed and am keen to work with him, and other members of the all-party group, to explore options regarding how we can bring forward these priorities and deliver on the ambition that we all share, which is to better protect park home residents. I hope that he will commit to working with me in the following weeks to do so. Before addressing the specifics of the Bill, I wish to thank my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs Wheeler) for the role she played and the work she did when she was the Minister responsible for this area.

Sir Christopher Chope: I am grateful to the Minister for her kind offer to work with me to try to make the Bill into workable legislation. Does she mean by that that, if the Bill does not progress to Second Reading today, we can hold discussions and perhaps have a write-around to see whether it could get a Second Reading on the basis that, when it gets to Committee, various things will or will not be done?

Kelly Tolhurst: I am willing to work with my hon. Friend and my officials over the coming weeks, so that we can bring something forward and support something, so that is entirely correct. But as I have said, there are certain parts of the Bill that at this point I am unable to support. However, I hope he will take my assurances from the Dispatch Box as a commitment to do that because when I say things I generally mean them, and I hope that even Opposition Members agree that, if I agree to do something for them, I follow through.

My hon. Friend outlined some of the Bill's specifics, and I want to move on to those, but the park homes sector plays a vital role in housing, especially for older people. As he said, it provides valued homes for around 180,000 people.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I wish to pick up on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs Wheeler) and the Minister's point about the elderly. As a GP looking after them, I can say that my experience of dealing with these parks

is that elderly people often choose the homes as retirement homes and places to downsize. The danger is that they are vulnerable and if there are unscrupulous people in the parks using technical terms to bolster rates and services, that can be a real worry. Has the Department carried out any impact assessments of what that may look like and how prevalent it is? What can we do to make sure people are informed, so that they understand the information they are given and are not bamboozled by clever salesmen?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. It is true that many owners and users of park home sites will be elderly and vulnerable. I have many in my constituency, so I am well aware of some of the challenges for the individuals living there. However, I will caveat that by saying that, although we are talking about malpractice today, a large proportion of park home operators operate their sites in a good way, and have care and respect for the residents. We are talking about a minority today, but I absolutely understand the prevalence. We had a review in 2017 and the Government made a commitment to take forward certain things. That is why I am pleased to stand at the Dispatch Box this afternoon and agree to work with my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con): Of course, transparency is key. Will the Minister agree to work with the industry to make sure that the good operators are able to be celebrated, the Government can support them and we can wash out the rogue traders, so to speak?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention because that is exactly right: we do want transparency and we do want to work with the sector to remove those rogue traders from the environment in which we operate. One reason why the pitch fee part of the Bill needs further work is that there was no consensus on a proposal. We want to work with the sector. One of the most important points is that, as with any changes to regulations, we do not want unintended consequences and we do not want to make it harder for those operating park home sites well and carefully. We must be careful not to brand every owner and operator as being rogue.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): I completely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and commend him and anyone who would want to change RPI to CPI. The Minister is making a good point: we need to be bringing forward our good providers and work with them through consultation. Does she agree, however, that now is perhaps not the right time, as a lot of the sector is on its knees because of the pandemic, so we need to consult them, to make sure there is a sector to go back to post covid and to do everything we can to support them?

Kelly Tolhurst: My hon. Friend raises an important point. He is right to say that we are living in unprecedented times with this coronavirus pandemic and many businesses are struggling. As a Government, we are working hard to support them. We want to carry out those impact assessments. On the pitch fees, that is why I said we need to consult the industry further to come up with a proposal that has consensus. In my second day after being appointed—I have been in post only a couple of weeks—I was lucky enough to take through the draft

Mobile Homes (Requirement for Manager of Site to be Fit and Proper Person) (England) Regulations 2020. In that Committee, I outlined that the Government had already committed to delivering and working to bring forward these elements in primary legislation when time allowed. That is why I have been really clear from the Dispatch Box today that I am willing and absolutely looking forward to working with my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and my officials to take opportunities where we can to protect individuals, while keeping it in mind that we must be sensitive to the challenges and pressures that people who run park homes and all businesses are facing. With all types of legislation and regulation, it is always a balancing act with regard to making sure that there is fairness across the piece, and that obviously relates to—

2.30 pm

The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 11(2)).

Ordered, That the debate be resumed on Friday 6 November.

Business without Debate

CARAVAN SITES BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 6 November.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES (BORROWING AND INVESTMENT) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 6 November.

ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES (REGULATION) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 6 November.

HONG KONG BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 15 January 2021.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION (OFFENCES) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 6 November.

MAGISTRATES (RETIREMENT AGE) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 6 November.

London's Economic Recovery: Covid-19

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

2.32 pm

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for granting time for this Adjournment debate, and I thank colleagues who are in the Chamber; I am conscious that it is the Friday afternoon ahead of recess.

Reviving the London economy is critical, clearly for London but also for every single person in this country. London contributes a massive 25% of all tax to the Exchequer. Two small London boroughs—mine, Kensington and Chelsea, and neighbouring Westminster—contribute 10% of all business rates in the entire country, and London contributes £436.5 billion of gross value added. If we take the gross value added of Scotland and Wales and double it, then we get to London's number. Ensuring that the London economy functions is important for people in Northern Ireland, the north-east of England, Scotland and Wales. It is critical.

Sadly, the London economy is suffering—in particular the central London economy. I think that there are two principal reasons for that. First, people are not commuting into work, and they are not coming in for cultural and social events at places such as theatres and restaurants. Secondly, there has been a massive decline in international visitors to our city. Let me take those in turn and look first at commuters.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): Many people commute from Beaconsfield into London, and although we are not part of London, we benefit tremendously from the London economy. I thank my hon. Friend for being such a champion of London and its economy, because consumers and commuters who travel into London benefit just as much as those in inner London. I thank her for securing this important debate.

Felicity Buchan: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind words, and she makes a very important point. This is in the interests not only of London but of those who commute into London.

Let us look at the numbers. Morgan Stanley commissioned a survey in September comparing going back to work in the UK versus in France. In September, 34% were back to work in the UK, whereas in France the number was 83%. I have looked at the latest Greater London Authority data specifically for London, and only 41% are back in work—less than half of the people.

A second issue is the perceived lack of confidence in public transport—a lack of confidence that is quite wrong, to my mind. I hear that a lot from my museums, for instance, where footfall is dramatically lower. They attribute it to a lack of confidence in public transport. We need to get that confidence back, and we need to encourage people to come into central London. That is why I opposed so strongly what the Mayor of London did in extending the congestion charge to seven days a week and increasing it to £15. On the subject of the Mayor of London, he consistently talks down our great city. His job should be to inspire confidence, not to breed fear and nervousness.

Let me move on to international visitors. VisitBritain believes that numbers are down 74% on last year, which is a hit of more than £20 billion to the London economy. Again, it is all about confidence. We need to get those visitors back.

Clearly, London is in tier 2 measures, and I want to say how much I welcome the announcement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer yesterday to give additional support to constituencies such as mine that are in tier 2. I would also like to thank the Chancellor for his enormous financial support package across the country, greater than £200 billion. At the very beginning of the crisis, in the Treasury Committee, I called for a big, bold and decisive package of support, and, goodness, we have delivered that.

On the margin, I would say that London has not benefited from the support package as much as some other areas for very technical reasons. Grants to the hospitality sector, for instance, were given on the basis of having a rateable value of less than £51,000. Commercial property prices in my constituency are three times the national average, so businesses in my constituency with comparable cash flows and size to those in the rest of the country were not getting the grants that people in other constituencies were benefiting from. There is a similar case with the holiday on stamp duty. Clearly, that has been terrific throughout the country in giving people a holiday on property prices of less than £500,000, but just because of an accident of geography the average house price in my constituency is £1.25 million. Even in my ward, with the cheapest housing prices, the average price is £510,000. Very, very few of my constituents have benefited from the stamp duty holiday.

I also want to put it on the record that I am very concerned about the Government's announcement that they will abolish tax-free shopping come 1 January. This might seem like a very esoteric subject, but international visitors to central London are critical for our economy. They spend a huge amount of money not only in our shops but in our hotels and restaurants, and they are highly mobile. If we make it less attractive for them to come to London by effectively putting a 20% increase on the cost of their goods, they will simply go to Paris or Milan. Especially as we are leaving the EU, we need to project an image of global Britain and to be encouraging international visitors. For the sake of the London economy and our high streets, hotels and restaurants, we need these spenders back.

However, let me look forward in a constructive way, because it is very easy to talk about the problems. How do we get the London economy going again? If there is one word I keep coming back to it is "confidence". We need the confidence of commuters and the confidence of international visitors. How do we get that confidence? First, we have to get the virus under control: we need to get our numbers below 100 and to get the R rate down. If we do that, London can go back into being a tier 1 region. I would urge the Government to make that review as soon as the health statistics allow. We need to get London into tier 1 because London is the engine of our entire country. I would also strongly recommend that the Government review the 10 pm rule, again as quickly as the health statistics allow, because we need to support our hospitality sector.

We all need to work together collectively to get that confidence back and to reclaim London's position as the finest capital city and the most prosperous capital city in the world.

2.41 pm

The Minister for London (Paul Scully): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan) on securing this Adjournment debate and on raising some really pertinent issues about the economic recovery that we so desperately need for our great capital city.

We are both privileged to represent constituencies in the capital city. They are very different, and it is really important that we actually remember that London is not one homogeneous mass. Therefore, the economic recovery and the plan for it need to reflect that. There are 600-odd high streets around the suburbs of London. What we saw, as we gradually starting to open up, was people shopping locally, as they were working from home and in their neighbourhoods, and that worked out okay. In fact, footfall was still down, but spend per head was up as people had the confidence—my hon. Friend talked about confidence—to go out in their local area to spend and to buy something in particular, not to browse or to shop as they might have done some months ago.

What clearly did not happen, however, was people returning to the central activity zones—the likes of Kensington, as well as the west end, Soho, the south bank, the City, Canary Wharf and all those areas. As my hon. Friend said, people did not feel the confidence to use public transport and return to their workplace, despite the enormous amount of work that Transport for London has done, and the investment put in and the work done by so many employers around the central London area in particular in making their workplaces covid-19 secure, as well as in making the pubs, restaurants and shops in all these areas secure.

It is so important that we remember what a massive contribution London makes to the UK economy. A fact that does not get outed enough is that the west end itself—all the culture, the restaurants, the hospitality, as well as the corporate business in that area—has 3% of the UK's entire gross value added sitting within it. We must remember that when employers are saying they are not going to bring their employees back to their workplace any time soon—until maybe next year, the health figures notwithstanding—they should not expect that London will naturally be the same London they left. It does not have a God-given right to exist preserved in aspic, and it is incumbent on all of us to work together to make sure that we have a plan for recovery.

Such a plan works in three different ways—short term, medium term and long term. We must have a 90-day plan. As and when the health figures allow us to move back to tier 1, as my hon. Friend says, we need to be ready to go. We have already had one go, but it did not work as speedily as we would have liked. We need to be absolutely ready so that, when we get the incidence rate down across the boroughs, we can move to tier 1 and ensure that people have the confidence to travel and to return to their workplaces, albeit in a more flexible way than was previously the case. We are not trying to get back to how things were in January or February, because there is certainly a sense of permanent change, but we need to be able to shape that change.

Joy Morrissey: Does the Minister agree that we need a Mayor who cares about London's economic recovery and actually fights for it, rather than putting in place measures that restrict not only economic growth but the number of people coming into the city, such as the London-wide congestion charge? We need a Conservative Mayor who can take a new economic approach that will revitalise London in the coming months and years.

Paul Scully: Clearly, yes. I want Shaun Bailey to be in post after May to help shape the recovery. We have been working collegiately with the Mayor, the Greater London Authority and the boroughs, and indeed with colleagues in this place, in relation to the structures and work that we have put in place, but that kind of working also needs to be replicated in public. They cannot be sitting on a letter criticising the Government and pointing the finger elsewhere, as we have seen from the Mayor and other people. What they do in public and in private is so important, because what might seem to be a good short-term political campaign is terrible leadership for our capital city, which contributes so much to the rest of the country.

For the short-term recovery, it is so important that we show people what Transport for London has done, and what our retailers, publicans and restaurateurs have done, to make sure they will be safe. It is about confidence, but beyond that it is also about joy. What do I mean by that? I mean that when people go to a pub and find that getting a pint is too onerous, because of all the structures that have been put in place, they will go back home and have a bottle of wine and a ready meal, as so many did during lockdown. We need to get them back into central London not just one time; we have to make sure they want to come back time and again, to enjoy everything that London has to offer.

Clearly there is work to be done on the medium term. Businesses, particularly in retail and hospitality, are talking about business rates, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington explained so eloquently, and about tax-free shopping and the effect on international tourism. They are also talking about rents. There is a certain amount of business structure that needs to change. A number of landlords, in the suburbs as well as in central London, are sitting on empty properties with an artificially high market rent, purely to keep their shareholder valuation at a particular level, and that is not good for high streets. How can we work with landlords and tenants to find a better balance that works for our local areas so that we do not hollow them out?

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Joy Morrissey) talked about the Mayor. I sometimes get the sense that he does not care whether he is the Mayor of London or the mayor of Gotham City; he just wants to be the Mayor. What do I mean about Gotham City? We run the risk of hollowing out the west end if we do not get the recovery right. If we have only the ultra-rich and the people on low incomes who service the city, but not the people in the middle who provide so much of the community and spend, London will not be the same as it was before.

There is so much that we are doing, such as the Chancellor's winter support plan, to make sure that we preserve as many businesses and jobs as possible, while also moving to those long-term structures, whether a

[Paul Scully]

green recovery or the smarter use of digital in the centre of town, and building up the skills we need for the jobs that are yet to be created as we move towards a new economy. We have the new normal, with masks, one-way systems and hand sanitising—hands, face, space—but we are moving towards a new reality, with permanent behaviour change baked in. We need to recognise that and address it. It is about greater use of flexible working, recognising that people are not going to travel into London in the same way they did. It is about reduced use of cash, and different way of shopping. We need to be ahead of the game.

Conservative Members are always talking about levelling up the whole country, and that is so important. How does London play a role in that? Well, before lockdown I went to see the mixed-use regeneration at Battersea power station. The steels are made in Liverpool and are painted in the midlands, and the bricks are sourced from Gloucestershire. We are providing jobs all around the country for such projects, which also benefit London. The electric black cabs that go around town, which we need to return to the likes of Bishopsgate—some of the Streetspace initiatives are actually penalising not only black cab drivers, but disabled users of cabs as well—are made in Coventry. There are 2,000 people there making electric black cabs. There is also our culture sector in the centre of town. High House Production Park in Thurrock makes a lot of the production work for the Royal Opera House. The more that we can get that back, the more that we are creating and sustaining jobs around the country.

We need to level up London, so that it is not just an economic recovery, but a social one too; they feed into each other. The obvious example is Canary Wharf; if I stood at the top of One Canada Square, I would be among some of the richest people in the country, looking down at Whitechapel, which is one of the poorest areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Kensington speaks for and campaigns in her constituency, which also has a diverse community, with Ladbroke Grove on one side—the birthplace of one Shaun Bailey, who we were speaking to earlier—and Kensington on the other. Some people outside London only think of the richer part of Kensington.

Felicity Buchan: My hon. Friend makes a very important point—that we need to level up within London. There is a difference of 16 years between the average life expectancy in the poorest ward in my constituency and in the richest. That is phenomenal. Some of our poorest areas are actually in London, so levelling up is not just a matter of north versus south; it is also within our inner cities.

Paul Scully: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we must look at this issue. Levelling up around the country and levelling up in London are not mutually exclusive; we can and must do both. That is one of the reasons why, during the pandemic, we have provided an extra £63 million for welfare support through councils. We have also put an extra £9 billion into the benefits system to ensure that families can cope as well as possible in the present situation.

The £200 billion or so that we are putting into the economy is to secure jobs, and help to protect businesses and livelihoods. This Government's first priority is always saving lives, but close behind is restoring livelihoods, and protecting jobs and people's futures. We know how long the unwind can be if we do not get that right.

I thank my hon. Friend for giving us the opportunity to speak about the economic recovery in London. Ultimately we will do this by getting to tier 1. It is not the Government's tier systems that transmit the virus. It is people getting too close; breathing close to people, without a mask; touching people; and not following the rules. We need to follow hands, face and space. Working together and getting back to tier 1 is the best way to recover our economy in London and elsewhere.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Before I put the Question, I would like to wish all Members and staff here at the House of Commons and Parliament generally to have a very good and restful short recess. I am extremely grateful for all the hard work that they have put in to ensure that our democracy still functions at this particularly difficult time.

Question put and agreed to.

2.54 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) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con)	Mike Freer
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con)	Mike Freer
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con)	Mike Freer
Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con)	Mike Freer
Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con)	Mike Freer
Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con)	Mike Freer
Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con)	Mike Freer
Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con)	Mike Freer
Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con)	Mike Freer
Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con)	Mike Freer
Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con)	Mike Freer
Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con)	Mike Freer
Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP)	Sammy Wilson
Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con)	Mike Freer
Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP)	Patrick Grady

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland)	Mike Freer
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con)	Mike Freer
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con)	Mike Freer
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con)	Mike Freer
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow)	Chris Elmore
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)	Caroline Nokes
Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)	Dawn Butler
Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con)	Mike Freer
Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Rachel Hopkins
Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con)	Caroline Nokes
Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con)	Mike Freer
Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con)	Mike Freer
Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con)	Jeremy Hunt
Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con)	Mike Freer
Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con)	Mike Freer
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con)	Mike Freer
Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance)	Wendy Chamberlain
Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)	Jonathan Edwards
Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP)	Patrick Grady

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)	Mike Freer
Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con)	Mike Freer	Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con)	Bim Afolami	Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con)	Mike Freer
Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con)	Craig Mackinlay	Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con)	Mike Freer
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con)	Caroline Nokes	Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con)	Steve Baker	Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con)	Mike Freer
Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore	Julian Knight (Solihull)	Mike Freer
Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con)	Mike Freer	Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab)	Kate Osborne
Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con)	Mike Freer	Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con)	Mike Freer
Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab)	Lloyd Russell-Moyle
Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con)	Mike Freer
Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con)	Mike Freer
Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con)	Mike Freer
Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP)	Ben Lake	Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con)	Mike Freer	Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con)	Mike Freer
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore	John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Conor McGinn (St Helens North)	Chris Elmore
Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con)	Fay Jones	John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab)	Kate Osborne
Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con)	Maria Caulfield	Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con)	Mike Freer
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con)	Mike Freer
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con)	Mike Freer	Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con)	Mike Freer
Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore	Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Patrick Grady
Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con)	Mike Freer	Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con)	Mike Freer
		David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con)	Mike Freer
		Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con)	Rebecca Harris
Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con)	Mike Freer
Kate Osamor (Jarrow)	Nadia Whittome
Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con)	Mike Freer
Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con)	Mike Freer
Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley)	Chris Elmore
Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con)	Peter Aldous
Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Christina Rees (Neath)	Chris Elmore
Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)	Ben Lake
Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con)	Mike Freer
Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con)	Mike Freer
Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)	Mike Freer
Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con)	Robert Courts
Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con)	Mike Freer
Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con)	Mike Freer
Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con)	Mike Freer
Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab)	Dawn Butler
Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con)	Mike Freer
David Warburton (Somerton and Frome) (Con)	Mike Freer
Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC)	Ben Lake
Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Written Statements

Friday 23 October 2020

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Wylfa Newydd Nuclear Power Station: Decision Deadline Extension

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Kwasi Kwarteng): This statement concerns an application made by Horizon Nuclear Power Ltd under the Planning Act 2008 for development consent for the construction and operation of a new nuclear power station and associated infrastructure at Wylfa Head on the Isle of Anglesey.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make a decision on an application within three months of receipt of the examining authority's report unless exercising the power under section 107(3) to set a new deadline. Where a new deadline is set, the Secretary of State must make a statement to Parliament to announce it. The Secretary of State had previously reset the deadline for the application for the Wylfa Newydd nuclear power station to 30 September 2020.

Following the announcement that its ultimate parent company, Hitachi Ltd, was ending business operations in respect of the Wylfa Newydd nuclear power station, Horizon Nuclear Power Wylfa Ltd wrote to the Secretary of State requesting that he reset the deadline for his decision on the application until 31 December 2020 so that it could ascertain its options for the project.

The Secretary of State has agreed to that request and has therefore set a new deadline for deciding the application of 31 December 2020. The decision to set the new deadline for the application is without prejudice to the Secretary of State's decision on whether to grant or refuse development consent.

[HCWS537]

EDUCATION

Qualification Reform

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson): Today, I am pleased to launch the next stage of the review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below in England. The review is an opportunity to develop a qualifications system where every student, including those with SEND and from disadvantaged backgrounds, benefits from high quality qualifications that help them realise their talents and achieve their career ambitions. This is vital to addressing our country's productivity and skills gaps and achieving the international competitiveness on which our future prosperity depends. The proposals I am setting out today complement important technical education improvements already underway through T-levels, apprenticeships and to higher levels of technical study.

The proposals follow a first stage consultation which was carried out in 2019 and are open for consultation until 15 January 2021.

The case for reform is strong. There are more than 12,000 different qualifications funded in England at level 3 and below. Some of the qualifications are well recognised and valued, but as the Wolf review and Sainsbury review identified, too many are poorly understood and poor quality. Students face a bewildering choice over which is right for them and which will increase their employment opportunities. Our aim is for clearer qualifications choices for young people and adults. We want students and employers to have confidence that every qualification on offer is high quality and can lead to skilled employment or further study.

We believe that T-levels and A-levels should become the programmes of choice at level 3. T-levels have been developed with employers to give young people the skills they need to enter employment or higher technical study, and A-levels have consistently prepared students well for higher education.

This consultation focuses on level 3. It sets out proposals for the qualifications we believe are needed alongside T-levels and A-levels for 16 to 19 year olds and adults, and how to ensure they meet the consistently high levels of quality that are needed to support all students to fulfil their potential and provide the skills and knowledge employers and higher education institutions need. The consultation sets out detailed proposals to streamline the technical offer for 16 to 19 year olds alongside T-levels to ensure that as many young people as possible can benefit from the preparation T-levels will provide. For young people choosing academic qualifications, we want only those qualifications that give the best preparation to progress on to, and successfully complete, high quality HE courses.

The new lifetime skills guarantee announced by the Prime Minister will fund level 3 technical courses for adults. We must ensure qualifications give adults the skills the country needs, so they are able to gain employment or to progress in the workplace. Adults will generally need greater flexibility than 16 to 19 year olds and will also tend to have greater prior experience. Our starting point for adults is a similar offer as for 16 to 19 year olds, but with some additional technical qualifications to meet their needs and more flexibility built in to the design of qualifications for adults.

We propose Ofqual and the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education should have a key role in ensuring and maintaining quality. And we want to put employers at the heart of this process by aligning the majority of qualifications to employer-led standards.

Alongside these proposals for level 3 qualifications, we want to improve study at level 2 and below. Getting level 2 and below right is key to making sure that students have clear lines of sight to level 3, apprenticeships, traineeships, and for some, directly into employment. We want to know more about what is working well in the current system and what more needs to be done to support all students to succeed. That is why we will shortly be publishing a call for evidence on level 2 and below.

This review is a once in a generation opportunity to develop a qualifications system where every student can benefit. Our proposed landscape—with employers at the heart and a much greater focus on quality—will serve all students better, including those with SEND and from disadvantaged backgrounds.

I look forward to continued engagement with the sector on these reforms. I will set out our firm plans and the next steps for implementation of our level 3 reforms in response to this consultation; and we intend to follow the call for evidence with a consultation on level 2 and below next year.

[HCWS538]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Office for Environmental Protection: Contingencies Fund Advance

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): DEFRA has sought a repayable cash advance from the Contingencies Fund of £536,000.

The requirement has arisen because there is an urgent requirement to proceed with setting up the Office for Environmental Protection in advance of Royal Assent of the Environment Bill.

Under “Managing public money” rules, expenditure to make preparation for the delivery of a new service prior to Royal Assent requires an advance from the Contingencies Fund. The cash advance will pay for essential set-up expenditure for IT, corporate services, estates, finance, recruitment and other HR costs that are needed for establishing for the Office for Environmental Protection. The need to spend now in advance of Royal Assent is driven by the necessary timelines associated with recruitment, procurement and set up which are expected to take several months. This will ensure that the Office for Environmental Protection can be brought into operation and begin exercising its statutory functions as soon as practical after Royal Assent of the Environment Bill.

Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £536,000 for this new service will be sought in an estimate for Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £536,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

This Contingencies Fund advance is in addition to the £215,000 notified to Parliament on 21 July 2020 to cover essential spend including public appointments and minimal staff recruitment.

[HCWS540]

Annual Fisheries Negotiations 2020: UK Priorities and Objectives

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): The UK is now entering into a period of annual fisheries negotiations to agree fishing opportunities and access to waters for the 2021 fishing year. We will be doing that as an independent coastal state for the first time in over 40 years. It is an important milestone as we leave the common fisheries policy, and one which warrants this update to the House.

Our aim across all annual fisheries negotiations will be to work closely with our counterparts in the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Governments to secure the best outcomes for the whole of the UK fishing industry and for our marine environment.

We will be participating in a range of annual fisheries negotiations. The UK will be taking its seat at the coastal states negotiations for key pelagic species; participating in multilateral organisations like the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), which we have already joined along with the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (NAFO), the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), and the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), and conducting our own bilateral negotiations to set 2021 opportunities and agree access to waters for next year with partners like Norway, the Faroe Islands, and the EU.

With Norway and the Faroe Islands, we have already agreed new fisheries frameworks to underpin bilateral negotiations and the former has already been signed and laid before the House. We are seeking to negotiate a fisheries framework agreement with the EU. This is proving a difficult negotiation and the UK and EU positions are very far apart, principally because the EU has not yet accepted the implications of our future status as an independent coastal state. Negotiations are continuing and updates will be shared with the House as available.

In all fisheries negotiations we will ensure that our actions are founded on the best available scientific advice. We will aim to deliver sustainability improvements—safeguarding our natural marine assets for future generations. Our landmark Fisheries Bill enshrines in legislation the Government’s commitment to sustainable fishing, and it is right that we make this a cornerstone of our negotiating positions.

Through the negotiations we will look to support our vital UK fishing industry, not only through securing additional quotas but also by continuing to support the elimination of illegal and harmful discarding. Again, our UK-wide approach will ensure we consider the needs of the fishing industries of all devolved nations, and the Crown dependencies, in negotiations.

Finally, and underpinning all our negotiations, we will be seeking to maximise the benefits of our new status as an independent coastal state. We will decide who can access UK waters to fish and on what terms; and we will negotiate access for UK fleets to fish in other countries’ waters on terms that suit us. Through friendly co-operation as sovereign equals, we will improve management of shared fish stocks with benefits for the wider marine environment and the long-term future of the UK fishing industry.

[HCWS541]

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Citizens’ Rights: Withdrawal Agreement Implementation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Wendy Morton): The withdrawal agreement provides citizens with the certainty they need about their rights now that the UK

has left the EU. It protects the rights of EU citizens in the UK, UK nationals in the EU and their family members who are lawfully resident by the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020. It ensures they can continue to live, work, study and access benefits and services, such as healthcare, broadly as they do now. The Government remain committed to ensuring the correct and timely implementation of the citizens' rights part of the withdrawal agreement in the UK and continues to work with EU member states to ensure they undertake the same implementation for UK nationals. We also have similar citizens' rights agreements with the EEA EFTA states and Switzerland.

Implementation for EU citizens in the UK

In the UK, EU citizens and their family members with both settled and pre-settled status under the EU settlement scheme have secured their rights in UK law. The EU settlement scheme is a success and as of 30 September 2020, over four million applications have been received, of which nearly 3.8 million grants of status have already been made. The Government have taken early action to protect the rights of EU citizens in the UK and there is plenty of time left to apply before the deadline of 30 June 2021. A frontier workers' permit scheme is also being established with an opening date due to be announced shortly.

Work to operationalise the provisions relating to social security co-ordination, are also advanced. Operational guidance will also be published to aid frontline staff in determining entitlements to benefits and healthcare in scope of the social security coordination provisions in the withdrawal agreement.

The Government are also on track to establish the independent monitoring authority for the citizens rights' agreements that will monitor the UK's compliance with the citizens' rights part of the withdrawal agreement and EEA EFTA separation agreement in the UK and Gibraltar. Information on its functions have recently been published on gov.uk.

Implementation for UK nationals in the EU

The Government have been working closely with EU member states on implementation for UK nationals in the EU throughout the transition period. The Specialised Committee on Citizens' Rights has already met three times to monitor the implementation and application of the citizens' rights part of the withdrawal agreement in both the UK and the EU. Joint statements from each of these meetings have been published on gov.uk.

The EU settlement scheme in the UK has been fully open since 30 March 2019. Throughout the transition period, we have sought application windows, beyond the minimum six-month window, in the 13 member states that will require UK nationals and their family members to apply for a new residence status. The Government are pleased to announce that all 13 member states have responded positively and UK nationals will have at least eight months to apply and significantly longer in some member states. Full details can be found on the "Living in Guides" on gov.uk.

The remaining 14 member states will operate a declaratory system, whereby rights under the withdrawal agreement are conferred automatically by operation of the law, for individuals that meet the conditions of the withdrawal agreement. As is already the case, UK nationals should ensure they are correctly registered in their member state of residence.

The Government will publish a full list of member state frontier worker systems on gov.uk before the end of the transition period.

The Government continue to work with the EU on clear and consistent communications and comprehensive support for the vulnerable. We are reaching out directly to UK nationals in the EU through our network of embassies, high commissions and consulates at town hall events and online to ensure all UK nationals and their family members are aware of any actions they may need to take in the member state where they have made their home.. Our "Living in Guides" on gov.uk, which cover the EU and EFTA states, are the principal source of guidance for UK nationals in the EU, including their rights under the withdrawal agreement and EEA EFTA separation agreement. They provide the latest information and actions that UK nationals may need to take and signpost to member state and EU guidance where relevant.

Readiness for the end of the transition period

Looking to the end of the transition period and beyond, the Government published an "explainer" on gov.uk on 19 October 2020 to help EU citizens in the UK and UK nationals in the EU understand their rights and how they are protected by the withdrawal agreement.

The Government are also pleased to confirm that a joint report on residency, produced by the Specialised Committee on Citizens' Rights has, today, been published on gov.uk and placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The joint report provides comprehensive details of residency systems in the UK and the EU, including details of application deadlines and the number of EU citizens in the UK and UK nationals in the EU who have secured their rights. It is the Government's intention to publish updates to the joint report throughout 2021 in order to provide additional assurance that citizens' rights are being upheld.

The Government will continue to work closely with the EU and member states to ensure that citizens' rights are protected and individuals are aware of any steps may need to take to secure their rights and access the entitlements that flow from those rights in the future. Further details on the progress of implementing the citizens' rights part of the withdrawal agreement will be made available to Parliament.

[HCWS542]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

UK-Japan Free Trade Agreement: Signing

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): Today Japan's Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu and I are signing the UK-Japan partnership agreement in Tokyo. This is the first trade deal that the UK has struck as an independent trading nation.

This British shaped deal goes beyond the existing EU agreement with major wins for all parts of the UK in areas such as digital and data, financial services, food and drink and creative industries. This deal could boost trade between the UK and Japan by £15.7 billion and drive economic growth in the long run.

The agreement also includes a strong commitment from Japan to support the UK joining the comprehensive trans-Pacific partnership (CPTPP) meaning closer ties

with 11 Pacific countries in one of the world's biggest free trade areas, covering 13% of the global economy in 2018 and more than £110 billion of trade in 2019.

The Government are committed to transparency and the effective scrutiny of our trade negotiations. Following my written ministerial statement of 12 October, I can announce that at the earliest possible opportunity today the Department for International Trade and the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office will be formally presenting the signed treaty text and related documents electronically to Parliament. They will subsequently be published on gov.uk.

The documents being laid in Parliament today are the UK-Japan partnership agreement treaty text, explanatory memorandum and parliamentary report, which provides an explanation of the partnership agreement, including any significant differences or enhancements from the EU-Japan agreement. An independently verified impact assessment of the UK-Japan partnership agreement will also be deposited in the Library of the House.

While the Government are formally laying the treaty text electronically in Parliament today, the Constitutional Reform and Governance (CRaG) Act scrutiny procedure will not commence until 2 November, when the House of Commons returns from recess. Laying today ahead of the commencement of CRaG ensures that the House has the maximum amount of time to scrutinise the detail of the UK-Japan partnership agreement.

[HCWS536]

TRANSPORT

Commonwealth Games 2020: Transport Plan

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): The 2022 Commonwealth games, held in Birmingham, will be the biggest sporting and cultural event that the

city and the region have ever seen. With an estimated television audience of 1.5 billion people, it will showcase Birmingham, the west midlands and the entire country as an amazing place to live, work, study, visit and do business.

Effective transport helps local communities and supports local economies. We are investing in transport across the region including over £320 million of transforming cities fund funding to support local transport projects in the west midlands.

We know that putting in place effective transport provision is a crucial part of any major sporting event and requires detailed planning and co-ordination. A well-understood and supported transport plan is therefore essential.

The Birmingham Commonwealth Games Act 2020 (the "Act"), which received Royal Assent on 25 June, includes a number of transport measures and places the games transport plan on a statutory footing, awarding it appropriate weight and authority.

Today, I am delighted to inform the House that, in line with s.25(1) of the Act, I have directed the West Midlands combined authority to prepare a games transport plan for the 2022 Commonwealth games.

The games will be delivered in a much shorter time than other games: in just four and a half years, rather than the typical seven. Local partners in Birmingham and the west midlands are already leading the transport preparations for the games.

The games transport plan is an integral measure, which will set out a strategic approach to planning and co-ordination of transport to support the games; covering the transportation of spectators, athletes and the games family, while at the same time ensuring that any disruption to transport users is kept to a minimum.

When complete a copy of the final games transport plan will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS539]

Ministerial Correction

Friday 23 October 2020

TREASURY

Fiscal Support: Covid-19

The following is an extract from oral Questions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 20 October 2019.

Allan Dorans [V]: The Scottish Government are doing what they can to support individuals, businesses and those who have been excluded by the Chancellor from receiving any grants, loans or payment holidays. They are hampered in doing so by not having the autonomy of borrowing powers to meet the unique requirements of the Scottish economy. Will the Government heed repeated calls for the devolution of borrowing powers to enable the Scottish Government to provide additional targeted assistance to those individuals and sectors that they have identified as most in need?

Jesse Norman: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the current state of affairs was agreed between the Scottish Government and the UK Government after exhaustive consultation and discussion by the Silk commission, and that remains the set-up to which the Scottish Government have committed themselves.

[Official Report, 20 October 2020, Vol. 682, c. 895.]

Letter of correction from the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman):

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Allan Dorans).

The correct response should have been:

Jesse Norman: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the current state of affairs was agreed between the Scottish Government and the UK Government after exhaustive consultation and discussion by the **Smith** commission, and that remains the set-up to which the Scottish Government have committed themselves.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Friday 23 October 2020

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Friday 23 October 2020

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No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Friday 30 October 2020**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

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Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
