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11 January 2021**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Monday 11 January 2021

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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

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Monday 11 January 2021

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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

SEVENTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 687

NINETEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2019-2021

House of Commons

Monday 11 January 2021

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Orders, 4 June and 30 December 2020).

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

Oral Answers to Questions

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Leaseholders: Fire Safety Costs

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): What steps he is taking to support leaseholders with high costs of interim fire safety measures pending permanent remediation. [910654]

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): In beginning, may I wish you, Mr Speaker, all Members of the House and its staff, and, of course, my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) a very happy new year?

We have announced a new £30 million fund to help end the scandal of excessive waking watch costs. This will fund the installation of alarm systems in buildings

with unsafe cladding, reducing or removing the dependence on costly interim measures such as a waking watch. We estimate that that will save residents a combined £3 million each month. Alongside that, we continue to prioritise the removal of unsafe cladding and have committed funds to help make homes safer, faster.

Caroline Nokes [V]: Sleep deprivation is recognised as a form of torture. People living in buildings with unsafe cladding are being tortured: physically, due to a lack of sleep, as they live in fear; financially, as they cannot sell their homes and are forced to pay for waking watches; and mentally, as they live in limbo. When does my right hon. Friend expect that torture to end?

Christopher Pincher: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend; she has campaigned long and hard for her constituents, and has raised this issue with me outside the Chamber as well as within it. We all appreciate the terrible challenges and suffering that many people around our country face on this issue. That is why we want the residents of blocks that are enduring a waking watch to get the benefits of our changes as soon as possible. We expect the £30 million fund to be open this month, with the aim of providing funding for the installation of alarms as quickly as possible. I think we all agree that the best way of making buildings safe is to speed up remediation, and that is what our policies intend.

Local Authority Funding

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): What plans the Government have to increase funding for local authorities in 2021. [910655]

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): What plans the Government have to increase funding for local authorities in 2021. [910663]

The Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government (Luke Hall): We are increasing funding for councils in 2021-22. Through the local government finance settlement, we are making an extra £2.2 billion available to councils,

with an average cash increase of 4.5%—a real-terms increase. We have also announced £3 billion of covid-19 support for next year, taking our total direct support for local government in responding to the pandemic to more than £10 billion.

Dr Evans [V]: I am grateful to the Minister for the announcement of the extra cash, particularly the covid cash, in these difficult times. He will know from our many meetings in the year since I was elected about my concern over fairer funding for Leicestershire. If Leicestershire were funded at the same level as London, it would receive an extra £374 per resident. Will he update me on the formula that underpins the structure and whether there will be a review? Is this likely to change? If so, when?

Luke Hall: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and the way in which he has consistently and constructively raised this issue with me and Ministers in our Department. Leicestershire will see an increase of 5.5% in its core spending power next year and receive more than £11.5 million to deal with covid pressures. The Government certainly agree that we need an updated and fairer method for distributing funds within local government. I hope he understands that this year we have had to focus on supporting councils through the pandemic, but once this is over we will revisit our shared priority of funding reform. In the meantime, we have substantially increased the rural services delivery grant to £85 million, its highest level ever, which will support the delivery of services in places such as Leicestershire. I am, of course, happy to continue meeting him in the weeks ahead.

Joy Morrissey [V]: May I thank the Minister for his covid cash for councils? Will he confirm that the Government will ensure that councils have the financial support they need to respond to covid-19 and support their local communities? In places such as Bucks, particularly, our council is doing a fantastic job but there is a lot of concern about whether it will have the financial support to carry on throughout the pandemic and make sure that all residents are taken care of.

Luke Hall: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. She is right to say that councils have done an incredible job in responding to the pandemic. We have provided an unprecedented package of covid-related support for councils, which is now worth £10 billion over this year and next year. It includes £1 billion of unring-fenced funding, as well as support for lost income from tax, sales, fees and charges. Buckinghamshire will benefit from more than £54 million of covid support this year and £11 million for next year. Councils are the unsung heroes of the response to this pandemic and we are standing squarely behind them.

Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): May I take this opportunity to congratulate Christina McAnea on being elected the general secretary of Unison? It is Britain's biggest trade union and of course has many members who work in local government.

Let me turn to the Minister. How is it fair to force councils to choose between hiking up council tax for hard-working families during the worst recession in 300 years, or cutting social care for older parents and grandparents during an unprecedented global health pandemic?

Luke Hall: It is hard to take lectures from the Labour party about raising council tax when Labour doubled council tax while in office and has trebled council tax in Wales. If the hon. Gentleman wants to speak about raising council tax, he should start by speaking to the Mayor of London, who is proposing a 9.5% increase in council tax for next year. We are ensuring that local government has the resources it needs to emerge stronger from the pandemic. That is why we are putting in an extra £2.2 billion next year. We are also giving councils the flexibility to defer any increases in council tax next year if they believe that is right for their community. If the Opposition Front-Bench team looked at the detail of what we are proposing, they would see that we have provided £670 million to help councils to support people who are least able to pay council tax. There is of course one council that will definitely be raising council tax next year, and that is Croydon, because of its completely disastrous management of its finances.

High Street Regeneration

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): What plans he has to support the regeneration of high streets. [910656]

Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con): What plans he has to support the regeneration of high streets. [910665]

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): What plans he has to support the regeneration of high streets. [910673]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): The Government's priority throughout the pandemic has been to protect lives and livelihoods, with substantial support flowing to high street businesses through business grants, the paying of people's wages and tax deferrals. Just last week, the Chancellor announced an additional £4.6 billion in new lockdown grants to support businesses and protect jobs. I was pleased that on Boxing day we allocated £830 million from our future high streets fund to 72 areas to transform underused town centres into the vibrant places to live, work and visit that we all want to see after the pandemic.

James Sunderland: Online sellers, global giants and supermarkets have enjoyed a virtual monopoly since the pandemic started, whereas small businesses in Bracknell, Crowthorne, Sandhurst and beyond are often on their knees. What is my hon. Friend going to do to address this growing imbalance?

Robert Jenrick: That idea lies very much behind the comprehensive package of support that the Chancellor has made available, with £200 billion specifically targeted at supporting small businesses on the high street. It is also why we have brought forward the further top-up grants, worth up to £9,000, to help small businesses through this next—and hopefully final—phase of the pandemic. We will of course continue to review the situation. Such concerns lie at the heart of our plans through the towns fund, the high streets fund and now the future levelling-up fund.

Claire Coutinho [V]: Just before Christmas I met businesses on the Oxted high street. Even with the unprecedented Government support that the Secretary of State has laid out, it has been a difficult and anxious

year for them, with many going above and beyond for their customers. Surrey County Council and the Surrey economic growth board, on which I serve, are doing important work to revitalise and transform our high streets; will the Secretary of State meet us so that we can share our ideas on how we can best support such hard-working family businesses?

Robert Jenrick: I praise my hon. Friend for her hard work to support Oxted high street in Surrey and the work of her local councils. The truth is that the pandemic has not so much changed things but magnified and accelerated enormous market forces that were evident even before the pandemic. There will now be a very significant role for local councils in bringing forward imaginative plans to bring private and public sector investment back to the high streets over the course of the year, and to make good use of the licensing and planning reforms that we have already brought forward and that we will bring forward more of in future. I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend to hear her plans for Oxted.

Mrs Drummond [V]: Waterlooville town centre in my constituency was struggling as a shopping centre even before the pandemic, and is now really suffering, with closed shops and a lack of investment. There is a vision for the town centre, but we need money to develop it. Will my right hon. Friend point out a fund of money that I could approach to make this happen?

Robert Jenrick: As I said, I was delighted to announce over the Christmas period the 72 places that have benefited from the future high streets fund, but I appreciate that hundreds of high streets throughout the country will be thinking about their own futures. We will very shortly bring forward the levelling-up fund, from which all parts of the country, including my hon. Friend's in Hampshire, will have the opportunity to benefit. I also direct my hon. Friend to look at the planning reforms that we have brought forward, because it is not simply about more public investment; we also want to support entrepreneurs, small businesspeople and small builders through the right to regenerate, the changes to the use-class orders and the new licensing arrangements—such as the ability to have markets, keep marquees outside pubs and have more tables and chairs outdoors—that I would like to be put on a permanent footing so that the al fresco dining we saw in the summer can be replicated this year.

Mr Speaker: And hopefully Chorley will be on the Secretary of State's high street fund.

Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): As we have been hearing, high streets are struggling like never before. When will the Government level the playing field on business rates between high street retailers and online businesses, so that they can compete on equal terms?

Robert Jenrick: The Chancellor announced earlier in the year an unprecedented business rates holiday, which is benefiting thousands of businesses the length and breadth of the country, and he will be considering what further steps are necessary. I know that he is making a statement later today, and we will bring forward a Budget in March. We all want to support small independent

businesses on our high streets, which is precisely why I encourage the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues to support the planning reforms that we have already introduced, such as the ability to build upwards, to bring more homes on to the high street and to turn a derelict or empty property in a town centre into something more useful for the future. Those are the ways that we attract private sector investment and enable small builders and entrepreneurs in Croydon, in Newark and in all parts of the country to face the future with confidence.

Private Rented Sector

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve security of tenure in the private rented sector. [910657]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Kelly Tolhurst): The Government are committed to enhancing renters' security by abolishing no-fault evictions. During the covid-19 pandemic, our collective efforts have been focused on protecting people during the outbreak. This has included introducing longer notice periods and preventing evictions at the height of the pandemic on public health grounds. We will introduce a renters' reform Bill very soon.

Navendu Mishra: I thank the Minister for her response. Hundreds of thousands of people are at risk of being evicted when the ban is lifted. The covid crisis has highlighted underlying problems in the private rented sector, including families being forced into expensive and insecure housing. Local organisations in my constituency, including Stockport Tenants Union and ACORN, have long campaigned to end section 21 evictions, but when will the Minister deliver her manifesto commitment to do the same?

Kelly Tolhurst: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. We are committed to abolishing no-fault evictions under section 21. Obviously, we have already taken some action. Last week, for example, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State increased the ban on evictions for a further six weeks. We have also introduced six months' notice, which means that people who receive an order now will find that it will not go through the courts until July. We are committed to making sure that we protect anybody who is suffering homelessness. That has been borne out by the level of investment that we have put into the sector during the pandemic. We will keep all these measures under review.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab) [V]: Millions of hard-working people are excluded from every covid scheme—newly self-employed or employed, small business owners, people with mixed employment, even some on maternity or paternity leave who have lost work because of covid but have little or no Government support. The Government's own stats show that hundreds of thousands have fallen behind on rent. A loophole in the new evictions rules means that anyone more than six months in arrears is at risk of eviction. When the Secretary of State said that no one should lose their home because of coronavirus, did he or did he not mean that?

Kelly Tolhurst: I regret that the hon. Lady does not recognise the unprecedented steps that this Government have taken in an unprecedented global pandemic to support renters and people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping. Our data show that our measures to protect renters are working. We have had a 54% reduction in households owed a homelessness duty to the end of an assured tenancy from April to June compared with January to March. Ministry of Justice stats show no possessions recorded between April and September. We have put a ban on evictions, given a six-month notice period, extended buy-to-let mortgage holidays, provided £700 million to support rough sleepers and those at risk of homelessness, provided 3,300 Next Steps accommodation, given £6.4 billion to local authorities to deal with the impact of covid, helped 29,000 people with Everyone In, and saw 19,000 move on to settled protection. The list goes on and on. We know that people are experiencing hardship in these times, and this Government will continue to review and take the necessary action to ensure people in this country are protected.

Covid-19: Local Authority Income

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): What support the Government are providing to help local authorities experiencing a reduction in income as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. [910658]

The Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government (Luke Hall): We are providing councils with comprehensive support for income lost due to the pandemic. We are extending the existing compensation scheme for lost sales, fees and charges income into 2021-22, and we have already paid councils £528 million under this scheme. We have introduced a local tax guarantee scheme for this financial year that provides 75% of irrecoverable losses in business rates and council tax, worth an estimated £800 million. We are also allowing councils to phase recovery of collection fund deficits over three years.

Dr Spencer: I very much welcome the incredible financial support provided to local authorities, particularly through the national leisure recovery fund. Does my hon. Friend agree that supporting council provision of health and leisure centres is vital in helping us to keep healthy and to support our mental wellbeing? Will he look at the situation in my local authorities, Runnymede and Elmbridge borough councils, and their individual leisure operator contracts and according liabilities, where those are in excess of the support provided by the scheme?

Luke Hall: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Leisure services play a vital role in helping people to be active, supporting physical and mental health, and bringing a wider range of community and wellbeing benefits. I can confirm that Runnymede and Elmbridge have each lodged an expression of interest as the first necessary step in the application process for the national leisure recovery fund; I believe that they will have submitted their completed applications before the deadline of 15 January. It is also worth noting that councils may be eligible for support from the sales, fees and charges scheme, which was recently extended into the first three months of 2021-22, but I am always more than happy to meet him to discuss this matter in more detail.

Leaseholders: Fire Safety Costs

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to ensure that leaseholders are not held responsible for the costs of remediating dangerous cladding. [910659]

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): We expect—and we are right to expect—developers, investors and building owners who have the means to pay to cover remediation costs themselves without passing on costs to leaseholders. In cases where this may not be possible and where there may be wider costs related to historical defects, we are keenly aware that leaseholders can face unforeseen costs. That is why we have introduced funding schemes, providing £1.6 billion to accelerate the pace of work and meet the costs of remediating high-risk and the most expensive defects. We are accelerating the work on a long-term solution, and are working to announce the findings of that as soon as possible.

Sir Robert Neill [V]: The Government have always been right to say that leaseholders should not bear the costs of a scandal for which they bore no responsibility. Will my right hon. Friend the Minister confirm that it will be wholly—[Inaudible]—for them to be expected to meet the costs by way of a loan scheme supported by the Government, as is reported in some of the press? That would not be consistent with the Government's policy or the Government's word, would it?

Christopher Pincher: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; he was breaking up a little, but I think we got the gist of his question. We have always been clear that it is unacceptable for leaseholders to have to worry about fixing the costs of historical safety defects in their buildings that they did not cause. I fully understand the anxiety that they must all feel, particularly given the compounding challenges of the pandemic. That is why we are determined to remove the barriers to fixing those historical defects and to identify clear financial solutions to help protect those leaseholders while also, of course, protecting the taxpayer. We will update the House with further measures as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker: Let us head to the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, in Yorkshire, Clive Betts.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab) [V]: Thank you, Mr Speaker—happy new year to you. I am sure it would be remiss of me if I did not say that your local constituency football team have made rather a good start to this year.

In saying happy new year to the Minister as well, I am sure he would want it to be a happy new year for all leaseholders, but he did not really answer the question from the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill). Even if a loan scheme were introduced to cover the costs of these defects, and even if it was a very low-interest scheme, that would still be a capital charge on properties—a capital charge that would be a considerable financial burden on leaseholders, would put many of them into negative equity, and would mean that their properties were unsaleable. Will the Minister accept that a loan scheme that puts an additional debt

on leaseholders is not a fair way out of this problem and that he should instead look to the industry and to Government to cover the cost of putting these defects right?

Christopher Pincher: The Chair of the Select Committee is absolutely right—we should look to developers and to building owners to remedy the defects in their buildings. We have made available to owners who are not able to remedy those defects quickly and effectively £1.6 billion in order to remedy those defects. As I said in my earlier answer, we do not want and we do not expect hard-pressed leaseholders to bear the unfair costs of defects for which they are not responsible. That is why we are working quickly to bring forward a long-term solution to ensure that costs are met, that defects are remedied, and that the position that leaseholders find themselves in is remedied too.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab) [V]: A belated happy new year to you, Mr Speaker.

Clauses 88 and 89 of the Government's draft Building Safety Bill will impose a charge on leaseholders, not developers and not the industry. Ministers now refer to "affordable" cost and a 30-year loan on top of current debts, including for waking watch, which we still have no remedy to. Adding insult to injury, Ministers are trying to gag recipients of the building safety fund from speaking to the media. That is just not going to happen. Have Ministers learned nothing about transparency from the Grenfell inquiry? Is it not about time that Ministers stepped in and made sure that the developer community shoulder their responsibility for this mess?

Christopher Pincher: The Government have stepped in: they have spent £1.6 billion of public money on remediating the most difficult and challenging buildings that require help and support. We have made a further £30 million available for waking watch. The Building Safety Bill to which the hon. Gentleman refers—one of the most significant pieces of legislation in this Parliament—will be brought forward to make sure that building defects such as we have seen are things of the past. In the meantime, we will work at pace to find solutions that resolve the question of building defects such that we do not see hard-pressed leaseholders enduring difficult, unforeseen and unfair taxes. If those leaseholders wish to step forward and make comments themselves, who am I to say that they should not? We live in a free country; let them speak.

Waking Watch Relief Fund

Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): What plans he has for the allocation of the recently announced waking watch relief fund. [910660]

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): We expect that the £30 million fund will be open this month, as I said earlier, with the aim to start providing funding for the installation of alarms as quickly as possible. We will work with local authorities and fire and rescue services on the delivery of the fund, and we expect to publish a prospectus with further information on the additional eligibility criteria and evidence requirements as soon as possible.

Sarah Olney [V]: Residents of Royal Quarter, Kingston in my constituency have contacted me to say that their building has been assessed as having dangerous cladding, but they cannot apply to the waking watch fund, as their building is less than 18 metres tall. Leaving leaseholders to pick up the tab for remediating cladding means that many buildings will not be made safe in the near future. Will the Government commit to funding the remediation of cladding on all buildings as soon as possible, to ensure that they can be made safe, and then claim the money back from those responsible?

Christopher Pincher: I am obliged to the hon. Lady for her question. In our response to this challenge, we have been guided by Dame Judith Hackitt, who advised that we should focus our attention specifically on buildings that are over 18 metres, and that is what we have done. We believe that the £30 million that we have made available will go a long way to helping with the waking watch challenges of many of those buildings. It still remains the responsibility of developers and owners to make safe the buildings that they own or are responsible for and to resolve the defects in them. That is the point I have made from this Dispatch Box before and which I make again today, and it is the point that the Building Safety Bill will help to remedy.

Local Government Powers

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): What steps he is taking to deliver more powers to local government bodies. [910661]

The Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government (Luke Hall): We are committed to levelling up across the United Kingdom by devolving directly to local areas, which understand the needs in their community and are best placed to take decisions over investments to drive economic growth and deliver services for their communities. From May this year, 41% of people in England will be living in areas with directly elected regional mayors, and we intend to bring forward the devolution and local recovery White Paper in due course.

John Lamont: I welcome the answer from the Minister. It is important that local government has the powers to deliver quality services, but unfortunately in Scotland the SNP Scottish Government have been grabbing powers back from local authorities for years. Does the Minister agree that we need to see Governments of all levels working together to ensure that British people get access to the services they deserve?

Luke Hall: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that devolution should be about delivering services that work for local people, which is why we are committed to devolution. We will need, at all levels of government across the country, to work together to achieve that and the best possible services for residents. We intend to bring forward the devolution and local recovery White Paper in due course, which will detail how we will partner with places across the UK to build a sustainable recovery. I can absolutely assure him that this Conservative Government will continue to set the pace on devolution.

House Building

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to promote house building.
[910662]

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to promote house building.
[910670]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): The Government care deeply about building more homes and delivered more than 243,000 last year, the highest level for more than 30 years. We have gone to great lengths to keep the whole industry open during the pandemic, sustaining hundreds of thousands of people's jobs and livelihoods, while continuing to stimulate the market through our stamp duty cut. Covid will impact starts significantly, so we are taking steps to sustain activity, including delivering up to 180,000 homes through our £12 billion investment in affordable homes, the biggest investment of its kind for a decade.

Sir Edward Leigh: There are about 100 small rural villages in my Gainsborough constituency, and I doubt there has been any building of social housing in any of them over the past 40 years. It is virtually impossible for young couples, who often do precisely the jobs we want in rural areas, to buy into villages. We do not want our English villages filled with people like me; we want young people. *[Interruption.]* That is the truth. Will the Secretary of State do a massive campaign, like the Macmillan campaign at the beginning of the 1950s, to build social housing and rent to buy in our rural villages in England?

Robert Jenrick: Like my right hon. Friend, I want to see more homes of all kinds built in all parts of the country, and I want to deliver as many social and affordable homes as we possibly can. I was delighted that the Chancellor gave us the funding for the £12 billion affordable homes programme, which as I say is the largest for a decade. It has a target to deliver 10% of those homes in rural areas, so it should support his community in Lincolnshire.

To answer the broader question, rural areas need to consider how they can bring forward more land in the plan-making process in their neighbourhood plans for homes of all kinds. The current planning system permits local communities to choose the type of homes that they want, so when they allocate sites, they can say that they should be affordable homes, through which they can support the next generation. I do not think any village in this country should be deemed to be set in aspic. Organic growth has happened throughout the generations and can and should happen in the future.

David Simmonds: My constituents particularly welcome my right hon. Friend's recent announcements in respect of improving the circumstances of leaseholders and ensuring that overly tall buildings are not permitted to blight local neighbourhoods. When can we expect to see the benefit of those measures being implemented?

Robert Jenrick: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work he has done in this area, along with a number of his colleagues representing London constituencies. I have

corresponded with the Mayor of London, directing him that in the forthcoming London plan there now be a tall buildings policy for London, which will ensure that every borough can determine if and where tall buildings should be built. We have no objection to tall buildings. London needs more housing, and that includes good-quality tall buildings, but it is fair for communities to decide where that should be focused. It may be in areas where there are existing clusters of tall buildings, such as Nine Elms or Canary Wharf, or it might be around transport infrastructure in other parts of the city, but we should be able to protect the character and feel of outer London and those parts of the suburbs that my hon. Friend represents, which deserve that added level of protection.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab) [V]: Hard-working young people saving up for their own home have been let down by successive Tory Governments, and this Government are missing their own target of increasing to 300,000 the number of homes built per year by the mid-2020s. The stamp duty holiday pushed prices out of reach of first-time buyers, and the first homes scheme built literally no homes. So what does the Secretary of State say to the young people whose dream of home ownership he has so badly let down?

Robert Jenrick: Let us remember that the last Labour Government left house building in this country at its lowest ever level in peacetime—the lowest since the 1920s. The statistics that we published at the end of last year show that this Government are building more homes than any Government has built for almost 40 years, and were it not for covid, we would have built more homes than any Government since that in which Harold Macmillan was Housing Secretary many years ago.

We will keep on building more homes. We will keep on investing in homes through the affordable homes programme and more investment in brownfield land, and we will keep on bringing forward ambitious planning reforms to free up the planning system, to support small builders and entrepreneurs and to create and sustain jobs for the brickies, the plumbers and the self-employed people the length and breadth of the country who need a Conservative Government to be on their side. I would respectfully ask the hon. Lady to back us. She and her colleagues have voted against every single one of those measures since the pandemic. People across this country need those measures to get this country building and support jobs.

Housing Development Levies

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): What progress he is making on reforming levies on housing development.
[910664]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): Contributions from housing developers see around £7 billion a year invested back into communities, building more homes and vital infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, and helping to deliver more than 30,000 affordable homes last year. But, as my hon. Friend has raised with me a number of times, the system is still too long-winded and complex. To fix that, we will introduce a flat rate, non-negotiable single infrastructure levy. As set out in the "Planning for the future" White Paper, that will accelerate house

building, aim to raise more revenue than under the current process and deliver at least as many on-site affordable homes. We will publish more details on this soon.

Neil O'Brien [V]: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as well as raising more for the infrastructure that is needed to support new housing, more of the cost should be borne by developers rather than taxpayers, and that we should give more power, freedom and flexibility to local councils about how they spend those revenues in line with local priorities?

Robert Jenrick: The current system is not successful. It leads to long-winded wrangling. It places the cards in the hands of big developers, rather than local councils, communities and, in particular, small developers, who find it too costly and complex to navigate. The new infrastructure levy will be simpler and more certain and, as my hon. Friend says, it will do two important things. First, it will raise a larger amount of money, capturing more of the uplift in land values, so that more money can be put at the disposal of local communities. Secondly, it will give greater freedom to local councils to decide how they choose to spend that, so that development can benefit communities in flexible ways.

Housing Need and Planning Reform

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Office for National Statistics on housing need and planning reforms. [910666]

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): We regularly engage with the ONS on many issues, including the role of household projections within the local housing need standard method. The hon. Gentleman may also be interested to learn that, alongside the planning reform White Paper, Ministers and officials have hosted and attended a very large number of consultation events. We are always interested in working with stakeholders and experts on proposals, and we welcome the expertise that the ONS brings.

Matt Western: Like communities up and down the country, the people of Warwick and Leamington are extremely concerned about overdevelopment and, in villages such as Bishop's Tachbrook, urban sprawl. When we look at the numbers from the district plan, we see 932 homes supposed to be built per year and the Government's figure from their "malgorithm" is 910 homes per year, whereas the ONS estimates 623 properties a year and, likewise, Lichfields 627. There seems to be a huge disparity between the figures from the ONS and Lichfields versus those of the Government. Will the Minister agree to meet me to discuss and explain the reasons for that because, on the face of it, the figures do not stack up?

Christopher Pincher: I am always happy, of course, to meet the hon. Gentleman, although he may be misinformed in so far as I think the local housing need for his own constituency and local authority is 627 a year, not the 910 that was projected in the Lichfields projections in the middle of last year. However, I am always very happy to meet him, and I am sure at that time he will be

very keen also to put on record his great pleasure in receiving £10 million in future high streets funding for Leamington, because his Boxing day tweet, in which he seemed to rubbish this spending, did smack a little of "Bah, humbug!" It seems that Ebenezer Scrooge does not live simply in the mind of Charles Dickens; he is alive and well, and living somewhere in Warwick.

Mr Speaker: I will not mention Chorley, but just keep it in mind.

Regeneration: Towns and Cities

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): What steps he is taking to enable regeneration in towns and cities. [910667]

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): What steps he is taking to enable regeneration in towns and cities. [910668]

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): What steps he is taking to enable regeneration in towns and cities. [910669]

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): While we look to the future with optimism as our vaccine programme continues to make progress, we know that covid-19 has meant an unprecedented challenge for towns and high streets. That is why, last month, I announced a new urban centre recovery taskforce, bringing together local leaders and industry experts to help our cities and towns to adapt and take advantage of the new opportunities that may follow. This builds on our wider planning reforms, giving shop owners the flexibility to change the use of their property and to rebuild vacant properties as homes. All this comes on top of our £3.6 billion towns fund, the £4 billion levelling-up fund and the new brownfield funding, all of which will ensure that towns have the investment they need to prosper.

Jack Brereton: I welcome the recently announced levelling up and brownfield funds. As we did not benefit in Stoke-on-Trent previously from similar funds, will my right hon. Friend do everything possible to ensure that we do not miss out this time on much-needed funding for towns such as Longton and Fenton in my constituency and for our entire city?

Robert Jenrick: We will be publishing very soon the prospectus on the levelling-up fund, and that will give an opportunity for all parts of the country to benefit from this additional funding, including the community that my hon. Friend represents in Stoke-on-Trent. We also, as a result of his assiduous lobbying, have brought forward further funding for the remediation of brownfield land. Stoke-on-Trent has an excellent track record of developing new homes, but it does face significant challenges with the cost of remediation and the viability of those homes, so I hope Stoke-on-Trent will benefit from that funding as well.

Rob Butler [V]: Tremendous strides have been made in Aylesbury over the past year with the council and the town centre management team working incredibly hard, despite coronavirus, to make the town a place in which people want to live, work, shop, visit and invest. Proposals for the regeneration of the Market Square and Kingsbury Square will give a much-needed boost to the street scene, so could my right hon. Friend outline how the

Government will assist ambitious local authorities such as Buckinghamshire Council to make plans for regeneration in Aylesbury a reality?

Robert Jenrick: I am very pleased to hear that Aylesbury has made such progress with its regeneration plans, which will complement Buckinghamshire's ambitious garden town project—to which we have already allocated over £172 million—to unlock 10,000 homes. My hon. Friend is right to say that this year a priority post covid for every single council in the country, including his own, must be how they can help their town centre to thrive, not just today but well into the future. That will include ambitious plans to turn underutilised retail into work spaces and homes, and trying to attract private sector investment by making full use of the planning reforms that we have brought forward, with a more flexible, more certain and more responsive system to make regeneration a reality.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con) [V]: I am delighted that high streets across the north-west will benefit from the future high street fund, including Kirkham in my constituency. However, seaside resorts such as St Anne's that are already in need of regeneration have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic, so what plans does the Department have to support the regeneration of this Lancashire coastal gem?

Robert Jenrick: I was very pleased to announce last month that Kirkham will benefit from our future high streets fund, receiving over £6 million, which will go a long way to support its ambitious plans. Not only that, but my hon. Friend's constituents will no doubt benefit, in part at least, from the £39.5 million that we have awarded to nearby Blackpool, which will help to revitalise the town and fund several projects, including modernising the illuminations, so that they can be brighter than ever later this year. He is right that as a seaside town St Anne's faces some very significant challenges, which he and I have spoken about in the past. We have provided over £230 million of support to other coastal towns in England through the coastal communities fund, and coastal communities will be very much in our thoughts in the £4 billion levelling-up fund and also as part of the UK shared prosperity fund, both of which we will be publishing prospectuses for very soon.

Topical Questions

[910714] **Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): Over Christmas the Government announced the 72 recipients of our £830 million future high streets fund competition, enabling the delivery by councils of ambitious plans for regeneration. Councils are once again critical to the covid-19 pandemic, and our focus in the coming weeks will be on ensuring that they play a full and supportive role in the vaccination programme, especially ensuring that the hardest to reach in each of their communities are protected and vaccinated.

The work that communities have done in protecting some of the most vulnerable in society—rough sleepers—has truly been first-class. Last week, I announced the

next phase of our strategy, which has been widely praised as one of the most successful of its kind in the world, and which has already committed over £700 million in the past year to supporting rough sleepers and the homeless.

The Prime Minister and I have been clear that central to this Government's mission is the Conservative party's promise of home ownership, helping more people to achieve the dream of owning their own home. Our landmark leasehold reforms are the next step in that great tradition. We are putting an end to practices that for far too long have soured the dream of home ownership for millions, and preparing the way for a better system altogether with the active promotion of commonhold.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: [V] Notwithstanding what the Secretary of State has just said about our councils being at the frontline of this pandemic, in addition to general grants Bucks council has received £200 million across 25 specific grants as at the end of the last year, but they are subject, I am afraid, to myriad conditions. For example, it has been told that the contain outbreak management fund cannot be used to support local businesses. Surely the Secretary of State can see that it would be better to give our councils the freedom and flexibility to deploy those grants in a way that best meets the needs of their communities, as, after all, they are really facing the danger we all fear?

Robert Jenrick: My right hon. Friend raises an important point. Local councils have done a fantastic job, but they have limited capacity and in many cases they are close to the limit of that capacity. We are very aware of that. I am urging my colleagues in Cabinet and across Government to prioritise carefully their asks of local government, to ensure that the schemes they bring forward are as simple as possible to reduce the burden on local councils. My long-standing view is that we should be providing funding in almost every case to local councils on an unring-fenced basis. That is certainly the way we have proceeded in general throughout the pandemic. We have provided £54 million of unring-fenced funding to her local council on top of, as she said, a whole range of schemes to support local businesses and the care sector.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): The Secretary of State has taken the extraordinary decision not to challenge the opening of a new deep coal mine in Cumbria. In the year the UK is hosting COP26, we need to show an example to the rest of the world. The application is of national, even global, importance and demands his intervention. Will he now commit to block this disastrous application? If he will not, will he tell the House how he expects anyone to take the Government seriously ever again on tackling climate change?

Robert Jenrick: I cannot comment on an individual application, other than to say that a decision not to call in an application is not a decision on the merits of a particular case. It is a decision on whether it meets the bar to bring in a case and have it heard on a national scale, or whether, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, it is better left to local democratically elected councillors, in this case in Cumbria. It is those councillors who will now make the decision. The national planning policy framework presents a balanced judgment that they will have to make, balancing our national presumption against

new coal with any particular benefits that a project might bring to that community in terms of jobs, skills and economic benefit. That is a decision that in this case will be made by the democratically elected members on Cumbria County Council.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): In November, the Secretary of State promised me that more details about the replacement of EU structural funds would be revealed in the spending review. They weren't. The Scottish Government and councils have been left in the dark about the future of the UK shared prosperity fund. Why did the Secretary of State break his promise in November, and where is the so-called respect agenda for devolved nations?

Robert Jenrick: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken. We said at the spending review that we are bringing forward not just the UK shared prosperity fund but £220 million of additional funding on top of that to support local communities in all parts of the country, including Scotland. We will shortly be publishing the prospectus. I hope he will now take this occasion to welcome the fact that not only will Scottish residents and businesses receive as much funding as they would have received had we stayed in the European Union, but £220 million more than that. We are more than meeting our commitment to his electors in Scotland.

David Linden: I am glad the Secretary of State has touched on that, because Scotland's share of the measly £220 million of transition funding to replace structural funds will be £18 million. If Scotland was an independent member of the European Union, it could expect to receive over £121 million at the very least. How can he claim that the shared prosperity fund is replacing lost EU funds when Scotland is receiving less than a sixth of what it would if it had stayed in the European Union?

Robert Jenrick: The hon. Gentleman needs to do his sums again, if he is fully abreast of what is happening. The EU structural funds will continue for the coming year at the level they would have been at had we remained a member. The Chancellor has chosen, in addition to that funding, to add £220 million more. The hon. Gentleman does not know the proportion of that going to Scotland, because we will publish that in the prospectus. The figure he quotes is the one set by the European Union, so his objection is to the way in which the European Union chooses to divide up its structural funds to support local communities, not to the way that this Government can. Fortunately, as a result of leaving the European Union we can make our own decisions in the weeks and months ahead.

[910716] **Lee Anderson** (Ashfield) (Con) [V]: The £6.2 million future high streets fund is a welcome boost for Ashfield. Along with the towns fund of up to a third of £50 million for our area, this investment shows a real commitment to level up in red wall seats like mine. However, the forgotten town of Eastwood in my constituency has been left behind for years under successive Labour MPs and Labour councils. Will my right hon. Friend therefore please meet me to discuss once again how Eastwood can be included in the next round of funding?

Robert Jenrick: My hon. Friend has already secured, as he says, the town deal for Ashfield, and the good news over the Christmas period is that it will also benefit from the high streets fund. We have been supporting Eastwood under this Government. The redevelopment of Mushroom Farm has received £160,000 for new commercial space for small and medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurs in his constituency, but I would be very happy to meet him and see what more we might be able to do, so that all the investment that we have brought to Ashfield is also spread to Eastwood.

Mr Speaker: I bet they have been kept in the dark.

[910715] **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP) [V]: Can the Secretary of State confirm that his new Everyone In policy announced last week includes people with no recourse to public funds, without exceptions or caveats? And will he listen to calls from the Local Government Association and others for no recourse to public funds conditions to be suspended so that everyone who is vulnerable can access help?

Robert Jenrick: We have been very clear that the further work that we are doing now, building on the hugely successful Everyone In scheme, will be available to all individuals. Councils need to apply the law and that means making an individual assessment, but the unique circumstances of winter and the pandemic will mean that councils will use that to support more people off the streets and, importantly, to view this as a moment not just to support them now, but to get them GP-registered so that, in due course, they can be vaccinated, so we lead the world in supporting this vulnerable group and ensuring that they are fully vaccinated.

[910717] **Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con) [V]: Not too long ago, the Secretary of State met me on Dinnington High Street to discuss help for smaller towns, and especially help for Dinnington. The towns fund, which is an excellent initiative that will help to rejuvenate many town centres, does not benefit smaller towns such as those in Rother Valley. What plans does he have to introduce a similar scheme that will benefit the likes of Dinnington, Maltby, Aston and Thurcroft, so that our towns in Rother Valley can also be revived?

Robert Jenrick: I do remember that visit to Dinnington when my hon. Friend was a candidate, and I was delighted that he was later elected. He has assiduously made the point that we need to think about smaller towns and larger villages in the preparation of our plans, whether that is the levelling-up fund or the UK shared prosperity fund. I appreciate that in places such as south Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, there are small communities, perhaps ex-steel and ex-coalfield communities, where the need is great and where we need to ensure that investment arrives. That will very much be in our minds as we prepare the prospectus for the levelling-up fund.

[910720] **Kate Osamor** (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: More than three years after Grenfell, thousands of worried tenants go to sleep every night in buildings clad with flammable material. Will the Minister confirm when he expects all flammable cladding will be removed from residential properties?

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): I am obliged to the hon. Lady for her question. I know that she campaigns hard for her constituents on this issue. On 21 January—in a little under two weeks' time—we will be able to release the latest figures on the remediation of aluminium composite material cladding. We believe that, by that time, we should show that around 95% of the buildings identified at the start of last year—having such safety defects—will have had their work either completed or it will be under way. We are absolutely committed to resolving this issue for leaseholders. That is why we are accelerating the work to find a package that will ensure that they are not left disadvantaged.

[910718] **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con) [V]: Despite the best efforts of local authority inclusion officers, there continues to be a crisis in the education of Traveller children, with around a third of Traveller children in my area not getting a proper education. The planning system has to bear some responsibility for that. As the Department reviews this policy, will it look at a more integrated approach so children generally go to school on a regular basis and get a better education? Will that be factored in to future planning policy as the Department reviews this area?

Robert Jenrick: My hon. Friend is one of the most knowledgeable and thoughtful Members of the House on this subject, which he and I have discussed many times. Fewer than one in five children from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller background meets the expected standard for English and maths at GCSE. I am firmly committed to delivering a cross-Government strategy to improve life chances in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and, as my hon. Friend says, to encourage greater integration, particularly in education. In the depths of the pandemic, my Department has invested £400,000 in

education and training programmes for GRT children, so that they can receive extra tuition and catch up on lost learning.

[910729] **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab) [V]: In November, the Public Accounts Committee published a damning report on the towns fund, stating that the selection process was not impartial and was almost certainly subject to political interference from Ministers. Wyre Council's strong bid for the future high streets funding for Fleetwood, which I supported, was rejected last month. Was that selection process, which saw Fleetwood's town centre miss out, also not impartial?

Robert Jenrick: The hon. Lady misrepresents even what the Public Accounts Committee had to say about the towns fund; I urge her to re-read what it said and not to be so liberal with her language. I can assure her that the high streets fund used a 100% competitive process, and Ministers had no say in choosing the places selected.

If fault lies anywhere, I am afraid it lies with the hon. Lady's local council, because despite our giving it hundreds of thousands of pounds to produce plans, and despite the no doubt great need in the community, it failed to put forward proposals that met the Treasury's basic benefit-cost ratio value-for-money standard. That is a great pity. The people of her local community have missed out, but if the blame lies anywhere, it lies with her local council.

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

3.31 pm

Sitting suspended.

Speaker's Statement

3.35 pm

Mr Speaker: Before I call the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I have a short statement to make about the events at the Capitol in Washington DC last Wednesday and Thursday. Like many hon. Members, I was shocked and dismayed by the events that took place. I wrote a personal letter to Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to offer my solidarity—not least at the trashing and occupation of her office. Since I wrote the letter, we have learned of the very sad death of Officer Brian D. Sicknick. Elected representatives in the House and the Senate, and the staff who support them, showed great courage in ensuring that the democratic process was delayed but not stalled. I am sure I speak for all hon. Members in passing on our best wishes to them all and our condolences to the family and colleagues of Officer Sicknick.

Before I bring in the Chancellor, I just mention that Chorley had a great win, by the way.

Economic Update

3.36 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rishi Sunak): Before I begin, I am sure the whole House will join me in sending our very best wishes to my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire). I have been fortunate in having worked closely with him, and he is one of the nicest and most decent people in politics—a fantastic Minister and a tireless advocate for his constituents. We all look forward to his speedy recovery and to seeing him back in this place as soon as possible.

Last week, the Prime Minister set out the actions that we must take to control the spread of coronavirus. With your permission, Mr Speaker, today I will update the House on the economic situation we currently face, the action we are taking to support the British people and businesses through the crisis, and the factors influencing our outlook.

As the House knows well, coronavirus has already caused significant harm to our economy. The scale of the impact bears repeating. GDP fell by 18.8% in the second quarter of 2020. While the economy grew as the country opened up over the summer, it remained 6.7% smaller than it was before the crisis. The Office for Budget Responsibility's November forecast showed GDP falling again in the final quarter of last year and it forecast the largest fall in annual output for over 300 years. Even with the significant economic support we have provided, more than 800,000 people have lost their jobs since February. While the new national restrictions are necessary to control the spread of the virus, they will have a further significant economic impact. We should expect the economy to get worse before it gets better.

In response, the Government have put in place a comprehensive economic plan. We have provided a fiscal stimulus of over £280 billion to fund our plan for jobs, to support public services like the NHS, and to provide financial support for millions of people and businesses. Some 1.2 million employers have furloughed almost 10 million employees. Almost 3 million people have benefited from our self-employment grants, taking the total support for the self-employed to nearly £20 billion. Over 1.4 million small and medium-sized companies have received Government-backed loans worth over £68 billion. Tens of billions of pounds of tax cuts, tax deferrals and cash grants have been delivered to businesses, and the United Kingdom Government have guaranteed at least £16.8 billion of additional funding for the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In response to the new national lockdown, we are extending and increasing our financial support. We are providing a bridge for people and businesses until the economy reopens, to give them the chance to rebuild productive capacity. To do that, we have extended the furlough scheme to April, we are supporting self-employed people with a fourth income grant, and we have announced, alongside the introduction of new restrictions, an extra £4.6 billion to protect UK jobs and businesses. All business premises in England that are legally required to close, including in retail, hospitality and leisure, can now claim one-off grants of up to £9,000 for each of their business premises, benefiting more than 600,000 businesses and coming on top of the existing grants

[*Rishi Sunak*]

worth up to £3,000 paid each month. We have also made discretionary funds of £500 million available for local authorities in England to support local businesses in those areas, on top of the £1.1 billion of discretionary funds that we have already provided to local councils.

Sadly, we have not been and will not be able to save every job and every business, but I am confident that our economic plan is supporting the finances of millions of people and businesses. Across almost all areas of economic policy, we are providing comparable or greater support than all our international peers. As the Office for Budget Responsibility, the Bank of England and the International Monetary Fund have all recognised, our economic response is making a difference by saving jobs, keeping businesses afloat and supporting people's incomes.

Looking forward, there are signs of hope. First, with the vaccine, we can start to see a path out of coronavirus. Vaccine roll-out is our most important economic lever and we have made available over £6 billion. We have now administered over 2.4 million vaccine doses across the United Kingdom, and by 15 February we aim to have offered a first vaccine dose to everyone in the top four priority groups identified by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

Also, the data shows that there are potential sources of underlying resilience in our economy. In aggregate, we have seen the household savings ratio reach record levels and, taken as a whole, corporate sector cash buffers have improved. And of course, we have now agreed a new trading partnership with the European Union. We have removed that uncertainty from businesses and can now start to do things differently and better—not least in financial services, where in November I outlined for the House our plan to reinforce the UK's position as a globally pre-eminent financial centre.

While the vaccine provides hope, the economy is going to get worse before it gets better. Many people are losing their jobs, businesses are struggling, and our public finances have been badly damaged and will need repair. The road ahead will be tough. Now it is time for responsible management of our economy, taking the difficult but right long-term decisions for our country, but I am confident that, with this comprehensive support that the Government are providing and, above all, the determination, enterprise and resilience of the British people, we will get through this. I commend this statement to the House.

3.44 pm

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: I start by joining the Chancellor in sending my very best wishes to the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire). I know I speak for everyone on the Opposition side of the House in wishing him a speedy recovery.

Six weeks have passed since the Chancellor last addressed this House. In that time, the Prime Minister scrapped his proposed relaxation of public health rules, introduced a new tier 4 level of restrictions for London and large parts of the south-east, and then superseded all of that with the imposition of a third national lockdown. After the Prime Minister's most recent announcement, Parliament was, of course, recalled, and Members were given the

opportunity to ask questions of the Prime Minister, the Health Secretary and the Education Secretary—but the Chancellor was nowhere to be seen. His sole contribution to a set of announcements that had profound implications for our economy was a 90-second video on Twitter, which raised as many questions as it answered.

There was no indication of how long the new grants are expected to cover and no clarity on how the discretionary funding for local councils has been calculated, nor of how it will be allocated. Funds being provided to the devolved nations were badged as new money, before the Treasury hastily amended its website to reflect the fact that that money had already been committed in December. We heard nothing about what would happen to those people who had started a new job since the beginning of November and are now ineligible for furlough. We heard nothing about what level the fourth grant for self-employed people would be set at, nor when that grant would be made available. We heard nothing for those people who have been excluded from Government schemes right from the very start, and we heard nothing about what the Chancellor would do to fix the broken system of support for self-isolation.

I was relieved to hear this morning that the Chancellor had undertaken to address the House today, but I deeply regret that, having last year blocked measures that would have helped to protect the NHS and secure our economy, today he appears to be out of ideas, urging us to look towards the sunny uplands but providing nothing new. The purpose of an update is to provide us with new information, not to repeat what we already know.

In addition, the Chancellor just now gave a highly partial picture of the state of our economy, talking of a rise in savings but not mentioning that over 5 million people are estimated to have taken on over £10 billion in debt just to get through the last year. He talked of corporate cash buffers, but did not mention that City experts have predicted that there will be over £100 billion in unsustainable corporate debt by the end of March.

The Chancellor needs to acknowledge the reality of the crisis we face—a crisis made worse by his Government's irresponsibility, with our economy having suffered the worst recession of any major economy. He needs to act accordingly. I therefore ask him to respond to the questions that businesses and workers desperately need answered. Will he update the furlough scheme to reflect the dates of the current lockdown? When will he set out the new incentive scheme he promised to provide for businesses that will now not receive the job retention bonus? When will he provide details on the next self-employment income support scheme? What does he say to people who have been excluded from Government support schemes from the very beginning and who still are not helped by today's announcement? How long will businesses have to make the new one-off grants last for? When will councils find out how the new discretionary funding will be allocated and on what basis it has been calculated?

Does the Chancellor believe that those who are classified as clinically extremely vulnerable should be automatically eligible for furlough if they cannot work from home? When will he fix support for those self-isolating, when the evidence for change is overwhelming? When will his much vaunted Project Birch actually start to deliver for

struggling manufacturers? Will we have to wait until the Budget for recognition of all these problems and solutions to them, as was suggested by his social media account?

We had all hoped for a more optimistic start to 2021 than a new national lockdown and yet more uncertainty about the future, but the people of Britain understand that they have to make sacrifices. They are doing their bit for the national effort while the vaccine is rolled out. They are fulfilling their side of the bargain. The Chancellor must fulfil his.

Rishi Sunak: I thank the hon. Member for her response, and in particular for her comments about my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire), which I appreciate.

I think that it is right, where possible in this House, that we acknowledge those areas—many areas, in fact—where there is agreement on both sides of the House: for example, on wage support, on business support, on loan guarantees, on funding for critical public services, on tax deferrals and tax cuts, on support for renters and homeowners, on support for job creation, retraining and skills, on support for children learning at home, on support for the self-employed, on support for the NHS, on support for the vaccination roll-out, and on testing. I could go on. The truth is that, politics aside, there is in fact significant unity of purpose in this place: to protect the most vulnerable; to vaccinate our people as quickly as possible; to reopen our country; and, finally, to rebuild and begin the process of recovery. Given this agreement, while it is right to acknowledge the difference in degrees and emphasis that the hon. Member poses, it is clear that on the fundamentals there is, in fact, little disagreement.

Let me turn to the shadow Chancellor's specific areas of concern. With regard to the formula for the local authority grants, I can tell her—as was, I think, published—that the formula for the additional half a billion pounds will be the same as that for the £1.1 billion that was issued shortly before the end of last year. With regard to the furlough dates, she will be pleased to know that the change in date from the original spring date through to the new date at the end of October, before the announcement of the new scheme and the extension, will bring an additional 3 million people into coverage for the furlough scheme. I am sure that she will join me in welcoming the fact that the scheme has protected more than 9 million jobs over the past several months. It is, of course, already possible for people to be furloughed if they are clinically extremely vulnerable or have childcare difficulties, but those decisions are, of course, to be made by individual employers and their employees. It would not be right for the Government to put a blanket mandate in place. The hon. Member is right that the Budget is the appropriate place to consider her various other questions, given the scale of the response and the fact that all our major avenues of support have been extended through to the spring.

The hon. Member made a comment about this country having experienced the worst recession of any major economy. It is important in this place that people have the right facts, particularly when those facts impact people's confidence and understanding of what is happening. I must gently point out some facts, which I am sure the hon. Member knows, because she will have studied this carefully. She will know that, when making

international comparisons between the performance of our economy and others, it is important that we are careful because everybody calculates things in very different ways. Indeed, as the Office for Budget Responsibility mentioned in its latest report—which I am sure she will be able to read—and as the Office for National Statistics has highlighted, in this country we calculate public sector output very differently from almost any other country. It is very clear that the way in which we calculate that output flatters other countries and disadvantages us when it comes to making such comparisons. As those independent forecasters have pointed out, when corrected for that difference we find that our economic performance is actually very much in line with comparable countries. It is not the worst, and I do not think that it is good for confidence or for people's understanding of the situation for that idea to be propagated.

Throughout this crisis the Government have always been pragmatic. When changes must be made, we have made them, and when help has been justified, we have always provided it. We are now so close to the end of this difficult period for so many people that I would ask the hon. Member at this time to recognise that the national interest is best served by our co-operation, not partisanship. The vaccine roll-out is the most important priority of this Government and provides us with the path to getting out of this situation, protecting people's health and releasing the restrictions that are hampering our economic recovery. That should be our focus—I know she will agree with me on that—and it is in that spirit, in the best traditions of this House, that I hope we will be able to see out this crisis in the coming months.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. I welcome the continuation of the vital measures to support British business through this further period, while keeping an eye on the hospitality sector and small businesses, which continue to have a very hard time and may need extra help.

May I invite my right hon. Friend to recall how we had to put VAT on energy-saving products before we left the European Union, because of European Union rules? Having struck VAT off sanitary products, can we look at other opportunities to use our freedoms now that we have left the EU to strike VAT off energy-saving products such as solar panels and home insulation, in order to promote the greener recovery that we want to see emerging from this crisis?

Rishi Sunak: I thank my hon. Friend for his advice and for the helpful information about the hospitality industry that he provided me with over the winter period. It has been helpful in formulating our response and I thank him for it. I also appreciate his thoughts on future tax policy, which he will know remains for the Budget. He is right to emphasise the importance of our green recovery, which was why I was pleased to make sure that we can fully fund, with £12 billion, the Prime Minister's 10-point plan for a green recovery, of which ensuring that we upgrade the efficiency of our buildings with regard to heat and energy is a key part, with more than £1 billion put aside for that. I will bear my hon. Friend's further thoughts in mind.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP) [V]: I thank the Chancellor for finally gracing us with his presence and for not redacting his statement for once—I suspect that was because there is so little in it that is actually new. What is also missing is the additional £375 million that he promised to Scotland on 6 January. It was lauded by the Tories in Scotland, before the Treasury back-tracked, edited the press release and decided that Scotland's businesses were not entitled to the £9,000 that English businesses will receive. Why?

Businesses are still struggling with debt and loss of income, so will the Chancellor extend the English business-rate holiday to allow Scotland to do the same? Will he continue the reduction in VAT to assist those in the struggling hospitality sector?

The Chancellor acknowledges the 800,000 jobs lost, but not his role in their loss and the uncertainty that his stop-start furlough has caused. Will he commit to extend the furlough and the self-employment support scheme for as long as necessary, with no more arbitrary stop-start?

Still the gaps remain—for freelancers, directors of limited companies, those refused furlough and pregnant women who have lost out, as well as those on annual pay-as-you-earn and the newly self-employed. Will those who are now submitting tax returns be included in the self-employment support scheme from 31 January? Hundreds of thousands of people are counting on being able to do that.

Will the Chancellor extend the £20 increase to universal credit, and will he finally expand it to include those on legacy benefits who have seen no increase over these past months? Will he increase the pitiful level of statutory sick pay?

I have said for months now that we will not be out of this crisis quickly, and I am sad to have been proven right. On top of this crisis, Brexit is causing chaos for Scottish exporters trying to get their goods across the border. It is no wonder that Scotland is looking on at this shambolic Westminster Government and deciding in poll after poll that independence offers a brighter prospect for our future than more of the same old Tory austerity.

Rishi Sunak: I am happy to address directly the point about funding for Scotland and perhaps clear it up. In recognition of the very difficult circumstances that the devolved Administrations were grappling with—as we all are during this crisis—the UK Government made an unprecedented decision to provide an up-front funding guarantee to provide certainty and clarity for the Scottish Government so that they could make plans in advance of individual announcements being made and the appropriate Barnett sums being made available at that time. That was something that the Scottish Government had asked for, and it was welcomed. It is now clear that the hon. Lady seems to think that that is not a good thing. The point of doing that is to provide up-front certainty, but it is still also right to keep a tally of the various announcements, as they are made, about the additional sums that they trigger for Barnett, which will net against that guarantee, and then over time the guarantee will be adjusted. If I am hearing from the hon. Lady that she would prefer not to have up-front funding guarantees and would prefer the system of knowing Barnett consequentials only on an announcement-by-announcement basis, she should please write to me

and let me know. But in aggregate this year £8.6 billion in up-front funding guarantees has been made available for the Scottish Government; the most recent announcement did trigger Barnett consequentials, which will net off against that guarantee. Over time, as we have done, that guarantee will be increased over the year as new announcements are made. I am not sure I could tell from the hon. Lady's response whether businesses in Scotland have been offered an additional grant of up to £9,000 to help them get through the next few months. Perhaps she can clear that up for Scottish businesses, because that is what the UK Government are providing for businesses here in England. That money has been made available to the Scottish Government through the guarantee, and, of course, we look forward to seeing how they use it.

It is also important that this is not just about Barnett consequentials; we have always adopted a UK-wide approach to our support. Whether we are talking about the furlough scheme, all the things we have done on VAT, supporting people into employment or indeed on loans, many businesses and people in Scotland have been supported, because this is one United Kingdom Government and we will make sure that we provide support for our citizens in every single part of it.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): The hospitality sector in Ipswich certainly welcomes the grant support the Chancellor announced last week—that is very welcome—but about a month ago I held a virtual roundtable event for the sector in Ipswich and it was probably one of the most sobering virtual meetings I have taken part in since this pandemic started. It was very sad to hear about the extreme anxiety those in the sector have; they have poured their whole lives into the businesses where they are working and there is still concern even now. So will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will be reflecting on what further support might be provided ahead of the Budget? I am talking specifically about a potential extension of the business rates holiday throughout 2021 and also the support on VAT. There there is light at the end of the tunnel, but when we go into that much better place I want to make sure that The Brickmakers Arms, The Kingfisher, the Belstead Arms, Pauls Social Club and the California Social Club, which I am now a member of and stakeholder in—I own part of it now that I have become a member—are there with us.

Mr Speaker: Order. It has to be a shorter question. We have put you on early to make sure you can get things mentioned, but you cannot make a speech in a question. I think we more or less have the drift of it.

Rishi Sunak: My hon. Friend is a fantastic champion for his local hospitality industry, and I very much hope I have a chance to visit the California Social Club in Ipswich at some point in the future. I will bear in mind his suggestions for how we can look at providing further support. This is a vital industry for our local communities and nationally it employs more than 2 million people, and he rightly says that they have borne the brunt of these restrictions and deserve our support as we emerge on the other side.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD) [V]: First, may I associate myself and my Liberal Democrat colleagues with the remarks made about the right hon. Member

for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire), whom I have come to respect greatly during my time here? I wish him the speediest of recoveries.

What we have from the Chancellor today is just another series of patches, whereas we need a long-term strategy. We still have nothing for the many millions who have been excluded from all financial packages, and our independent retailers need support against the online behemoths. Today, we learned that already a quarter of a million businesses are facing collapse. So when will he tell us what his long-term strategy for recovery is? Will he extend the furlough through the summer? Can he tell businesses what help there will be for them now that they face an enormous burden of debt?

Rishi Sunak: All our economic support now extends all the way through the spring. We will of course have a Budget on 3 March, where we will provide an update on the next stage of our economic response to coronavirus and the economic outlook for the rest of the country as well. On the specific question regarding support for businesses as against those online, the hon. Lady will be aware that this year we implemented the digital services tax for the first time, which collects a levy on online marketplaces. That will collect significant revenue this year. It is a right step and we are working with other countries to put in place a multilateral solution, which is the best long-term way to solve the problem she highlighted.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I thank the Chancellor for his latest announcement on grants, which has been warmly welcomed by the hospitality sector. Can he confirm that the up to £9,000 he has made available is in addition to the up to £3,000 a month that has been made available to businesses that have had to close? He will be aware that businesses in the hospitality sector will continue to face real challenges in the coming months in order to play a part in our recovery. Will he reflect carefully on what further support we might be able to make available to this vital sector in the Budget?

Rishi Sunak: I can confirm that the £9,000 is in addition to the monthly grants of up to £3,000, which means that over the next three months, businesses could receive up to £18,000 of total cash support. I will bear in mind other avenues for future support. As we come out of this, it will be important that the hospitality industry is given every possible chance to succeed and flourish.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP) [V]: The Chancellor has said that we are now seeing signs of hope, especially because a deal has been struck with the European Union. It does not look like that in Northern Ireland, where supermarket shelves are empty and thousands of people are being sent letters from suppliers in England saying that neither they personally nor their businesses will any longer be supplied with goods. The steel industry today has received a letter from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs saying that engineering firms will have a 25% tariff imposed on steel that they bring here, and companies that sell goods to GB have been told that they will not get a refund on the taxes they have to pay, even though their goods are not going into the EU. All this has been brought about as a result of either a lack

of knowledge by officials in HMRC or a reneging on the promises the Government made that there would be unfettered trade and access for UK firms selling in Northern Ireland and vice versa. What is the Chancellor doing about the impact that his Department is having on businesses in Northern Ireland?

Rishi Sunak: I am sorry to hear about some of the examples that the right hon. Gentleman raised. I know that goods in aggregate continue to move smoothly between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and I am not aware of any significant queuing. Individual issues are being addressed by UK authorities. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is talking with colleagues across the House to make sure that we are kept abreast of any particular issues, so that we can look to resolve them as we can.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con) [V]: The Chancellor will know that I have worked hard and lobbied for financial support for Harlow's small businesses, and I really welcome the financial package for our town, worth well over £160 million so far. However, I have been contacted by many businesses in my constituency that have yet to receive much of the grant funding they have been allocated, such as Carol Bush, the wonderful landlord of the Golden Swift pub, because Harlow Council has yet to distribute it. What steps can he take to ensure that councils across the country distribute these grants from the Government immediately, as they should have already done, to help our hard-pressed businesses?

Rishi Sunak: My right hon. Friend is right that this cash should get to businesses as quickly as possible. I can confirm that the guidance will be published this week, and cash from central Government should be with local authorities by the end of this week, at which point it will be up to them to distribute it as quickly as possible. I know that they have been focused on this in the past several months, so hopefully this process can be as quick as we all need it to be.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab) [V]: Infection rates in Sefton have more than doubled in the last week, and hospital admissions are up by 50%. Those people who have been excluded from financial support so far want to reduce infection levels and hospital admissions by staying at home, protecting the NHS and saving lives—they want to play their part too, but they need the Chancellor's help to do so. What is his objection to using the £2 billion that the large retailers have returned in unused business rate relief to enable the many freelancers, self-employed people, people who run small firms and people who changed jobs at the wrong time to play their part in the national interest while we wait for the vaccine to be rolled out?

Rishi Sunak: I think that the Opposition had called for that money—the £2 billion—to be used to support small businesses, particularly retail and hospitality businesses, which we have now supported to the tune of £4.5 billion; I know it would be nice to spend the same money twice. With regard to those who need supporting for self-isolation purposes, we have made available £500, on a means-tested basis, to those who need that help, and that money is being worked through with local councils and the Department of Health.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): Given the state of public finances, and as we look to the post-covid recovery, will my right hon. Friend resist any calls, in his forthcoming Budget, for increases in public expenditure? This needs to be a private sector-driven recovery, most importantly by small businesses who will provide the employment and prosperity that we will need going forward if we are to fund our public services in future.

Rishi Sunak: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right and has spoken passionately about this throughout his entire career. I firmly agree with him: this must be a private sector-led recovery. Government cannot and should not do everything. We can support free enterprise by investing in skills, innovation and infrastructure, but ultimately it will be those small and medium-sized businesses that create the jobs that we desperately want to see.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab) [V]: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), I am very disappointed that the Chancellor has not given support for the many self-employed people who are not getting help, but my question is on another issue. The Chancellor appears to have little appreciation of how low-paid people manage to survive from week to week. Given the huge coverage today pleading with people to stay at home and follow the rules, I would have expected him to announce better support for those who need to isolate. The fact remains that some people who should be isolating will go into work because they are struggling to put food on the table or pay their heating bills, and cannot afford to lose any income. I ask the Chancellor again: will he go away and look at what extra support can be given to ensure that people who are isolating do not lose any income, and that that gives them the incentive to stay at home?

Rishi Sunak: We have in fact put in place payments to financially support those who need help when they are asked to stay at home, and they are available up to £500. As we have now reduced over time the period of self-isolation, the real value of those payments has actually increased, in some cases by 20%, 30% or 40%, depending on when people were contacted. More generally, throughout this crisis the Government have always made sure that we look after the most vulnerable. That is clear in the measures that we have taken and clear in the data that was published over the summer showing that those on the lowest incomes have had their situation protected the most by this compassionate Conservative Government.

Sir Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): In normal times, a successful British aviation sector supports 1 million jobs in this country. Will the Chancellor look urgently at what can be done best to ensure a rapid recovery for the sector heading into the summer? In particular, as he prepares his Budget, will he look at whether it makes sense for us to have one of the highest levels of air passenger duty anywhere in the world?

Rishi Sunak: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. He is right to passionately champion both our aviation and aerospace sectors, which are critical to our economy. I am grateful for the help that he gave in helping to design a test-to-release policy for quarantining arrivals, but also in campaigning for business rates relief

for airports—up to £8 million per airport, which is benefiting dozens of our regional airports up and down the country. I will bear in mind his suggested measures for forthcoming Budgets, but, like him, I want to see our industry return to its strength.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP) [V]: Just for the record, the Chancellor said that he was unsure of what the Scottish Government were going to do with regard to the business top-up grants. It has just been announced that larger hospitality businesses will receive up to £25,000 in Scotland. Due to his intransigence, it looks like the 3 million excluded will be going a full calendar year without support. That is absolutely shameful. The fact that the £20 per week uplift to universal credit does not apply to legacy benefits is equally shameful. Can the Chancellor tell my constituents about to lose that £20, when Minister after Minister admits that they could not survive on universal credit rates, why and how he expects so many of our constituents to do just that?

Rishi Sunak: The Scottish Government obviously have control over their tax-raising powers and indeed have the ability to top up and design benefits, so if that is something that they are keen to do, they have the ability to raise the tax to fund a permanent uplift in the welfare system. I am sure that that is an opportunity that the Scottish Government can take up if they want to and see fit to do so.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con) [V]: As well as the 18,000 people in my constituency who benefited from the furlough, businesses here have benefited from more than £50 million-worth of loans. As we move into the recovery, we need to make sure that they are creating jobs and are not held back by excessive debt repayments. What will the Chancellor do through pay as you grow or other schemes to make sure that they can get on with the business of creating wealth and creating new jobs?

Rishi Sunak: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the importance of cash flow, and he is right to highlight pay as you grow, which means that the 1.3 million businesses that have benefited from bounce back loans will have the opportunity significantly to reduce and extend their repayments for those loans. By extending the repayment term to 10 years from five, we have cut the average monthly payment by almost half from just over £500 to just over £300. Businesses also have the option to move to interest only, which further reduces the payment to around £60 or £70 on a typical loan. That extra cushion will ensure that businesses can save their cash for driving their businesses forward as they reopen after these restrictions.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance) [V]: I acknowledge the scale of the financial support that has been provided by the Chancellor, but almost a year on there is a stubborn refusal to address the needs of those who are excluded often by what are seen as very arbitrary rules. Will the Chancellor confirm that the Treasury has indeed received a number of constructive proposals on how existing schemes can be modified without the risk of fraud? Will he commit to giving those proposals a fair consideration and, where appropriate, to making back payments?

Rishi Sunak: I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury has met various groups and has received various proposals, and of course we will give those proposals fair and due consideration.

Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con) [V]: Stroud and the south-west is packed with creative people and industries that need innovative support right now. Specifically, many UK film and TV productions have struggled to get insurance for costs related to covid-19. Can my right hon. Friend outline for the House what the Government are doing to support this £4 billion UK industry?

Rishi Sunak: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the importance of the creative industries to the UK economy and, indeed, to our social or cultural capital. That is why the Government have created a £500 million film insurance scheme, to which she rightly alluded. More than 100 different film productions have taken advantage of the scheme so far and it is currently safeguarding over 14,000 jobs. It is that kind of thinking that we hope can help drive our recovery and support the industry that she rightly champions.

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): In line with advice from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Midwives, the TUC and Maternity Action, will the Chancellor of the Exchequer today commit to amending the furlough scheme to cover the cost of maternity suspensions on full pay for women who are 28 weeks or more pregnant or otherwise medically advised to shield?

Rishi Sunak: There are specific provisions in place in guidance for employers for calculating pay with respect to periods of maternity. Hopefully, those are clear, but I am very happy to look into the hon. Lady's specific point.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con) [V]: My right hon. Friend is aware how good Bridgwater and Taunton College is and how many apprentices it is training for Hinkley Point and many other organisations. One of the unforeseen consequences of the pandemic is that £8 million of the college's funding goes into training those people but, unfortunately, a lot of employers are not taking on apprentices, or are making them redundant, so those young people are not getting the chance to finish their training in the skills they need to get jobs. Can we urgently examine ways to ensure that they and the colleges are empowered to train those young people and get them into the workplace as soon as possible?

Rishi Sunak: I am fairly certain we have already put in place a new matching service for apprentices who, sadly, are unable to complete their apprenticeship with their current employer, but I am happy to get the details and write to my hon. Friend about that. More broadly, like him, I support passionately further apprenticeships, which is why we have given companies a £2,000 bonus to take on a new apprentice and provided additional funding to both businesses and colleges to pay for the associated training.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab) [V]: Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker, and well done Chorley FC!

If the only economic message is quibbling about how statistics have been used, there is no message. Now that the Chancellor is with us, I ask him: if he thinks there is so much unity of purpose, does he really stand by the plan to cut £20 a week from universal credit and to maintain the cruel two-child policy? I give him the opportunity to make an announcement and do something today to make sure that his appearance before us in the House today is not a total waste of time.

Rishi Sunak: At the beginning of the pandemic, we put in place a temporary uplift in universal credit, which lasts all the way through to the end of this year. Of course, future tax and welfare decisions will rightly be made at the Budget.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con) [V]: Labour-run Rotherham Council took a long time to devise a discretionary scheme for businesses and individuals excluded from support during the first lockdown, and ended up handing back millions of pounds to the Government because it had not distributed the money. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the Government have given councils the flexibility and support necessary to ensure that local businesses and the self-employed receive the full help they deserve, and that councils have a duty to distribute funds speedily and effectively, so that that mistake is never repeated?

Rishi Sunak: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. The funding is indeed discretionary. Obviously, I and the Government do not know the exact economic circumstances in every local area and it is right that local authorities are best placed to make those discretionary decisions. They know their areas and how best to support their businesses, and our guidance gives them the discretion to do so.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab) [V]: The Chancellor says he is supporting 95% of the self-employed—a claim he knows is disputed—but even if we accept his figures, does that not mean that 250,000 people lose out? Surely writing off a quarter of a million people and their families is not what he means by “whatever it takes”?

Rishi Sunak: Those figures are not disputed; they are fact, based on the returns we have. Of the returns we have from people who are majority self-employed, 95% qualify and are eligible for support. The 5% who are not, to whom the hon. Gentleman alludes, are excluded because their income is greater than £50,000. He will have heard me say before that the average income of those people is £200,000, and I think it is right that we target support on those who most need our help.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con) [V]: I thank the Chancellor for the further one-off grants for closed businesses of up to £9,000. Businesses in Crewe and Nantwich are very ready for the cash, but can he assure them that they do not need to choose between those one-off grants and the monthly grants—that both are available to affected businesses?

Rishi Sunak: I am happy to confirm that that is absolutely the case. Businesses do not have to choose: they will continue to benefit from the monthly grant of

[*Rishi Sunak*]

up to £3,000 a month, and on top of that, to help them to get through this difficult period till the spring, they can additionally receive a one-off grant of up to £9,000. That means that cumulatively over the next three months, businesses could receive up to £18,000 of support. I know that my hon. Friend's businesses will warmly welcome that. He has spoken to me at great length about supporting his local hospitality industry, and I hope that this helps.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD) [V]: The Chancellor's assertion that the Prime Minister's trade deal means that businesses can now start to do things differently and better will have been heard with total incredulity by anyone whose business involves the export of seafood. The new procedures for export are a bureaucratic mess that has brought export trade to a grinding halt. One local fish trader told me this morning that a single consignment now has to go with no fewer than 17 different attachments, and another told me on Friday that he had lost £50,000 on a single consignment that he had been unable to export. What is the Chancellor going to do to offer help to fish exporters to get them through this very difficult time—difficult because of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' own rules and procedures?

Rishi Sunak: What this deal ensures is that all those businesses that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned have tariff-free access to European markets. Otherwise, there would have been significant tariffs on those exports. He is right that there are changes to our trading relationship. That has always been the case, and the Prime Minister and the Government have been clear about that. I know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for the Duchy of Lancaster is working through individual issues as we look over time to streamline and improve all our processes. The right hon. Gentleman will also know that we have invested a huge amount of resource in the IT systems at DEFRA and in providing support for those businesses that need help to fill out various customs forms and meet new procedures.

Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con) [V]: I welcome the £4.6 billion in grants announced last week for the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. As my right hon. Friend will be aware, businesses in the hospitality industry have been subject to restrictions since the beginning of the pandemic, leaving the sector as one of the hardest hit financially. I have spoken to many affected business owners and workers in Stoke-on-Trent Central. As we approach the end of this financial year, with the possibility of restrictions now extending beyond it, will my right hon. Friend reassure me and businesses in my constituency that the Government will extend the existing package of measures, including the current business rates relief and VAT reduction, which act as an important lifeline for many in the sector?

Rishi Sunak: I know from visiting my hon. Friend's local area how important hospitality businesses are to her. While I obviously cannot comment on future Budget decisions, I can give her the assurance that I remain very committed to supporting our fantastic hospitality businesses through this crisis, so that they can recover strongly on the other side.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I thank the Chancellor for his statement. Northern Ireland is facing a double whammy. First, we are coping with the economic consequences of covid, and we thank the Chancellor for the help with that, but at the same time we are also trying to deal with a protocol that is crippling businesses in Northern Ireland. South of the border, the Irish revenue authorities have said that all companies can circumvent customs to deal with this problem, but on our side of the border, HMRC is increasing the red tape. This protocol is an unmitigated disaster. Personal protective equipment can no longer get into Northern Ireland. Foodstuffs cannot get into Northern Ireland. Marks & Spencer has produced a list of 400 goods it will not bring into Northern Ireland. We now must invoke article 16, and I encourage the Chancellor to do that. I am sure that the Scots Nats are delighted they do not have a protocol now.

Rishi Sunak: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question and for registering some of those issues with me. I know that he and other colleagues are speaking to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster about individual issues, and I will be sure to follow up with him later today. The hon. Gentleman will know, and I hope it is helpful, that we funded with £200 million the Trader Support Service, which is helping businesses in Northern Ireland to adjust to the new arrangements. I think 25,000 at the last count had signed up, and I know that the response has been pretty good, but there is always more we can do, and I look forward to talking to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster later.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con) [V]: The Treasury has done really well supporting businesses and jobs in this crisis, but directors of small limited companies are many of the people who will ultimately be paying for the Treasury's support. What can be done, perhaps using a version of the Federation of Small Businesses' suggestion of a directors income support scheme, to help prevent hard-working linchpins of our economy—on modest incomes taken as dividends—from falling through the cracks?

Rishi Sunak: We always will give fair and due consideration to any proposals that we receive. Indeed, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), has met the FSB and received the proposal, and we will go through it in detail.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Musicians and performers in Glasgow North have already very often been excluded from the Chancellor's support packages, and they will find it difficult to look towards a brighter future when they then hear that the Government have failed to negotiate visa-free touring for them across the European Union. Many of us have been warning that Brexit would simply compound the economic crisis caused by a pandemic, and that kind of decision seems to prove the point, does it not?

Rishi Sunak: We have provided significant support to our cultural industries. I think it is right that we highlight the contribution they make both to our society and to our economy. I struggle to find any other countries that have matched the £1.5 billion of support we have provided,

which has now gone out, I believe, to over 3,000 different cultural institutions, supporting the livelihoods and local institutions that cover performing arts, such as musicians, and we know that they will play an important part in our recovery.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): There are businesses in my constituency in Pembrokeshire that only made it through to the end of 2020 because of the outstanding support and intervention by this UK Government, and the funding support that the Treasury has provided for the devolved Administrations has been a key part of that. However, does my right hon. Friend share my concern that, at the same time as businesses in my constituency tell me they feel shut out of the Welsh Government's business support grant scheme, it appears that the Welsh Government are sitting on about £1 billion of unallocated funding support? Does he agree that this is not a moment for holding back support and that we need to be getting it to the frontline, especially for small businesses?

Rishi Sunak: I thank my right hon. Friend for the question, and he is absolutely right. We must try to get our cash support out to businesses as quickly as possible; they are suffering as we speak. The Welsh Government have been provided with over £5 billion in an up-front funding guarantee, and he is right to highlight the importance of that money getting out to support the local businesses that he knows are so important to driving the future prosperity of the Welsh economy.

Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab) [V]: Analysis by the Resolution Foundation, based on the number of households claiming universal credit or working tax credit in April last year, found that 34% of working-age households across the north-east stood to lose out on over £1,000 a year if the uplift is cut, as currently planned, in April 2021. Unless I am mistaken that is still the case, although the Chancellor said it was at the end of the year in answer to an earlier question, so maybe he can clarify that. Can I ask the Chancellor if he agrees with me that it would now be unthinkable to cut this lifeline, given the ongoing significant impact the pandemic has had on low-income families?

Rishi Sunak: It is important to recognise some of the other things that we have put in place for next year already, notably support for over 3.5 million vulnerable households with their council tax bills—£150 each, worth £670 million in aggregate—but also increasing the national living wage above inflation, at 2.2%, providing about £350 of benefit to those on low wages. Those are the kinds of things that this Government will continue to champion.

Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con) [V]: Can I first welcome the furlough extension, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, which will give many Carshalton and Wallington residents a great sense of peace of mind? However, some businesses have been in touch with me with concerns about the October cut-off date to be eligible to start furloughing staff, so can my right hon. Friend outline whether this decision could be reviewed or what other support businesses can access to help mitigate this?

Rishi Sunak: The change in the date from the original spring date to October will bring an additional 3 million people into the scope of benefiting from the furlough scheme, and I know that is something my hon. Friend will welcome. With regard to additional support, he will know our comprehensive plan, whether it is discounted or Government-backed loans, tax cuts, tax deferrals, VAT deferrals, business grants, business rates holidays or discretionary funding from local councils. All of that is available depending on a business's circumstances, and I would urge his businesses to look online and see what they might be eligible for.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green) [V]: The Chancellor said earlier that there is "unity of purpose" across this House. One area where it is clear there is unity with everybody except him is that more support is needed for the excluded. It frankly beggars belief that he has yet again come to this House with nothing to announce for them, so I urge him to urgently look at the directors income support scheme for directors of small limited companies, which has been on his desk since November. There are also the recently self-employed still left out in the cold, and freelancers, those who combine PAYE and self-employment, and women who have taken time out because of pregnancy all still utterly abandoned. I want to know how he has the gall to continue pretending that he is doing enough for my constituents and the millions like them who are still left in poverty and despair.

Rishi Sunak: With regard to our support for the self-employed, it is worth noting—not that you would know it from what the hon. Lady said—that almost 3 million people have benefited to the tune of around £20 billion. I do believe that that is comprehensive. It is certainly more comprehensive and generous support than has been provided by almost any other country I can find. Of course, we always look at other suggestions we receive, and I will continue to do that.

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con) [V]: As the pandemic continues, it is only right that the Government provide further financial assistance to support jobs and businesses. That is why I welcome the £4.6 billion of funding for grants that was announced last week, which will benefit people and businesses across Barrow and Furness. However, does my right hon. Friend agree that in the long term we have to return to sustainable public finances in order to build resilience to similar shocks in the future, whatever they may be?

Rishi Sunak: My hon. Friend makes an excellent and insightful point. This is about resilience in the public finances—he used the word well. We have faced two supposedly once-in-a-generation shocks in the space of 10 years and we do not know what the future holds. What we do know is that we want to encounter the next shock that comes along in as strong a position as possible, because ultimately that will enable us to respond in as comprehensive and generous a way as we have here. That is why, over time, we must rebuild our public finances to that position of, as he said, resilience and strength.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I wonder if hon. Members really do believe in being fair to everyone. If they do, I implore them to ask short

[Madam Deputy Speaker]

questions—do not make statements and do not make speeches. This is a statement by the Chancellor. It is an occasion for a quick question. I have 36 people to get in and 25 minutes in which to do it. Shall we see whether Members really do want to be fair to everybody else?

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab) [V]: Behavioural scientists are clear that to get people to self-isolate requires that they have the capacity, motivation and opportunity to do so. So far, frankly, the £500 on offer is not achieving that. What assessment has the Chancellor made of that scheme, and what is he planning to do to improve it?

Rishi Sunak: I am not aware of any science or feedback showing that that scheme is not doing what it needs to do. The £500 is means-tested, it provides support and it has increased in real value as the number of days people are required to isolate has been reduced.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con) [V]: A constituent approached me to say that many supply teachers working through agencies are not being furloughed because schools are open to key worker children, yet those supply teachers are not being called into schools because most year groups are learning remotely. Will my right hon. Friend look at flexibility within the furlough scheme in this area, similar to last time, to assist agency workers?

Rishi Sunak: I would be very happy to look at the specific point my right hon. Friend raises.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) [V]: I shadowed the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire), and I wish him successful treatment and a speedy recovery.

About 130,000 individuals across Greater Manchester are ineligible for any support—that number is second only to London. Many of them have been shut out of support since day one, which is almost a year ago now. Will the Chancellor confirm today that he is actually looking at this important issue, and confirm whether more support for this group is actually coming their way?

Rishi Sunak: As part of the announcement made last week, half a billion pounds of discretionary funding is being made available to local councils. That comes on top of the £1.1 billion that was made available at the end of autumn last year. If local councils want, some of that funding can go to support the very people the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): Financial services are very important to my constituency and to the country as a whole. I welcome the free trade agreement, but clearly there is more to be negotiated on financial services. Will my right hon. Friend outline how we can retain the strong relationship with Europe on financial services, while retaining autonomy to adapt the industry to our needs?

Rishi Sunak: I praise my hon. Friend for being a fantastic representative of her constituents when it comes to financial services. I have enjoyed my conversations with her, and I look forward to working with her and

the industry to ensure that we maintain a close relationship with the EU, but also that we look to capitalise on the new opportunities, making sure that London remains a pre-eminent global centre and that the UK does its bit. Whether it is on greening the financial system or taking advantage of new digital technologies, we must lead the world, and I know that she will help me to do that.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): The Welsh Government have not hoarded money meant for Welsh businesses, and it is dangerous to hear the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) saying such things in the Chamber. They are getting help to those businesses while the UK Government make a big fanfare over new help that turns out not to be new help at all. Will the Chancellor tell me and my constituents how much new money for Wales he has announced today?

Rishi Sunak: I am happy for the hon. Lady to refer to the answer I gave earlier, but if she would prefer that, rather than give up-front funding guarantees and certainty to the devolved Administrations in a pandemic, we returned to piecemeal funding by announcement, she should please write to me and let me know. The Welsh Government have received over £5 billion in up-front funding guarantees, and as we make announcements it is right that we highlight the amount of additional Barnett funding that flows from those announcements, so that that can be netted off against the guarantee.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con) [V]: I am delighted to learn that local authorities will be receiving additional cash at the end of this week. Could I please ask the Chancellor to do everything possible to help local authorities to get that money out of the door as quickly as possible, to help businesses' cash flow?

Rishi Sunak: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of speed. We try to keep the guidance the same, and that helps local authorities. Indeed, the guidance for the £500 million discretionary funding will be the same as for the £1.1 billion, and that will help local authorities. They should have the cash by the end of this week at the latest, and I too urge them to get it out as quickly as possible.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD) [V]: As in many places, local pubs and bars in Oxford West and Abingdon are on their knees. One of my constituents, a bar owner, has told me that her business is slowly going under and that she stands to lose everything. The £9,000 is of course welcome, but the concern is that this will delay rather than stop them going under, so will the Chancellor step in and save our locals by scrapping the rateable value cap for pubs, allowing them to access the retail, hospitality and leisure grant fund, offering rent holidays during times of enforced closure and guaranteeing now to extend the furlough scheme for as long as it is needed?

Rishi Sunak: The hon. Lady makes a good point about the importance of our local pubs. There is no rateable value cap on the grant. That was the case in the earlier iteration in the spring, but the latest grants are done by rateable value, and they are available for businesses with a rateable value in excess of £51,000. The businesses also benefit from the business rates holiday, so I hope

that helps, but I share her sympathy for the industry. I know it is difficult, and we must do what we can to help them.

Gary Sambrook (Birmingham, Northfield) (Con): The Chancellor will know that the furlough scheme and the self-employment scheme have helped to protect many millions of jobs across the UK and many livelihoods across the Birmingham, Northfield constituency, but as he said, unfortunately not every job is going to be able to be protected during the pandemic, so can he outline the measures he is taking across Government to help to support those who find themselves unemployed?

Rishi Sunak: I can give my hon. Friend my assurance that the Government's No. 1 economic priority remains jobs and trying to help people into employment. To that end, we have created various schemes and put billions of pounds towards them, whether through doubling the number of work coaches, the restart scheme for the long-term unemployed or, indeed, our kickstart scheme to help 250,000 young people at risk of becoming unemployed to find new work in Government-funded jobs. I look forward to working with him and delivering all those vital initiatives.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP) [V]: A number of people are still in childcare voucher schemes rather than having moved to tax-free childcare. A number of them did not realise, at the start of the pandemic, how long the impact would last, and they have now racked up large balances that they will not be able to spend before their child no longer needs wraparound childcare. Will the Chancellor please look at the people who have these large balances and consider putting in place some flexibility, or asking employers to put in place some flexibility, because they have ended up in this situation through no fault of their own?

Rishi Sunak: I am not familiar with the specific details that the hon. Lady raises, but I can see the logic of what she is saying, if I followed it correctly. I will happily have a look at that and write back to her.

James Daly (Bury North) (Con) [V]: I welcome the Chancellor's announcement of an extra £500 million of discretionary funding for local authorities in England. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that councils have absolute discretion in the use of those moneys, including, if they so choose, the provision of grants to self-employed workers or sole traders whose businesses are based at their home address?

Rishi Sunak: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that the grants are meant to be discretionary. It is for local authorities to make the decisions at their discretion as to how best to support their local economies. The guidance should remain the same as it was before. I believe it gives local authorities the discretion they need.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab) [V]: A supply teacher in my constituency contacted me last week after being told she would not be furloughed despite being unable to work while schools are closed. Last summer, less than half of supply teachers were furloughed. In some cases, they were furloughed at just 80% of the

national minimum wage. What steps will the Chancellor now take to ensure all supply staff are able to access the furlough scheme during the lockdown and to prevent them falling through the gaps?

Rishi Sunak: If I follow the question correctly, I think the guidance has already been clarified. It was already the case that childcare was a reason people could be furloughed. With regard to supply teachers, I will have a look at what the guidance says.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con) [V]: I welcome the continuation of the unprecedented support provided by the Chancellor throughout this crisis. While looking forward to economic bounce back, may I call on my right hon. Friend to extend the business rate holiday and VAT reduction, which have been absolutely critical to the tourism and hospitality sector in Fylde?

Rishi Sunak: I know how important the tourism and hospitality sector is to my hon. Friend's constituency and what a fantastic champion he is for it. I know how important those initiatives have been. Of course, future decisions of that magnitude will be for the Budget, but I will take what he says into consideration.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab) [V]: Community union self-employed members have raised serious concerns about discrimination in the self-employment income support scheme for those who have taken maternity or parental leave. They point out that eligibility conditions and calculation methods chosen by the Chancellor discriminate against women because they do not exempt periods of maternity leave. What steps has the Chancellor taken to ensure that all parents, and women in particular, are not penalised in their income support payments for having children?

Rishi Sunak: The guidance on eligibility for the particular circumstances the hon. Gentleman mentions has been published. It is designed to be fair to everyone and to take into account, as best we can, everyone's varying and different circumstances.

Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con) [V]: My constituency contains an award-winning nature reserve at Kenfig and some of the best surfing beaches in the world. The town of Porthcawl is a popular tourist town and Bridgend itself is an historic market town. It is no surprise, therefore, that the impact of covid-19 on the hospitality sector has really hit my constituents hard. Many have written to me recently to ask me to support UKHospitality's recommendations on how the Government can help, in particular with an extension of VAT and business rates support. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that every step possible should be taken to support this vital sector?

Rishi Sunak: My hon. Friend is right about the importance of this vital sector to our local communities and our economy, with hundreds of thousands of businesses and millions of people employed. Like him, I am keen to see it spring back to its former glory. I look forward to hearing from him about how he thinks we can best support that industry into the future.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab) [V]: Contrary to the Government's briefings, the problem with lockdown is not support bubbles or exercising with a friend. The key problem is that people are still being forced into work, with too many non-essential workplaces open and statutory sick pay so low many cannot afford to self-isolate when they need to. Will the Chancellor provide the economic support necessary for people to stay at home by ensuring that all non-key workers who cannot work from home are furloughed on full pay, and by raising sick pay to the real living wage at £330 a week?

Rishi Sunak: With the greatest respect to the hon. Lady, I think it is best that we listen to the scientists with regard to the appropriate health restrictions. She will have heard the chief medical officer this morning giving his view on the right approach to other restrictions. With regard to support, the furlough scheme remains one of the most generous and comprehensive anywhere in the world. It is something that I am proud of and which I know is providing security to many millions of people at this very difficult time.

Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con) [V]: The Chancellor will know that the Blue Collar Conservatism group was instrumental in persuading the supermarkets to return the business rates relief that they did not need; we asked them to do so on the basis that there were many who had gone without support, and they agreed to do so on that basis. Will the Chancellor therefore ensure that that £2 billion returned by the supermarkets goes to those who have so far been excluded from support? They cannot go another three months without any income.

Rishi Sunak: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend's tireless campaigning on this issue. She is a great advocate for the cause. She will know that we have just provided over £4.5 billion of support to many small businesses up and down the country, which I know she will warmly welcome and has called for. Indeed, part of that is half a billion pounds of discretionary funding for local authorities to support local businesses, many of which may include the people she has talked about who will be eligible for that support.

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab) [V]: For 10 months, 3 million people have been forgotten or excluded by this Government, including several of my own constituents, such as Graeme Park, and Karen and Matthew Cox. The Prime Minister said last week that these people will be listened to and that support packages are there to protect people, so can the Chancellor tell us clearly today what package of support is actually available for these groups, how much is available and when will people be able to access them?

Rishi Sunak: Rather than my recapping every single thing that we have done, let me say that it is worth bearing it in mind when the hon. Lady talks about 3 million people that for over half of them self-employment is not the primary source of income; they are not majority self-employed. From memory, the average income from self-employment of those individuals is around £2,000. It is actually the case that many of the other things that we have done will be of more significant support to them. Indeed, the majority of them are actually employed and can benefit from our furlough scheme,

so it is not right to say that they have received no support. We have put in place a range of different things, and many people are benefiting from them.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con) [V]: The hospitality supply chain is crucial to the sector: food and drink producers, dairies, breweries, wholesalers and many more. Will the Chancellor look at extra support for hospitality supply chains, such as with VAT and business rates, so that when the vaccine allows hospitality to reopen again, there is a supply chain there to support them?

Rishi Sunak: My hon. Friend is right about the supply chain. He will know that much of the supply chain also supplies the on-premises trade as well as the off-premises, so those businesses will have some trade during this period, but he is right that we must ensure that it is there for the recovery. The supply chain will, of course, benefit from our furlough scheme, which is very comprehensive in its eligibility and very generous. I thank him for his points and will of course bear them in mind.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Let us see if we can go a bit faster to try to get everybody in.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP) [V]: The Young Women's Trust found that because of covid 1.5 million women are losing income; 69% are claiming benefits for the first time; half of young mums are unable to keep or find employment because of childcare costs; and a third of women will not report sexual harassment for fear of being fired. Can the Chancellor therefore tell me how his Government can possibly continue to justify the five-week wait, have statutory sick pay at a disgracefully low £94 a week, and exclude many female business owners from help? Will he take proper action for women, who are bearing the brunt of this pandemic?

Rishi Sunak: All the support that we have put in place is blind to gender; no one is excluded on the basis of gender and I do not think it is fair to suggest otherwise. One of the reasons that I have been so keen to try to support the hospitality industry throughout this period, and to encourage people to be able to go back to it when it was open, was because of the social justice aspect. It is an industry that disproportionately employs women and other groups that we want to try to see protected. That is why it is a very important industry to me, and we must get it back to its former glory.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con) [V]: While politics is played with narratives around council tax increases, will the Chancellor confirm that the most important thing right now is support for local authorities to deliver public services in constituencies like mine? Will he please outline the steps that the Treasury is taking to deliver that support?

Rishi Sunak: My hon. Friend is right. We have provided over £3 billion of additional funding for local authorities next year to help them get through coronavirus in different ways and, within their day-to-day budgets, an additional £300 million of adult social care grant. They are seeing one of the highest core spending power increases in a decade. With regard to the political points that he knows others are trying to make, it is probably worth bearing it in mind that under the last Labour

Government council tax rose on average by about 6% every year; under this Conservative Government since 2010, it has risen so far by just over 2%.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP) [V]: The Chancellor of the Exchequer will share my desire to see economic recovery right across the United Kingdom. I thank him for the support provided to sustain businesses in this difficult time. However, in addition to covid-related challenges, businesses in my constituency are being hampered in trading by the chaos created by the Northern Ireland protocol. A local haulage company reports that protocol-related difficulties cost it an additional £48,000 last week. Another business in my constituency is being hit by 20% VAT on bicycle parts. Our second-hand car industry faces wipe-out because of the VAT margin scheme. The protocol spells economic harm for business and consumers in Northern Ireland. What will the Chancellor and his Government do to remove the barrier to economic recovery and free and unfettered trade within the United Kingdom?

Rishi Sunak: I am sorry to hear the various examples that the hon. Lady gave. I hope that the Trader Support Service can be of some assistance to her small and medium-sized businesses. We have funded it to the tune of about £200 million to provide support for the change of circumstances, and I know that 25,000 companies have already signed up and are benefiting from quite speedy support. I will of course keep that under review and ensure that it is doing what it needs to do.

Kate Griffiths (Burton) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for providing grants of up to £9,000 to businesses forced to close due to the new national restrictions. I know those businesses in retail, hospitality and, in particular, the pub industry in my constituency of Burton and Uttoxeter are grateful for that safety net. Will he continue to review the support available to them to ensure their long-term survival and growth as we come out of the pandemic?

Rishi Sunak: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. Hospitality is such an important sector for our local communities and indeed our national economy. I cannot comment on future Budgets, but I will bear what she says in mind. She can rest assured that I will do what I can to support the hospitality industry and ensure that it can drive our recovery.

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab) [V]: Last week, the Chancellor graced Members of this House with a 90-second video on Twitter announcing support for the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. While I look forward to him delivering the Budget on TikTok, those gimmicks leave businesses in the dark through a lack of scrutiny. Now that he has been freed from Twitter's time limits, will he tell struggling businesses in my constituency just how long they need to make those grants last?

Rishi Sunak: The grants we have put in place are one-off but can help businesses through to the spring. Additionally, they will, of course, continue to receive the monthly grants of up to £3,000, which will be paid throughout. That means that, for example, over the next three months, a business could receive up to £18,000 in

cash support. We will, as the hon. Lady said, have a Budget on 3 March, before that time elapses, at which point we will set out the next stage in our economic response to coronavirus.

Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Chancellor knows—not least from the conversations he had last November with businesses in my constituency—how heavily our local economy depends on the hospitality sector and how hard hit it has been. Will he give me and the sector an assurance that he will look sympathetically at its calls to extend the lower rate of VAT and the business rate holiday? What message has he got for the sector about its importance to the UK economy and to the wellbeing and quality of life of our citizens?

Rishi Sunak: I thoroughly enjoyed my conversation with my right hon. Friend's local businesses. He mentioned exactly the right point: quality of life. This is not just about our economy and jobs; this industry is so vital for our wellbeing, and it brings spirit, life and vitality to our local communities. He can rest assured that I will want to continue supporting the industry, as I have done in the past, and I will bear what he says in mind for future Budgets.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): A failure to make the £20 uplift to universal credit permanent would have a disproportionate impact on families across the north-east, which has the highest rate of unemployment and the second highest rate of child poverty. Will the Chancellor now commit to make that £20 uplift permanent?

Rishi Sunak: The hon. Lady, for whom I have a lot of respect, mentioned two things: unemployment and child poverty. We know that the best way to ensure that children do not grow up in poverty is for them not to grow up in a workless household; indeed, the rate of poverty among children who are not in workless households is five times lower. Work—removing unemployment—is the best, surest and most sustainable way out of poverty, which is why this Government have backed with billions of pounds our various initiatives to support people into work, which I know she will support, whether that is the restart scheme, the kickstart scheme, doubling the amount of work coaches or increasing the incentive for people to take on new apprentices. Those are all the surest ways to help people out of poverty, and that is why we are committing billions of pounds to that end.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We are officially out of time, but I will keep this running for a few minutes longer if Members will be decent and be quick. There are two more items of business, and it is simply not fair on other Members later in the day if this item of business takes too long.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con) [V]: Retraining opportunities will be a crucial part of our economic recovery. I have been really impressed by companies such as Openreach, which has set a promising target for more women in its employment programmes. Will my right hon. Friend the Chancellor look at making sure that women are not excluded from the economic recovery?

Rishi Sunak: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I have enjoyed my conversations with her on this topic. We want to make sure that people can find new opportunities, which is why we have funded companies with bonuses to take on new apprentices, as well as providing a universal entitlement to a level 3 qualification for the 37% of our adult population that sadly does not have one, and traineeships also provide young people with a start into work experience and then a job interview. Those are the kinds of thing that help people find economic opportunity, and we will make sure that women benefit equally from all of them.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab) [V]: Amy Pierce, the director of a small company in my constituency, was doing well until the pandemic. Since then, her turnover has dropped by 40%, but her costs have not. She has now had to lay off her staff, which is massively regrettable. What can the Chancellor say to small businesses like that to assure them that the employment base and the economic base will be there in towns such as Rochdale when the pandemic ends?

Rishi Sunak: I am incredibly sorry to hear about the example of the hon. Gentleman's constituent, which will be mirrored by many others up and down the country. As I said in my statement, the restrictions we have had to put in place have taken a significant economic toll on the country. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost their jobs, and businesses are suffering. We have tried to protect as many as possible. It is not possible to protect all of them, but with the support that we have put in place, I am confident that we are helping many businesses, protecting many people's incomes and saving many people's jobs. I hope that his constituent's business and many others can bounce back strongly once we are through this.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con) [V]: I very much welcome the Chancellor's substantial grant support to smaller hospitality businesses in my constituency, which will at least give them a chance of seeing through this difficult period. I also represent a constituency with a large number of small travel businesses that depend on the revival of the travel industry and, in particular, the aviation sector. As he prepares for the Budget, will he look at any way he can to help that industry and that sector get back on their feet as restrictions are lifted, hopefully in the spring?

Rishi Sunak: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the importance of the travel sector to our economy. I was pleased to work with him to help to put in place a test and release policy for international travel, which was helping, and to provide business rates support to our many airports—I know that up to £8 million per airport has been of value. I will continue to listen to him and others to see what we can do to support the economy as we recover out of this crisis.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab) [V]: It is nearly a year since the Chancellor rightly introduced the self-employed income support scheme, but despite his having had months to fix the gaps that have wrongly excluded millions, he is refusing to do so. The right hon. Member for Tatton (Esther McVey) asked the Chancellor whether the £2 billion in business rates relief that is being returned to the Treasury from supermarkets and

other large shops could be used immediately to support those who have been excluded and received nothing; will he now answer that question?

Rishi Sunak: The hon. Lady's party called specifically for that money to be used to support small businesses and high streets; indeed, not only have we just done that but we have done it to the tune of £4.5 billion, not the £2 billion that her party was calling for.

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con) [V]: Green finance has a crucial role to play if we want to build back better and transition to a net zero economy by 2050. The UK has a critical role in the development of the sector internationally, not just as a global leader in finance but with this year's presidency of COP26 and chairmanship of the G7. Will the Chancellor outline for the House what he is doing to develop the vital green finance sector?

Rishi Sunak: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point: not only are we leading in the world in reaching our net zero targets but we are a global financial centre, and we have combined the two to lead the greening of the financial system, which is an opportunity for us. We are going to issue a sovereign green bond this year and will be the first major economy to make mandatory the climate-related financial disclosures recommended by the international taskforce, which will help to cement our global leadership. I look forward to hearing from my hon. Friend the other things that we can do in this vital year for our journey to net zero.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab) [V]: A Castleford constituent—a single mum who works at a major company's distribution warehouse—has been told that her employer will not furlough her while schools are closed and that she has to take six weeks' unpaid leave that she cannot afford. The school has said that she cannot have a place as it is overwhelmed with key worker applications. Does the Chancellor agree that the employer's response is completely unfair? What should my constituent do now?

Rishi Sunak: I am more than happy to receive a letter from the right hon. Lady about the particular situation that she describes, but I hope she will understand—she will know this, having been in a similar position—that it is hard for me to comment on the specific circumstances between an employee and employer. The furlough scheme can be used for the circumstances that she described. Obviously, the school will be better placed than I am to determine whether the constituent in question is a key worker, but if the right hon. Lady writes to me, I will be more than happy to follow up on her questions.

John Howell (Henley) (Con) [V]: I add my support to the cause of directors who take income as dividends. As a former inspector of taxes, I have heard what Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has said and do not entirely agree with it. Will my right hon. Friend agree to meet me to discuss the options available to deal with directors who take income as dividends?

Rishi Sunak: My right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury has met several groups and heard representations on different proposals. I am not

aware of another country that has found a way to support people's dividend income, but if my hon. Friend knows of one, I would be delighted to look into it if he sends it in.

Dame Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab) [V]: Does the Chancellor believe that the £22 billion cost of Serco test and trace has been spent in a way that represents the best value for money?

Rishi Sunak: The testing capacity that we have in this country has considerably increased from where it was. The House will remember that at the start of this crisis it was 10,000, and now we are doing several hundred thousand a day, so that is a substantial increase, and testing can play a part in reducing the spread of transmission. Obviously, given the new strain of the virus, we have had to put in place new restrictions, which is disappointing, but I still believe that test and trace can play a role in suppressing the spread of the virus, especially as we come out of this crisis. The hon. Lady is right to hold me and others accountable for every pound of taxpayers' money that we spend and I am sure will continue to do so.

Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con) [V]: I have exciting, innovative companies of tomorrow located in Guildford, and they will be crucial to our economic recovery. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that these companies remain at the centre of his future plans?

Rishi Sunak: My hon. Friend is right: our innovative companies are a great strength of the UK economy compared with others and they will help drive our recovery. That is why we put in place the future fund, which was an unprecedented intervention to help 1,000 of our fastest-growing start-up companies with match funding. Innovate UK also made available £500 million of additional grants and loans through its innovation schemes, and most recently, we have committed extra funding for our start-up loans scheme next year. Taken together, it is a significant vote of confidence in those innovative companies, and I look forward to hearing from her other ways that we can support them to help drive our recovery.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: Last week, when I challenged the Prime Minister over the lack of support for the 3 million excluded, he claimed that they had "not been excluded", so can the

Chancellor spell out what is being done to make the PM's word a reality, as I did not hear anything today that will give meaningful support to my constituents who have had 10 months of zero income or Government help?

Rishi Sunak: It is just not right to say that people have not been able to receive any support. Obviously, I cannot comment on the individual circumstances of every single person, but we have put in place £280 billion of direct support in a multitude of different ways, and then there is additional support that is not even fiscal—for example, mortgage holidays, which now one in six or one in seven mortgage holders have taken advantage of. So yes, it may be the case that people have not been helped in the exact way they wanted, but with £280 billion of support in literally 20 different ways, this Government are doing what they can to provide reassurance and security to millions of people and businesses through this difficult crisis.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC) [V]: The Welsh hospitality sector employs over 8.5% of the Welsh workforce and is even more important in rural areas, such as Dwyfor Meirionnydd, where hospitality provides 27.3% of employment. Today's statement provided no new money and no clarity for struggling hospitality businesses that need to be able to make informed decisions in the coming months. Will the Chancellor therefore confirm that there will be no further announcements of extra funding prior to the March Budget?

Rishi Sunak: The Welsh Government have received over £5 billion of up-front funding guarantees to support their local economy. I hope they will use it to do exactly that, but also, Welsh businesses will benefit from UK-wide interventions—for example, our furlough scheme, our loan programme or, indeed, some of the VAT reductions—and I have said that all our support now extends through to the spring. We will have a Budget on 3 March, where we will set out the next stage of that economic response to coronavirus.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Between this item of business and the next statement, I will briefly suspend the House for three minutes.

5.12 pm

Sitting suspended.

Covid-19: Vaccinations

5.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Nadhim Zahawi): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the covid-19 vaccine delivery plan. The plan, published today, sets out the strategies that underpin the development, manufacture and deployment of our vaccines against covid-19. It represents a staging post in our national mission to vaccinate against the coronavirus, and a culmination of many months of hard work from the NHS, our armed forces, Public Health England, and every level of local government in our Union. There are many miles to go on this journey, but, armed with this plan, our direction of travel is clear.

We should be buoyed by the progress that we are already making. As of today, in England, 2.33 million vaccinations have been given, with 1.96 million receiving their first dose and 374,613 having already received both doses. We are on track to deliver our commitment of offering a first vaccine to everyone in the most vulnerable groups by the middle of next month. These are groups, it is worth reminding ourselves, that account for more than four out of every five fatalities from the covid virus, or some 88% of deaths. But of course this is a delivery plan for everyone—a plan that will see us vaccinate all adults by the autumn in what is the largest programme of vaccination of its kind in British history.

The UK vaccines delivery plan sets out how we can achieve that noble, necessary and urgent goal. The plan rests on four key pillars: supply, prioritisation, places and people. On supply, our approach to vaccines has been to move fast and to move early. We had already been heavily investing in the development of new vaccines since 2016, including funding a vaccine against another coronavirus: middle east respiratory syndrome. At the start of this year, this technology was rapidly repurposed to develop a vaccine for covid-19, and in April we provided £20 million of further funding so that the Oxford clinical trials could commence immediately. Today, we are the first country to buy, authorise and use that vaccine.

Also in April, we established the UK Government's Vaccine Task Force, or VTF for short, and since then it has worked relentlessly to build a wide portfolio of different types of vaccine, signing early deals with the most promising prospects. It is a strategy that has really paid off. As of today, we have secured access to 367 million doses from seven vaccine developers with four different vaccine types, including the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, which we were also the first in the world to buy, authorise and use. The VTF has also worked on our homegrown manufacturing capability, including what is referred to as the "fill and finish" process, in collaboration with Wockhardt in Wrexham. Anticipating a potential global shortage early on, we reserved manufacturing capacity to allow for the supply of multiple vaccines to the United Kingdom. Like many capabilities in this pandemic, it is one that we have never had before, but one that we can draw on today. So much of that critical work undertaken early has placed us in a strong position for the weeks and months ahead.

The second pillar of our plan is prioritisation. As I set out earlier, essential work to protect those at the greatest clinical risk is already well under way. The basic

principle that sits behind all of this is to save as many lives as possible as quickly as possible. In addition, we are working at speed to protect staff in our health and social care system. All four UK chief medical officers agree with the recommendation of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation to prioritise the first doses for as many people on the priority list as possible and administer second doses towards the end of the recommended vaccine dosing schedule of 12 weeks. That step will ensure the protection of the greatest number of at-risk people in the shortest possible time.

The third pillar of our plan is places. As of yesterday, across the United Kingdom, we have more than 2,700 vaccination sites up and running. There are three types of site. First, we have large vaccination centres that use big venues such as football stadiums; we saw many of those launched today. At these, people will be able to get appointments using our national booking service. The second type is our hospital hubs, working with NHS trusts across the country. The third is our local vaccination services, which are made up of sites led by GPs working in partnership with primary care trusts and, importantly, with community pharmacists.

This mix of different types of site offers the flexibility that we need to reach many different and diverse groups and, importantly, to be able to target as accurately as we can. By the end of January, everyone will be within 10 miles of a vaccination site. In a small number of highly rural areas, the vaccination centre will be a mobile unit. It bears repeating that, when it is their turn, we want as many people as possible to take up the offer of a vaccine against covid-19.

The fourth and final pillar is, of course, our people. I am grateful to the many thousands who have joined this mission—this national mission. We now have a workforce of some 80,000 people ready to be deployed across the country. This includes staff currently working within the NHS of course, but also volunteers through the NHS Bring Back Staff scheme, such as St John Ambulance personnel, independent nurses and occupational health service providers. There are similar schemes across the devolved Administrations.

Trained vaccinators, non-clinical support staff such as stewards, first aiders, administrators and logistics support will also play their part. We are also drawing on the expertise of our UK armed forces, whose operational techniques—brought to life by Brigadier Phil Prosser at the press conference with the Prime Minister a few days ago—have been tried and tested in some of the toughest conditions imaginable. I am sure the whole House will join me in thanking everyone who has played their part in getting us to this point, and all those who will play an important role in the weeks and months ahead.

We recognise that transparency about our vaccine plan will be central to maintaining public trust, and we are committed to publishing clear and simple updates. Since 24 December, we have published weekly UK-wide data on the total number of vaccinations and the breakdown of over and under-80s for England. From today, we are publishing daily data for England showing the total number vaccinated to date. The first daily publication was this afternoon. From Thursday, and then weekly, NHS England will publish a more detailed breakdown of vaccinations in England, including by region.

This continues to be a difficult time for our country, for our NHS and for everyone as we continue to live under tough restrictions, but we have always known that a vaccine would be our best way out of this evil pandemic, and that is the road we are now taking. We are under no illusion as to the scale of the challenge ahead and the distance we still have to travel. In more normal times, the largest vaccination programme in British history would be an epic feat, but against the backdrop of a global pandemic and a new, more transmissible variant, it is a huge challenge. With this House and indeed the whole nation behind this national mission, I have every confidence that it will be a national success. I commend this statement to the House.

5.27 pm

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the Minister for advance sight of his statement.

We meet today at a challenging moment in the handling of the pandemic. We have growing infection rates, we are in lockdown, businesses are shut and schools are closed, and tragically more than 80,000 people have already lost their lives to this awful virus. The vaccine provides us with a light, a glimmer of hope, and a way to beat the virus, saving lives and getting us back to normal.

The Government succeeded in the development of a vaccine—investing in multiple candidates has paid off handsomely—but a vaccine alone does not make a vaccination programme. Given the Government's failures with the test and trace system and the procurement of personal protective equipment, it is right that we scrutinise the plans carefully.

The plan is quite conventional: aside from the new big vaccination centres, it uses traditional delivery mechanisms operating within traditional opening and access times. The Opposition have some concerns about that, as we believe that exceptional circumstances call for an exceptional response. At the No. 10 briefing earlier today, 24/7 access was said to be something that people would not be interested in, which surprised me; I would like to hear from the Minister the basis for that view.

Similarly, there is the mass deployment of community spaces and volunteer mobilisation unprecedented in peacetime. It is the Government's prerogative to choose their approach, but I am keen to hear from the Minister assurance that the plan as written and set out today will deliver on what has been promised: the top four priority categories covered by the middle of next month. On a recent call, the Minister said that the only limiting factor on the immunisation programme would be the speed of supply. Will he publicly reaffirm that and confirm that this plan will make maximum use of the supply as he expects to get it?

I think we would all agree that our frontline NHS and social care heroes deserve to be protected. At the beginning of the pandemic, our staff were left for too long without adequate personal protective equipment, and we must not repeat that with the vaccine. Protecting them is the right thing to do, reflecting the risks that they face, but it is also pragmatically a point of emphasis for us, because we need them to be well in order to keep doing the incredible job that they are doing.

We are currently missing about 46,000 NHS staff for covid reasons. The health and social care workforce are in category 2 in the plan, but there does not seem to be a national-level emphasis on inoculating them immediately.

There seems to be significant variation between trust areas. Will the Minister commit today to meeting our demand that they all get their vaccines within the next fortnight? We very much welcome the clear and simple metrics that he is going to publish each day so that we can follow the successes of the programme, but as part of that, will he commit to publicising the daily total of health and care staff vaccinated, so that we can see the progress being made against that vital metric, too?

It was reassuring to see pharmacies included in the plan. They are at the heart of all the communities in our country, they are trusted and they already deliver mass vaccinations. It was disappointing and surprising to see them having to take to the front pages of national newspapers last week to get the Government's attention, but now, with them in the plan, will the Minister reassure the House that he is fully engaged with their representative bodies and that they are satisfied that they are being used properly? The number that has been trailed publicly is of 200 participating pharmacies, but given that there are 11,500 community pharmacies in England, can that really be right? Why are there not more involved, or is that number wrong? If so, could the Minister share with us what the number is? On social care, 23% of elderly care home residents have been vaccinated, compared with 40% of the over-80s more generally. Given their top prioritisation, is there a reason for this lag? What plans are there to close the gap? Is the Minister confident that all care home residents will be vaccinated by the end of the month, as promised?

Finally, there has been a high level of consensus across this place, and certainly between the Minister and me, on misinformation, and we will support the Government in whatever they think they need to do to tackle it. We will have a real sense of the impacts of misinformation as the programme rolls along, particularly as we look at who is and is not declining the vaccine. Will the Minister tell us what he will be monitoring in that regard, and what the early feedback is, perhaps from our own care staff, on who has been saying yes and who has been saying no and what that might mean for the future?

We welcome the fact that the Government have published this plan. We will back them when we think they are right but we will continue to offer constructive ways to improve the process, as I hope I have just done. I hope that the Minister can address the points that I have raised.

Nadhim Zahawi: I am grateful for the hon. Member's backing and support. He asks a number of important questions, and I will attempt to answer them now. Suffice it to say that it would be sensible for us to recognise that test and trace now delivers 85% of those who are tested positive in terms of identifying their direct contacts and the indirect contacts at between 92% and 96%. Over 5 million people have been tested and isolated and are therefore not transmitting or spreading this virus, and 55 million people have been tested. That is a pretty major undertaking, with capacity now touching 770,000 and tests running at about 600,000 a day. From a standing start of about 2,000 a day back in March, that is a pretty remarkable achievement for NHS test and trace.

The hon. Gentleman asked about 24-hour provision. There are two priorities for the NHS, and we have looked really long and hard at this. Priority No. 1 is

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obviously to target very closely those four most vulnerable categories. Priority No. 2 is to try to get a vaccination to them as quickly as possible, which is about throughput. This is linked because if we were to go to a 24-hour regime, it would be much harder to target the vaccine at those four cohorts. Obviously, when we have limited vaccine volume, we do not want staff standing around waiting for people in centres that are open 24 hours. Also, many of those people are over 80, and we are going into care homes to vaccinate the residents of those homes. The decision to go from 8 to 8 was made because we want to ensure that there is an even spread and very close targeting.

That is linked to throughput—how many vaccinations can we get into people's arms as quickly as possible? We do not want vaccines sitting in fridges or on shelves. That goes to the hon. Gentleman's question about 24/7, but also the pharmacy question. All the 200 pharmacies that we are operationalising can do 1,000-plus vaccinations a week, so the focus in phase 1, certainly with the first four categories—and, I think, with the total nine categories—is very much on targeting and throughput. The 2,700 sites are the best way that we can target that. Obviously, primary care is very good at identifying those who are most vulnerable or over 80 and, of course, getting into care homes. That is why the NHS plan and the plan we have published today are very much based around those priorities.

As we enter phase 2, where we begin to want to vaccinate as many adults as quickly as possible, we want convenience of course. We want to be able to go into many more pharmacies, so people can walk to their local pharmacy, or GP, and get their jab, when we have limitless volumes of vaccines. We have clearly now got that optioned and it will come through in the weeks and months ahead. That is the reason for that. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: the limiting factor continues at this stage to be vaccine volumes. The NHS has built an infrastructure that can deploy the vaccine as quickly as possible, but it is vaccine volumes that will change. With any new manufacturing process, especially one where we are dealing with quite a complex process—it is a biological compound that we are producing—it tends to be lumpy at the start, but it very quickly stabilises and becomes much more even. We are beginning to see that, which is good news.

We are absolutely committed to making sure the health and social care workforce are vaccinated as quickly as possible, and of course we are committed to making sure the residents of care homes are vaccinated by the end of this month—January. I reaffirm that commitment to the hon. Gentleman.

I think the hon. Gentleman's final question was on data. I am glad that he agrees that it is important, because the Prime Minister's absolute instruction to us as a team is that we have to make sure we publish as much data as possible as quickly as possible, which is why we have moved to a rhythm of daily data and on the Thursday more detailed publication, which will have regional breakdowns. The NHS is committed as it builds up more data to publish more and more. The nation expects, and rightly wants to see, the speed and the targeting that we are delivering, but I am confident that the NHS has a solid plan. We have the volunteers

and the Army—two great institutions of this country—delivering this campaign and with the support of Her Majesty's Opposition I am sure we will do this.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We now go to the Chairman of the Health and Social Care Committee, Jeremy Hunt.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con) [V]: I congratulate the Minister on getting this programme off to a flying start: to vaccinate 2 million people, including a third of over-80s, six weeks after the first dose was approved is an extraordinary achievement unmatched by any similar country. May I ask him about the speed of the roll-out? Many people want teachers to be jabbed as quickly as possible, but is it the case that all those in groups 1 to 4 will need their second jabs before we can make real inroads into other key groups? And will he publish the breakdown of numbers vaccinated not just by region but by local authority area, because a lot of people would like to know just how many people have been vaccinated in their local area?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's compliment and this is only the start. I hope that, as we progress in the weeks and months to come, the focus and the rate of output will continue to rise.

My right hon. Friend raises an important point around the critical workforce for the economy, like teachers. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation looked at all these issues and has come out very clearly in favour of us vaccinating the nine cohorts that are most vulnerable to dying from covid-19, which is why that is absolutely our focus.

We are absolutely committed to making sure that people get two doses, so if they have received their Pfizer first dose, they will get their Pfizer second dose within 12 weeks of the first dose. Similarly, if they have had their AstraZeneca first dose, they will get their AstraZeneca second dose within 12 weeks. So those people whom we will begin to reach in March, where we have to deliver their second dose, will absolutely get their second dose. But to my right hon. Friend's point, the more vaccine volumes that will come, and we have tens of millions that will come through beyond February and into March, the faster we can begin to protect those nine categories in phase 1. The moment we have done that, then it is absolutely right that we should begin to look at categories like teachers and police officers—those who may be exposed in their workplace to the risks of this virus.

Of course, it is worth reminding the House that it is two weeks after the first dose, and three weeks after the first dose with AstraZeneca, that people begin to get that protection, not the moment they are jabbed, so there is that lag time as well. But my right hon. Friend's point is well made: we need to make sure, as we protect greater and greater numbers of people in those nine categories, that we then move very quickly to the next dose.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation was very clear that those who live in care homes were the top priority for vaccination against covid-19. Due to integration of health and social care, Scottish health boards were able to deliver the Pfizer vaccine into care

homes in December, and well over 70% of such residents have already been vaccinated across Scotland. In my own health board, the phase is almost complete. So can the Minister explain why in England care home residents were not the first cohort to receive the Pfizer vaccine in December, and as only a quarter have received their first dose, when does he expect all such residents to have been vaccinated?

People over 80 years are now being offered vaccination, but there are only 1,200 sites to cover the whole of England—a similar number to Scotland, which has less than 10% of the population. This means elderly people are being asked to travel long distances, despite their age and the fact that many will be also shielding. As the letter does not offer the option to wait and have their vaccine at a local GP surgery, does the Minister recognise that many are now feeling pressurised into travelling, despite the current dangers? So will he take this opportunity to clarify that the vaccines will gradually be made available through all GP surgeries and that elderly patients who cannot travel long distances will be offered a further opportunity closer to home?

The Minister will be well aware of the public concern about the decision to delay the second dose of each vaccine so as to ensure more people receive the first dose more quickly. With the current surge in covid cases, I totally understand the rationale for this approach. So can he explain why there have been more than 300,000 additional second doses given over the last week, despite the JCVI announcement on 31 December, and can he guarantee that sufficient quantities of the Pfizer vaccine will be available by the end of February to ensure those given their first dose in early December will receive their booster on time?

Nadhim Zahawi: There is a lot to unpack there; let me try to take the points in reverse. We can guarantee that those who have had their Pfizer vaccine will get their booster within the prescribed period of up to 12 weeks. The hon. Lady asked about those who have had a second jab already. Information went out to primary care networks and hospital hubs, saying that those who have an appointment up to 4 January should be able to have their appointment honoured. Beyond that, they have been working very closely with the NHS England team centrally, which we have been supporting with resources and actually phoning to postpone those appointments further. That is why we have protected many more people.

It is worth reminding the House that for every 250 people from the most vulnerable cohorts that we protect, we save a life. For every 20 people in care homes that we vaccinate, we save a life. The focus is therefore now very much on care homes. We began with the Pfizer vaccine into care homes. Of course, last week—on 4 January—we started to roll out the AstraZeneca vaccine, which is much easier to administer into care homes, especially for the roving teams. It had to spend two days in hospitals before it was released to primary care networks, but the moment it was released, it went into care homes and now some areas in England. We have about 10,000 care homes where we have to vaccinate residents and, of course, those who look after them. Some have done their care homes already; others are beginning to do the same thing. All will be done by the end of the month.

The hon. Lady talked about people having to travel long distances. I mentioned in my opening statement the strategy that there will be 2,700 vaccination sites. I

think she may have been confused about the figure of 1,200, which is the number of primary care networks, hospital hubs and large vaccination centres, but there will be 2,700 vaccination sites. By the end of the month, no one will be more than 10 miles away from a vaccination site.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the Minister for being so assiduous in giving very thorough answers to the long and complicated series of questions that have already been put to him, but I must say to the House that we now have half an hour more for the rest of this statement, so I insist on having questions, not statements, from everyone. I specifically mention this to people who are coming in virtually, because they seem to lose a sense of timing when they are not here in the Chamber. A question means a question—just one question. I say to the Minister, who has been most assiduous, that where he has already given an answer to the question, I will not insist that he has to give the answer again because the person who is now asking it has not listened to his first answer.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I will be as quick as I can, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Some of my Beckenham constituents have contacted me to say that they think they should have had the vaccination already; two of them are in their 90s, so I am slightly alarmed. I am told that GPs are not necessarily the people to go to in order to ask what is happening, so I wonder who my constituents and I should go to when the system—inadvertently, perhaps—does not actually give out an appointment that it might have done.

Nadhim Zahawi: My hon. Friend's constituents will be contacted, either by their primary care network or by letter from the national booking service. They do not have to go to the national vaccination centre if that is inconvenient; they will be able to get their vaccination through their primary care network or the hospital hubs. I am very happy to take those particular two cases offline, look into them and give him some more details.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): I would like to dig a bit deeper into the supply question. I had the privilege of visiting a GP surgery in my constituency on Friday, where I was told by the doctor in charge that they cannot book the next set of appointments because they do not know when they will get the next delivery of the vaccine. I have heard from other centres that they are not allowed to move on to the next cohort when they finish the under-80s, in order to ensure that there is equity across the country. The Minister has said that we cannot have 24/7 vaccinations because of supply. Is the supply issue the rate at which the product is being manufactured, the rate at which it is being packaged, the rate at which it is being batch tested, or the rate at which it is being distributed around the country?

Nadhim Zahawi: The hon. Lady asks an important question. In any manufacturing process—especially a new one—it is always lumpier at the beginning, and there are more challenges. There are a number of tests done by both the manufacturer and the regulator; the batch testing at the end of the process is done by the regulator, to make sure that the batches meet the very high standards that we have in the United Kingdom. That will begin to become much smoother and stabilise,

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and we have a clear line of sight through to the end of February, which is why we are confident that we can meet the target of offering a vaccine to the top four most vulnerable cohorts on the list of nine from the JCVI by the middle of February.

We thank the hon. Lady's local GPs, but it is important for them to remember that the central team that is doing the distribution is running at about 98.5% accuracy at the moment, which means that 1.5% of deliveries are not as we would like them to be. We will get better at that. As Brigadier Prosser said, this is like standing up a supermarket chain in a month and then growing it by 20% every couple of weeks. It will get better. The focus of the central team is to try to give primary care networks—GPs like hers—as much time and notice as possible, so that they can plan ahead and get the four cohorts in for their jabs. It is always difficult at the outset, but it gets better by the day and will do in the weeks ahead.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Would the Minister like to join me in thanking NHS staff in Telford and Wrekin and Shropshire for having vaccinated more than 15,000 people already? Could he also reassure my constituents who have received a letter from NHS England inviting them to have a vaccination in Birmingham or even Manchester—an hour and 45 minutes away—that if they wait just a few more days, they can choose, if they wish, to have a vaccination very locally?

Nadhim Zahawi: I absolutely join my hon. Friend in congratulating and thanking the heroes of the NHS and the volunteers in Telford and Wrekin and Shropshire for vaccinating 15,000 people—15,000 of the people most vulnerable to covid who, in a couple of weeks' time, will have that protection. He is right, I can confirm, that anyone receiving a letter where it is inappropriate or not possible for them to travel that distance to a national vaccination centre does not have to do so. They will be able to be vaccinated in their primary care network at a time and place that is convenient to them. With the national vaccination centres—seven went live today, and there will be more next week, more the week after and 50 in total by the end of the month—we are trying to effectively add to the throughput that I described earlier.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I have some good news: my mother, who is 89 years young, had her vaccine at 9.40 this morning, so it is a happy day—I was going to sing it, but then it would start to rain, so it is not a good idea. What system is in place to ensure that if someone does not turn up for their vaccine, not one slot or vaccine goes to waste, and that a secondary list is immediately available with staff to substitute? At Dundonald hospital in Northern Ireland over the weekend, some people did not turn up, but they were able to call upon the midwives team to come forward. What policy is in place to make sure that the vaccine is not lost for use?

Nadhim Zahawi: The people of Strangford will be pleased to hear that the hon. Member's mother has got her first a dose of the vaccine. This is an important message to send to the whole country: if you are called up and have an appointment to get the vaccine, please turn up. This vaccine can protect your life. It can protect

somebody else's life. It is a shame to not turn up if you have booked an appointment. The NHS in England has made sure that the hospital hubs and primary care networks that have been vaccinating, and now the national vaccination centres, have on speed dial the care home workers and those on the frontline of the battle against covid who are in the JCVI's top four cohorts, so that they can get them in as quickly as possible and not a single dose is wasted.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con) [V]: I thank my hon. Friend for his incredible tenacity on such an important project. Our local vaccine centre in Basingstoke serves six primary care networks across Hampshire, and under his plan, 20,000 over-75s should receive their first vaccination at this hub from our army of volunteers and local NHS staff in the next 35 days. Can my hon. Friend say how the large difference in patient numbers at each hub is factored in when vaccine supplies are dispatched? I reiterate the need for clinical commissioning group-level data to monitor progress. Can he more urgently reconsider the priority given to teachers, please?

Nadhim Zahawi: I think I dealt with the question of teachers earlier, which is incredibly important. Phase one is to focus on those who are most vulnerable to dying from this disease. As soon as we get through that to phase two, teachers and other frontline services, including police officers and others, will be absolutely uppermost in our minds and those of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which helps us with that prioritisation.

My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the issue of vaccine supply, and I know that her local vaccination service has done a tremendous job. There was a slight hiccup, if I can describe it as that, in making sure that they were recognised as six primary networks in the system. We rectified that, and I assure her that the volumes, certainly those of which I have line of sight, will mean that the service will receive plenty of vaccines to hit that target by mid-February of offering the top four cohorts the opportunity of the vaccine.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: As of Friday, the staff in care homes in Walthamstow that serve a smaller community—those with fewer than 20 beds—tell me that not a single patient has had the vaccine or an invitation to get the vaccine. The Minister will be aware that the residents are very aware that they were promised the vaccine originally would come to them by the end of December. They feel like they are sitting ducks. With less than three weeks of January left, will the Minister pledge that all the residents in smaller care homes will at least get an invitation within the next week, so that they know when they will get the vaccine?

Nadhim Zahawi: I think I shared the statistic with the House earlier that for every 20 residents of care homes that we vaccinate, we save a life. They are absolutely our priority. I give the hon. Lady this pledge: we will vaccinate or offer to vaccinate all residents of care homes by the end of the month. There are 10,000 care homes in England. Some areas of the country have already vaccinated all their care home residents. Others are beginning to. We will make sure that residents of care homes will by the end of this month be offered the opportunity of a vaccine.

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con) [V]: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the start to the vaccination programme. Local health leaders in Oxfordshire have made a great start, too, but they report a worrying trend of those from ethnic minorities not taking up the vaccine at the same rate as other groups. Can my hon. Friend set out his strategy to make sure that all our constituents take up this vital vaccine?

Nadhim Zahawi: Information, information, information. I am working across Government to make sure that we communicate the benefits, both in terms of protecting the individual, but also in protecting the communities people come from. Working with black, Asian and minority ethnic communities is incredibly important as part of the overall strategy to focus our attention to make sure all those communities come forward, especially those who work in our care homes and care for residents. Many of those workers are from BAME communities. The more that they see people like themselves taking the vaccine and getting protected, the more effective our strategy is to deliver that protection to those communities.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab) [V]: Following on very closely from the previous question, does the Minister agree that one of the key ways in which we can counter some of the very virulent anti-vax and covid denial messages on social media, which are impacting particularly in some communities, needs to be through not just a myth-busting approach, but through peer-to-peer positive example messaging within local communities—within faith groups, between neighbours and in local social media networks? Can he make sure that he advises local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and others to promote examples of where people have had the vaccine, so that they can be shared to counter some of those more damaging messages?

Nadhim Zahawi: The hon. Lady makes a really important point. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), who reached out to me with his concerns for his community. Sadly, I see among the community that my wife and I come from that there is a lot of disinformation, and not only on social media. There is the very clever and, I should say, evil use of platforms such as WhatsApp to share videos that scare people into not having the vaccine.

The hon. Lady is right that local government and local public health leaders have a central role to play. We are engaging with them and, of course, making sure that local leaders throughout the United Kingdom are telling the story. She is right that the most effective way is for people to see someone like them taking the vaccine and being protected. We are doing that as well.

Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con) [V]: I thank my hon. Friend for all his work in making sure that the vaccine gets to all parts of the UK. I ask him to look in particular at how the roll-out is being managed by the health services in South Derbyshire. Sadly, compared to our neighbours in Erewash and Burton, so far only a very limited number of people have been called to a local site run by our GPs in conjunction with the clinical commissioning group.

Nadhim Zahawi: My hon. Friend raises an important point. I commit to looking specifically at the point she raises. The NHS in England has done an incredible job,

but of course some teams have outperformed others. We have to learn from the best and make sure we share that knowledge. If some teams need additional resource and help, we will do that. That is why we have the additional 80,000 people in the programme who are ready to help and ready to make sure we get the jabs into the arms of the most vulnerable people.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab) [V]: For parts of Lancashire, the closest mass vaccination centre is more than 60 miles away in Manchester. The Minister has said that there will be more mass vaccination centres, so can he reassure my constituents that we will get a centre on the Fylde coast and in north Lancashire?

Nadhim Zahawi: The hon. Lady is right to highlight the issue of distance. No one in her constituency or anywhere else in England will be more than 10 miles away from a vaccination site.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con) [V]: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), I am starting to get queries about vaccinations from elderly residents. I am sure that this will expand as the roll-out progresses and people could be missed. What facilities is his Department putting in place to answer questions quickly from very worried constituents?

Nadhim Zahawi: My hon. Friend will know that I have engaged with colleagues to dig deep into the issues their constituents may have with the vaccination programme. I am very happy to look at any cases she has. Through the combination of standing up hospitals, the primary care networks supported by community pharmacies and now the national vaccination centres, all residents within the four cohorts should be captured by the primary care services that know their communities really well. In case they are not, we are also engaging heavily with local government. One of the lessons of test and trace is to ensure that we engage with local government, because it knows its residents really well.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP) [V]: Before the recent spending review, the SNP called for an uplift in the NHS in England to bring per capita spending in line with Scotland, and thus provide billions to support the roll-out of the vaccine and build up capacity. The Treasury announced less than a third of what we had asked for. Does the Minister expect NHS England to be able to keep up with the vaccination demand, despite this lack of investment?

Nadhim Zahawi: The head of NHS England, Simon Stevens, was before the Public Accounts Committee today and I am sure that the hon. Lady will look at his answers. Suffice it to say that the Chancellor has made £6 billion available for the NHS family to make sure we deliver and deploy as fast as we can to the most vulnerable cohorts in our country.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con) [V]: The national roll-out is undoubtedly extremely impressive, but unfortunately the benefits are not yet being felt in Aylesbury. Residents are increasingly concerned that they have been left behind, and it has been extraordinarily difficult for Buckinghamshire's MPs and council to get definite

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information about where and when vaccines will be available. Can my hon. Friend therefore confirm that vaccines will start to be available in Aylesbury in days rather than weeks?

Nadhim Zahawi: Absolutely. We must ensure that my hon. Friend's residents are within 10 miles of a vaccination site at the end of this month and as early as possible to get vaccinating. He is a great champion of his constituents, and I am happy to look at any specifics he may have, take those offline and come back to him.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab) [V]: The vaccination centre in Chesterfield—the largest town in Derbyshire—is opening only on Wednesday. It is clear from recent conversations with Derby and Derbyshire clinical commissioning group that we are not on target to have all vulnerable groups done by 15 February, and there is no centre at all in Staveley. What will happen between now and 15 February to get us from the current position to achieving the target the Minister has set, which we all so desperately want him to achieve? Will he also ensure that there is a centre in Staveley?

Nadhim Zahawi: It is great to see the hon. Member looking fit and well; I wish him all the very best. He is right to say that we must ensure that every part of the country meets that target, offering those four cohorts the opportunity of a vaccine. We are looking to ensure that we publish more granular data—regional data—so that we can see which areas are not keeping up the pace and therefore direct resources to them, so that by mid-February they have made that offer.

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con) [V]: I thank my hon. Friend for his statement and for his hard work on vaccine deployment. Many of my constituents have raised their concerns over the speed of vaccination roll-out in north Wales. Will he confirm the quantity of vaccine delivered to Wales so far? Will he also undertake to publish regular updates on the delivery of future batches so that it can be clear where bottlenecks in the roll-out are occurring?

Nadhim Zahawi: We work closely with the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish Governments on the programme and ensure that we deliver the vaccine volumes to them. Although we do not publish the exact quantities of vaccine for a variety of reasons—including that the whole world is looking to get more volume of vaccines and we do not want to disadvantage ourselves in any way commercially—I reassure my hon. Friend that all the devolved Administrations will have enough to be able to offer those four JCVI cohorts the opportunity to be vaccinated and protected by mid-February, at least with a first dose.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Teachers in Vauxhall are working tirelessly to manage the delivery of classrooms online as well as teaching the most vulnerable key worker children in our schools. The Minister highlighted earlier that he will prioritise those most likely to die and that he will keep teachers at the forefront of his mind. Can I please ask him why teachers and school staff on the frontline of the pandemic are not being protected? What is the timeline for getting them vaccinated?

Nadhim Zahawi: I thank all the teachers in Vauxhall and the rest of the country for the work they are doing on online education as well as teaching children from the most vulnerable families and the children of our NHS and social care staff on the frontline. The hon. Member is right to highlight the issue. Some teachers—those who are clinically vulnerable, for example—will be captured in the nine cohorts set out for us by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, as will those in the right age groups in categories one to nine. I give her the commitment that as soon as we are through phase one, the priority absolutely will be to ensure that those who are critical to the functioning of the future of our country—the future generations to come—are prioritised.

Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con) [V]: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his excellent start. In Newbury, we are due to receive our first doses later this week. The issue is one of information. All my constituents want to know is when the doses will be received and when their loved ones can expect to be contacted. May I invite my hon. Friend to work with NHS England to ensure that timely local information is made readily available going forward?

Nadhim Zahawi: I absolutely share my hon. Friend's concern. I give her that commitment. The team at NHS England is working and focusing on giving as much time and notice as possible to primary care and hospitals on when they get deliveries, so they can make those appointments and keep vaccinating those who are most vulnerable. That is exactly its priority at the moment.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab) [V]: Throughout the pandemic, community pharmacies have never closed—they really have been some of our unsung heroes. The *Shields Gazette*, my local paper, has launched its “Shot in the Arm” campaign. We want to know why the Minister will not allow all those experienced and dedicated community pharmacies to deliver the vaccine.

Nadhim Zahawi: First of all, with respect, that is inaccurate. Community pharmacies are already part of the primary care networks that are delivering the vaccines. I have also made very clear in the strategy that there will be 200 community and independent pharmacies as part of the vaccination programme in phase one, where we need that volume and throughput. The community pharmacies that can do 1,000 vaccinations a week are very much part of the programme and we thank them for that. As we get to the next stage, where we have vaccines in limitless volumes, it is about convenience and ramping up the number of community pharmacies that can also join in the fight against covid.

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con) [V]: I congratulate my hon. Friend on a remarkable start. I can confirm that in Calderdale we have already vaccinated more than 50% of the over-80s. Can I just press him on communication channels with patients and the vaccination process? We see GP surgeries giving out very little information. We have already heard about letters going out for the larger hubs, but people just do not understand what the process is. Could he work with GP surgeries and others, so that the general population can understand the process?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who always asks very important practical questions. He is absolutely right to say that it has been challenging. Part of the challenge, which I think we have addressed today, is the amount of notice primary care networks and GPs have of a delivery. That will only get better as we stabilise deliveries to the warehouses and are then able to take them out into the primary care networks and hospitals. I will of course work with primary care networks and the whole of the NHS family to make sure our communications get better and better.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab) [V]: In Salford, we receive little or no notice that a delivery of the vaccine from the Government is due. Some batches have not turned up at all. When they do arrive, we act quickly. It was therefore staggering when, late last night, our clinical commissioning group was instructed to cancel 924 pre-existing second dose Pfizer appointments, with little time to book new appointments before the batch expires at midday on Wednesday. Will the Minister now allow local CCGs to plan and order their own vaccine batches? Can he assure those whose time before their second Pfizer dose has been elongated that they will be 70% to 90% protected for up to 12 weeks?

Nadhim Zahawi: I shall take the hon. Lady's questions in reverse. The four chief medical officers have looked at the issue of the up-to-12-week dosing and all agree that it is the right thing to do. I apologise to the people Salford for that cancellation, if that is what happened yesterday. We have touched on this, but part of the issue has been the lumpiness in the deliveries in the early days, which will begin to become much smoother. The NHS central team, with Brigadier Prosser and the 101 Logistic Brigade, are absolutely focused on making sure that we give as much notice as possible to primary care networks so that they can plan ahead, and that will only get better and better as we smooth out the delivery process from manufacturer into warehouse.

Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con): The local NHS is doing a fantastic job of rolling out the vaccine to priority groups in Burnley and Padiham, but some residents have contacted me because they are confused about what process they need to follow, so will my hon. Friend set out whether residents need to contact the national booking centre or are better to wait for their GP to contact them?

Nadhim Zahawi: If people receive a letter from the national booking centre and it is more convenient for them to take up that appointment than to call and make an appointment, they should get their vaccination done through the national booking centre. If that is inconvenient, they can absolutely wait and the primary care network will contact them and give them an appointment to make sure that they are vaccinated. Our absolute pledge is to make sure that the four categories that are most vulnerable to coronavirus are offered a vaccine by mid-February.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP) [V]: In Scotland, care home residents have been tackled quicker than those in England, overall coverage in Scotland is similar to that in England, and pro rata Scotland has way more vaccination sites, yet the Chancellor of the

Duchy of Lancaster has caused concern by stating that the Scottish Government are somehow sitting on supplies, and he did that by comparing coverage to actual allocation. As we tackle fake news, does the Minister agree that it is irresponsible to play politics with fudged figures on such an important subject?

Nadhim Zahawi: Scottish care homes tend to be much larger in profile than the 10,000 homes in England. We are very much focused on making sure that we vaccinate all care home residents by the end of January. We are working with the four CMOs, who are working very closely together, to make sure that that particular cohort is protected. As I mentioned earlier, if we protect 20 residents, we save a life, and that is what we do.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): We should rightfully be proud of the huge national effort that is taking place to vaccinate the British people against covid. We have seen the incredible speed and efficiency of Israel's vaccination drive, which is on track to vaccinate all over-16s by the end of March, so what discussions has my hon. Friend had with his Israeli counterpart about replicating Israel's success, particularly in the areas of digitisation and accessibility?

Nadhim Zahawi: I commend the Israeli Government and health service for a stellar job in vaccinating their most vulnerable communities. We have a lot to learn from other countries, including the throughput—the speed at which they manage to vaccinate—which is something from which we can all learn so that we can improve our output. NHS England and the teams on the frontline have been doing a tremendous job and is worth us all thinking about that: we stand on the shoulders of real heroes.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We are way over time, so I am going to take only four more questions and I would be grateful if they could be swift.

Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con) [V]: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the progress made so far, but ask him for some reassurance about those whose appointments have been cancelled due to the vaccine unexpectedly not being available. Will he confirm that they will not be forgotten about, that they will not lose their place in the queue and that they will be reached swiftly?

Nadhim Zahawi: My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. I can give him the reassurance that anyone who has had their appointment cancelled will get that appointment reinstated and will get their vaccine. Our absolute commitment is to make sure that those four most vulnerable cohorts have the offer of a vaccine by the middle of February.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab) [V]: I heard the Minister's earlier comments about vaccinations for teachers and school support staff, but what about the position of special schools? Should their staff, who work with profoundly disabled young people, including those with serious neuro-disabilities, and who provide personal and intimate care, not be treated in the same way as frontline social care workers?

Nadhim Zahawi: The Lady is absolutely right to highlight that cohort, some of whom will be picked up in category 4 and some of whom will be picked up in category 6—this will include the people who look after them.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con) [V]: Vaccinating those in care homes will ensure that some of society's most vulnerable are protected against this awful virus. However, many people receive care at home, so does my hon. Friend agree that they should be treated in the same way as those in care homes, as they have no option but to interact with many different people?

Nadhim Zahawi: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; the primary care networks are best suited to focusing on that and delivering that vaccination, which will protect those who are most vulnerable from dying from covid-19.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): All credit and our great thanks to the vaccine taskforce and to our scientists, who have been brilliant in developing the vaccine. In our history, it has often been production engineering that has let us down, so may we have some figures? How many doses are produced each day? What is our manufacturing capacity? Are there any hold-ups or capacity problems in testing the batches? How many doses are being filled in the vials each day? Again, what is the maximum capacity?

Nadhim Zahawi: It is not our capacity, but the manufacturers'; AstraZeneca produces the Oxford vaccine, and Pfizer-BioNTech produce their vaccine, and Moderna's is now also approved and in process. There are a number of processes throughout the manufacturing process. When we go from the bulk vaccine into fill and finish, there is a period of time and a sterility test the vaccines have to go through. Then there is batch testing by both the manufacturer and the regulator. All of that gets better and better every single day. It is a new manufacturing process. Oxford-AstraZeneca are delivering 100 million vaccines, which is what we have bought from them, and we have bought 40 million from Pfizer. We will have millions of vaccines in the weeks and months to come. We will meet our target of mid February for delivering the opportunity of a vaccine to the four cohorts most vulnerable to covid.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the Minister. I am sorry to the nine colleagues who have not been called to ask their questions. I hope they will encourage their colleagues to ask shorter questions in future, because that is how we will manage to be fairer in getting more people in.

Points of Order

6.22 pm

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster indicated in a television interview at the weekend that the problems at our ports are going to get worse before they get better. The protocol, which my party has warned about repeatedly and consistently since its inception, has caused problems, with food supplies not reaching supermarket shelves in Northern Ireland from Great Britain. If the problems are going to get worse, as hauliers have indicated that they are in the next few days, has the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster indicated his intention to come before the House to spell out what he intends to do either to invoke article 16 or to take decisive action that will ensure the seamless and unfettered distribution of food from GB to the shelves of supermarkets in Northern Ireland?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for having given me notice of his intention to raise this matter. The direct answer to his question, as far as the Chair is concerned, is that Mr Speaker has not been given any notice of any intention of the Minister to make a statement tomorrow, although there are of course other ways in which the hon. Gentleman can try to require the presence of the Minister here in the Chamber to answer his point.

Under these unusual arrangements, I will take a point of order from Hilary Benn.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab) [V]: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union will cease to exist in five days' time. On 10 December I wrote to the Leader of the House to ask for more time to allow us to complete our work so that we could scrutinise the trade and co-operation agreement that was eventually reached with the EU on Christmas eve. The Leader of the House replied on 6 January to decline the request. I then wrote to him the following day to ask him to reconsider in the light of the fact that we have asked Lord Frost and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to give evidence to the Select Committee on the agreement, but neither of them is available this week.

This means that the Committee that was set up specifically to examine matters relating to the negotiations on the future relationship with the European Union will now be prevented from taking evidence from the person who negotiated the agreement and from reporting fully to the House on its implications. As this is, to put it mildly, highly unsatisfactory, has the Leader of the House given any indication to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that he intends to change his mind and move a Standing Order accordingly so that we can take evidence from Lord Frost and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. In answer to his specific question, I can confirm, he will be disappointed to know, that Mr Speaker has not had any representations such as he describes from the Leader of the House on

that matter. I can understand the right hon. Gentleman's consternation at the situation as regards the Committee that he chaired. The fact is that the order establishing the Committee on 16 January last year had effect for 12 months, and therefore, in the absence of any further decision of the House, the Committee's activities will indeed cease this week. I am sure that hon. Members will want to join me in thanking the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues on the Committee for their work as it, clearly sadly in his eyes, draws to an end.

Of course, as the right hon. Gentleman points out, it is important for the effective functioning of Select Committees that Ministers and officials respond constructively to reasonable requests for them to give evidence. I am sure that Ministers will have heard the points made by the right hon. Gentleman and that they will respond appropriately to future requests from any Select Committee examining the implications of the UK's trade and co-operation agreement with the EU and other aspects of the ongoing relationship between the UK and the EU. But I do appreciate that what I have been able to say is of no comfort whatsoever to the right hon. Gentleman.

I would normally have a short suspension of the House at this point, but having taken points of order, I observe that the personnel in the Chamber have already changed, and therefore we will waste no further time, as we are certainly up against the clock in the next important debate.

Global Britain

6.28 pm

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Elizabeth Truss): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Global Britain.

I am delighted to open this debate on global Britain when, for the first time in 48 years, we now have full control of our trade policy. Back in 1846, Richard Cobden inspired people in Manchester with his belief that free trade would be

"the greatest revolution that ever happened in the world's history...drawing men together, thrusting aside...antagonism...and uniting us in the bonds of eternal peace."

That revolution continues today, as for the first time in nearly half a century we are a sovereign trading nation free to pursue British interests while promoting British values. Our newly independent trade policy will create jobs, grow our slice of the global pie, and unlock great swathes of the world to the best of Britain.

As we recover from covid-19, we need to think radically about how we generate economic growth and how we are going to use our new global platform in 2021 to promote free and fair trade—how we are going to take on those countries that try to cheat and to undermine free enterprise. In 2020, we negotiated trade agreements covering 63 nations and the European Union, and in 2021 we will use this year, including our presidency of the G7, to champion free and fair trade in an era rife with pernicious practices. We will promote modern rules that are relevant to people's lives for digital and data trade. We will champion high environmental and animal welfare standards in a science-led approach, and we will push for modernisation of the World Trade Organisation and trade agreements to reflect our values of free enterprise and fair play. We will also build an advanced network of trade deals, from the Americas to the Indo-Pacific, with the UK at its heart as a global services and technology hub. We have already reached deals covering 63% of UK trade, well on our way to our manifesto target of 80% in three years. We want to hit that target and to deepen our existing relationships in areas such as services and technology.

Exports are equivalent to nearly a third of our national income. Trade equals jobs. A job means independence and security, the realisation of our dreams, funding public services and the future prospects of our country. The deals we have done with the EU and our partners across the world, from South Africa to South Korea, mean that our traders continue to enjoy preferential access to world markets.

We have secured arrangements with Turkey that mean that Ford in Dagenham can continue to export its engines tariff-free. We have secured access to the Canadian market for our beef producers, such as the Foyle Food Group in Northern Ireland. We have secured tariff-free access into Mexico for our car exporters such as Jaguar Land Rover, while Scotch whisky—one of our biggest exports—continues to enter markets such as Singapore tariff-free and stays recognised.

All in all, this adds up to £885 billion of trade that we have secured. In addition, we have been able to go further and faster in our deal with Japan, protecting the free flow of data, which benefits industries such as FinTech and computer gaming, regulatory dialogue on

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financial services and improved mobility provisions, including allowing spouses to travel with businesspeople. We have secured additional protections for our fantastic creative industries, from music to TV, and recognition for geographical indications across the UK, from Welsh lamb to Scotch beef, from Armagh Bramley apples to English sparkling wine, subject to Japanese domestic processes.

This platform allows us to step up this year to show our full potential as president of the G7 and as an independent trading nation. At the G7, we will work to reform the World Trade Organisation, make progress on data and digital trade and promote greener trade. Our new UK global tariff will see around 57% of our imports entering our market tariff-free—more than the 44% that we had under the EU.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making a powerful start to promoting global Britain. She speaks of the G7 and the opportunity for us to make our mark in the world. Does she believe that now is the right time to move from the G7 to the G10, and to include Korea, India, and Australia? That would represent over half the world's GDP in order for us to start looking at the challenges that we face of updating the United Nations, NATO and the WTO, and to make sure that we are in a position to offer a counterweight to China.

Elizabeth Truss: My right hon. Friend makes a very powerful point. Allies such as Australia, South Korea and India will be key to forging that group of democratic nations who can stand up for democracy, human rights and fair and free trade, and, of course, we are very committed to working with them this year.

Our new global tariff, as I said, will eliminate tariffs on more than 57% of imports. In particular, it will eliminate tariffs on 100 environmental goods. In short, our new tariff regime is lower, simpler and greener.

Furthermore, we will be working with our friends and family across the world to drive forward free and fair trade, setting the global standard for trade in the 21st century. We are already in deep negotiations with the United States, Australia and New Zealand, and, this year, we will apply to one of the most dynamic trading areas on earth—the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. Joining is part of our plan to grow our economy by making it far easier for British goods to reach our friends in Asia and the Americas. This high standards agreement would align the UK with some of the world's fastest growing economies in a free trade area covering nearly £9 trillion of GDP. We will also deepen our relationships with countries such as Canada, Mexico, South Korea and Israel. As well as this, we are working closely with India, the world's largest democracy, on an enhanced trade partnership, reflecting our mutual interest in technology and innovation. We are also in talks with Brazil and our allies in the Gulf.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): While we are talking about the real opportunities for growing Britain's trade power across the globe and while my right hon. Friend has touched on the aspect of Israel and the Gulf, let me say that we have rightfully been

world leaders in soft power and aid during many generations and this should continue, but that we also need to lead in terms of diplomacy. Will she look at taking this back to the Cabinet to consider what we can be doing to expand the Abraham accords to bring not only peace to the middle east, but further trade and aid to that location as well?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. He is right that trade is the key not just to prosperity, but to peace and co-operation between nations. I want to reassure the House that we will ensure that no country is left behind without the benefits of free and fair trade with the United Kingdom. Later this year, we will be launching an emerging markets trade scheme, which will offer the lowest-income countries a better deal when they are trading with the UK. It will be more generous than the EU scheme and it will help those countries on the ladder towards prosperity through the enterprise and ingenuity of their people.

We want to encourage British businesses to take advantage of all the opportunities that we have either negotiated or are negotiating. Therefore, we will be loudly and proudly championing exports in key industries from food and drink to services in technology trade. We have a network of trade advisers across the country ready to help our businesses go global and they can be proud to put the Union Jack on their pack, which is one of the most recognised symbols in the world. With our GREAT campaign, we are showing partners worldwide that Britain is ready to trade. In December, the Prime Minister launched our new Office for Investment under the leadership of Lord Grimstone. It will work tirelessly to secure investment in every nation and region across Britain, backing jobs and livelihoods. More than 56,000 new jobs were created last year through foreign investment in the UK, with a further 9,000 others secured. We will also be founding our first new freeports, which will drive enterprising growth in port cities and towns across the country as we turbo-charge trade across the world.

Of course, many are sceptical about globalisation and the benefits of trade. One reason why they are sceptical is that too many unfair practices and too much cheating have been allowed to undermine real free trade. That is why we are establishing the Trade Remedies Authority, headed by Oliver Griffiths, to protect UK industries from unfair practices. It is not right, for example, that ceramics manufacturers in Stoke-on-Trent can be undercut by goods subsidised by state-owned enterprises, that our innovators can have the fruits of their work taken under forced technology transfer, and that goods can come into this country that have been produced by forced labour in abhorrent conditions. That is why we are pushing the World Trade Organisation for greater transparency and reform of the rules, and by joining CPTPP, with its ambitious digital and data provisions and clear rules, we will pile further pressure on the WTO to reform.

As an independent trading nation, we are setting our own path and rejecting the twin errors of values-free globalisation and protectionism.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): One thing that incentivises and encourages younger people in our country is their determination to help third world countries that are not as well off as we are.

The spending of the Department for International Development has historically been very important, but I very much hope that the Minister will start to explain to the electorate the huge advantages that third world countries will now have as a result of our lowering tariffs on the sort of products that we cannot produce here in the United Kingdom.

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right that, of course, the UK global tariff has lower import tariffs than the common external tariff of the EU, but we are going to go even further than that with our new emerging markets trade scheme, which will offer more preferential rates for the lowest-income countries in the world to help their populations trade their way out of poverty, and I agree with him that that is a really important way in which we can bring more prosperity to the world.

As I was saying, we now have the opportunity to set our own path by rejecting the twin errors of values-free globalisation and protectionism. Instead, as the United Kingdom, we are rooting our approach in the fundamental values of sovereignty, democracy, the rule of law and a fierce commitment to high standards. That is why we are bringing together a coalition of like-minded nations to advance high standards worldwide—from food and animal welfare to the environment and data. With fellow democracies such as Japan and Canada, we are championing innovation, a cleaner planet, women's economic empowerment and much more. We have demonstrated this through the fantastic deal we have struck with the EU to ensure we can keep trading freely with zero tariffs and zero quotas, alongside deals covering 63 countries. No other nation has ever negotiated so many trade deals simultaneously, and I am proud of the results we have achieved.

At this tough time, we need to embrace our future as a confident, optimistic and outward-looking global Britain, delivering jobs and prosperity at home while helping lead the fight for free and fair trade abroad. My hope is that all sides of this House can join me in celebrating how far we have come and the huge opportunity we have in 2021, striking deal after deal with our friends and family worldwide to support our values and full economic potential. This is global Britain in action.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Before I call Emily Thornberry, I would like to indicate that all Back-Bench contributions will have a time limit of three minutes.

6.42 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Let me thank the Secretary of State for holding this debate, albeit in the very strange circumstances we find ourselves in today. I said many months ago, when I came into this role, how important it was that we should have an open debate in Parliament and with the public about the challenges and opportunities that we will face after Brexit as an independent trading nation. Now, as 2020 is finally skulking away, those challenges and opportunities are upon us, and today's debate is, if anything, long overdue, but no less welcome for that.

However, I think it would be remiss of me, as I think it was remiss of the Secretary of State, not to start by acknowledging the severe and rising problems affecting businesses engaged in trade across the channel and the

Irish sea today. Trade that flowed freely just a few weeks ago is now grinding to a halt because of the barriers and bureaucracy that the realities of Brexit require. Let me be clear: those problems are always to some extent inevitable—they could only have been mitigated, not avoided entirely, by the adoption of a different approach to our deal with the EU—but three things that were not inevitable, and indeed were totally avoidable, are the lack of time that businesses had to prepare, the lack of support that they have been given to prepare and the lack of help available to them now. I recognise that not all of that is down to the Department for International Trade, but I do have three questions that I hope the Minister of State will be able to address later.

First, I asked the Secretary of State seven weeks ago if she would establish a dedicated helpline for companies facing problems with their exports after 1 January, and I was told in response that the Department already had a dedicated helpline for trade-related queries, which is the one it shares with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. That is all very welcome, except that if any businesses had called that number this weekend to ask for help with their problems at Dover or Holyhead, the automated response would have told them that the office was closed and that they should ring back at 9 o'clock on Monday. I hate to break this to DIT Ministers, but the import-export trade does not operate on office hours. That is why round-the-clock support was needed, especially during the period of transition, adaptation and confusion. I could see the clear need for that seven weeks ago; it is extraordinary that the Government still cannot see it now.

That lack of foresight could be related to my second question, which falls squarely on the shoulders of the Secretary of State. Given all the problems that were inevitable on 1 January and the consultation and preparation that were required to mitigate those problems, does she regret her decision last July, which I warned her against at the time, to scrap the advisory groups her predecessor set up to deal with customs issues and continuity of trade post Brexit? Does she also regret her inexplicable decision to remove from the advisory group on transport issues the representatives of the Freight Transport Association, the Road Haulage Association and the British Ports Association? At exactly the time she should have been listening to the experts, she was shutting them out of the room.

Thirdly, and finally, on the current issues affecting EU trade, will the Minister of State tell us at the end of the debate who in the Government is now in charge of that brief? Is it still the Minister for the Cabinet Office, his colleague the Secretary of State, the new Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, or the Chancellor, given his responsibility for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs? Looking at the chaos our exporters are facing today, I think we can all agree that someone in government has to get a grip and it would help if we all knew who is supposed to be doing the gripping.

Speaking of getting a grip, I come to the flurry of continuity agreements secured by the Secretary of State in December. Welcome though they were, there is something strange about the process followed for those agreements in the past year. Whenever I asked why no progress was being made, why the agreements were taking so long and why no deals were signed in the first nine months of the year, I was repeatedly told that they were very

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difficult and detailed negotiations which we could not expect to be done quickly. But when we look at the final text that emerged in December of one agreement after another, we see that they are clause for clause, word for word, identical to the EU treaties that went before them, apart from the words “European Union” being replaced with “United Kingdom”. The question is, therefore, exactly what were they discussing all that time?

Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con): The right hon. Lady will remember from our discussions about this that they were continuity agreements, and although, understandably, many of the partners with which we were seeking agreements had the ambition to do more at that time, we were seeking continuity. We explained to them that we would do more in due course, but we needed continuity to protect the terms of trade as we left the European Union. As for why it took so long, many of our partners did not think that we were actually going to leave and realised only late in the day that they needed to sign the agreements with us to protect our mutual trading arrangements.

Emily Thornberry: I hear what the right hon. Gentleman says, but it looks to me a bit like two people meeting to play chess and the two of them sitting there looking at the board, not moving the pieces, and eventually deciding to shake hands and declare a draw. The Secretary of State might say that that is what continuity agreements are and the Government just kept things as they were, but if that is her argument I do not understand why the deals were left until the last minute and why a number were not done at all. Most fundamentally, what is the point of being an independent trading nation, what is the point of choosing to negotiate our own trade agreements, if we are happy to just replicate every deal that was done years ago by the European Commission, rather than include any new provisions of our own?

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Emily Thornberry: Let me make a little progress, then I will.

In many areas, the failure to make these deals is particularly stark, including the total lack of progress on any of the aspects of future job growth the Secretary of State highlighted in her speech, on just two of which I shall focus now. First, it is amazing and deeply disappointing that in the 30-plus continuity agreements secured by the Government over the past two years there is not one single new provision that strengthens the global fight against climate change—not even in the enhanced agreement with Japan. Secondly, it is not just a missed opportunity but a failed responsibility that there is no sign in any of the 30-plus agreements of the Government giving even the slightest consideration to human rights.

Egypt and Cameroon are by any standards among the most brutal regimes in the world today, yet the Government signed deals with both countries in December, with no apparent hesitation over their human rights records at all, and no apparent effort to strengthen human rights provisions in those agreements to gain some leverage over their behaviour. With Singapore,

Vietnam and Turkey, the Government went one step further, signing new trade agreements which contain no substantive clauses on human rights at all, and not as much as a side-letter to address the issue. Is it any wonder that Members in the other place, with an increasing number in all parts of this House, believe that the only way to get Ministers to take human rights seriously when it comes to future trade deals is by obliging them to do so by law?

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con) *rose*—

Daniel Kawczynski *rose*—

Emily Thornberry: I will take one more intervention and then I need to make some more progress.

Henry Smith: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way. What is her view of the recent agreement struck between the EU and China when it comes to human rights?

Emily Thornberry: Given the time that I have available, although I would be happy to sit and—[*Interruption.*] No, no, I would seriously be very happy to sit and talk to the hon. Gentleman about this issue and about the issue of China, because it is a challenge for all of us to work out exactly what the right way of proceeding is, and we need to ensure that we listen carefully to the variety of views, and we need to ensure that we make progress together on this.

On the subject of amendments to the Trade Bill, we will also soon be considering proposals to ensure that Parliament is properly able to scrutinise, debate and approve new trade agreements before they become law, and if it was not already clear why those agreements are required, then the absolute farce of the last few weeks surely makes that case. We saw 11 new trade agreements or memorandums of understanding take effect on 1 January: none of them have been debated or approved by this House; none of them have completed the ratification process; four of them were not even published until new year's eve; and one of them, that with Cameroon, has yet to be published. The whole process makes an absolute mockery of the current procedures for the scrutiny of trade deals, and when the Trade Bill comes back to this House, Ministers surely cannot tell their Back Benchers with a straight face that those procedures should stay as they are.

As I said earlier, if any of this was a case of incredibly detailed treaty negotiations coming down to the wire in an effort to get the final text right, we might all accept it. But then we might have come back with something more than this—the agreement with Mexico, just five pages long with an eight-page annex; then they really would have no excuse. But then there is the unfortunate reality of the 30-plus continuity agreements signed by the Government these last two years: no ambition, no improvements, no action on the environment, no progress on workers' rights, no consideration of human rights, no time for parliamentary scrutiny, and not a single benefit in terms of trade that we did not already have. So I am grateful to hear all the talk from the Secretary of State regarding the new trade deals which she aims to sign this year and next, and I am sure that this is the first of many debates that we will have on those prospective deals.

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): Yet again the right hon. Lady is raising the issue of continuity agreements, but may I just gently say to her, echoing the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, that many countries were not willing to go beyond the continuity agreement until we had actually left the European Union? What was important for business was that word “continuity”—signing those agreements, so that at the point at which we left they could carry on trading on the basis on which they had been. Excellent work was done, not just in the past year but in the year or two beforehand by the previous Secretary of State for International Trade as well.

Emily Thornberry: I understand entirely what the right hon. Lady is saying. It is interesting, is it not, that half of the agreements were done in six months by the previous Secretary of State for International Trade, and the other half have been done over an extended period of time under the current Secretary of State? Indeed, many of these agreements, as the right hon. Lady has said, were done on the basis that the European Union deal was likely to be quite different from the one that we actually have now. That is one reason that we had this condition, yet we end up with cut-and-paste agreements coming down to the absolute wire at the end of last year, without our being able to do any scrutiny. As the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) has said, there are many issues that Members would want to raise and would want to have considered before we make any trade agreements, but as things stand, there is very little time for us to debate these matters.

Daniel Kawczynski: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Emily Thornberry: In the limited amount of time that I have left, I will not be taking any more interventions; let me just get to the end of my speech, because we already have only three minutes for each Back Bencher to make a speech in any event.

I would like to talk about the Secretary of State’s plan—as she has called it—on CPTPP, and to make a plea to her with regard to it. She has spoken many times about this matter. She talks as if the only issue to consider is whether we can persuade Japan, Australia and Canada to get on board, but I respectfully say to her that before she can win the argument for accession with them, she needs to start by making the case in Britain first. We have been through five years of division and debate in this country over leaving a trade bloc with our closest neighbours. Are we going to do that just in order to go and join another trade bloc on the other side of the world, simply because Tony Abbott thinks that it is a good idea? He might well be right—it may offer tremendous benefits for our country—but we cannot even start to judge until we know the terms on which we would join, and whether those terms are right for us.

There is a danger that the Government might even persuade themselves that this debate has already been had, thanks to the 14-week public consultation that was carried out back in 2018, but let me remind the Secretary of State of three things. First, only 81 business groups, non-governmental organisations and members of the public sat down and wrote formal responses to that consultation; in my book, that does not amount to proper engagement with stakeholders. Secondly, according

to her Department’s own national survey conducted after that consultation, only 10% of the people of this country said that they knew what CPTPP was and supported joining it. That does not amount to a proper mandate in my book either. Thirdly, if she goes back to the consultation process responses, she will see that it is clear that many were based on very different assumptions about the outcome of our EU trade negotiations from the outcome that we have actually got. What is this about? In my view, it does not amount to a proper and reliable base of opinions.

For all those reasons, my plea to the Secretary of State today is for her to open up the consultation process again and to give business, unions, civil society and the public a chance to voice their opinions about whether joining CPTPP is the right next step based on where we are now and what we want to achieve as a country. The reason why that is crucial brings me back to what I said at the outset, about the chaos that is building at our ports and the crisis that is growing for our exporters. This is not a partisan statement; it is a simple statement of fact. We are going through all this pain because of a fervent belief on the Government Benches that the gains to be had from doing our own free trade deals with the rest of the world will eventually outweigh the losses from damaging our trading relationship with our nearest neighbours in Europe. That is the Government’s leap of faith. Even if I and many of my colleagues have fervently disagreed with that argument in recent years, we are now in a position where, for the good of our country and the communities we serve, we have to hope that we are proved wrong and that the Government are proved right—but, as things stand, that is not the case.

With every hour of delay that passes at Dover, every consignment that is turned away, and every product that is, after all, having to face tariffs because of rules of origin, British businesses are losing money. Meanwhile, in the rest of the world, we have not gained one single penny in extra trade from the Government’s leap of faith: not one single agreement that we did not have before, and not one single export facing lower tariffs than it did in December. Indeed, as we heard the last time we were here, according to the Government’s own figures, our country is forecast to be worse off and to make lower exports thanks to the Secretary of State’s enhanced deal with Japan compared with the deal that we had before. So it is understandable—perhaps inevitable—that when the Government resume their talks with Australia, New Zealand and America; when they start their talks with India, Brazil and the Gulf states; when they try to turn 14 pages of cut and paste into proper treaties with Mexico, Turkey or Canada; and most of all, when they make their formal bid for accession to CPTPP, they will be desperate to do these new trade deals at any price, to make up for our losses with Europe.

But no matter how desperate the Government get, they should not be allowed to do these deals at any price. These deals must not come at the cost of domestic British jobs and business. They must not come at the cost of our farmers and our food standards. They must not come at the cost of our ability to protect the NHS from marketisation or put environmental protection before corporate profits. They must not come at the cost of our principles when it comes to human rights, democratic freedoms and the future of the planet. To guard against

[Emily Thornberry]

all those things, every one of us should make it clear that they will not be allowed to come at the cost of proper scrutiny and debate by this House.

7 pm

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): I refer Members to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is absolutely right that trade brings prosperity and jobs, but global Britain is about much, much more than trade. It is about our shared values—our respect for human dignity, human rights, equality, the rule of law, freedom and democracy. It is about how we work with others who share those values to establish and maintain a rules-based international order that protects those values.

Sadly, what we saw last week in the United States shows us how fragile the value of democracy can be when it is under pressure from populism and nationalism, fuelled by messages disseminated on social media. At the current point for the United Kingdom, post Brexit, dealing with covid and yet to deal with the societal and economic impacts of that, it is absolutely imperative that we reject any push towards nationalism and isolationism and that we recognise the importance of global Britain. Indeed, it is more important today than it ever has been.

If we are going to lead, as we can this year, in G7 and the COP26, we also need to see a change in world politics, where absolutism—"You are either 100% for me or 100% against me, and no compromise is allowed"—has taken hold. We need to move away from the world of strong men facing up to each other. We need to find more ways in which we can work with those who share our values, because those values are under threat, and we need to work together to protect them.

Global Britain has the position this year to enable us to do that, but in order to do it, we need to live our values ourselves. I have to say to the Government that threatening to break an international treaty shortly after signing it, threatening to break international law and cutting our international aid does not enhance the impact of global Britain. In fact, it makes it harder for us as global Britain to get our message around the world. We have been respected because of our 0.7% and respected because of what we do, not just because we are British.

In the few seconds available to me, I want to mention one issue that is a clear and present danger to global Britain: the break-up of the United Kingdom. We often talk in this Chamber about Scotland and how important being part of the UK is to the Scottish economy. The reality is that England needs the rest of the UK as well. The United Kingdom has a seat on the Security Council of the United Nations; I doubt that England would have a seat on the Security Council of the United Nations. We need to think about the impact of this, and I particularly want to mention my concern about Northern Ireland at the moment. We have seen the issue of empty supermarket shelves—not all due to the protocol, but certainly the protocol is playing its part, and the Government need to deal with that issue. Global Britain has a role to play on the world stage, but in order to do that, the Government need to ensure that we maintain the integrity of the United Kingdom.

7.3 pm

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP) [V]: It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). We do not quite agree on the future of the United Kingdom, but we on these islands will always be friends, colleagues and, I hope, allies.

It was David Hume who said that the truth emerges from an honest disagreement among friends. I am a friend to all Members of the House, but we should be in no doubt that this is a very honest disagreement. Global Britain is not my party's project; that will surprise nobody. I do not wish it any harm, but frankly, I wish it was not being inflicted upon my country against our democratic wishes.

I listened carefully, as I always do, to the Secretary of State. As ever, she got 10 out of 10 for enthusiasm, but one out of 10 for detail and zero out of 10 for recognition of the difficulties in the real world right now. If I were Trade Secretary of the United Kingdom—a moment of fantasy—and there were shelves empty in a part of the United Kingdom, I would have mentioned that before global aspirations that are hypothetical at best, in contrast to those real-world consequences.

I am struck, as ever, by the ability of Government Members to be giddy with excitement at the potential up sides of global Britain. I do, for the record, wish global Britain well—I want to see it succeed—because the battles of the past are the battles of the past, but the hypothetical, aspirational advantages are as nothing when set against the real-world consequences that people are suffering right now. No amount of red, white and blue breathless excitement will distract from the fact that global Britain is an answer to a question that nobody in Scotland or Northern Ireland was asking. Frankly, nobody in Northern Ireland or Scotland is interested in it right now, when we have far more pressing concerns.

Regardless of the international links that global Britain and the UK will have, the primary relationship in all forms of trade, human contact and cultural exchange is always going to be with the continent that we are part of and will remain part of. Despite the deal, such as it was, done at the last minute in Brussels at the tail-end of the year, far too much of the detail of that relationship remains utterly unclear, again causing real problems right now. The fact that the House's scrutiny of that agreement and the future relationship has been shut down, with the Committee that should be doing it and is best placed to do it being closed by this Administration, should concern us all.

There are a number of things that we are losing. These are not aspirational, hypothetical things; these are things in the real world right now. The loss of the Erasmus exchange is an act of economic vandalism against our universities and higher education sector. It came at the last minute in the talks, when previously we had been told, "We will keep it," "We will try to keep it," or, "We will manage to somehow fix it." At the last minute we were told, "No, we won't."

It is an act of economic vandalism against our universities, but it is also an act of vandalism and vindictiveness against future generations of students, who will be shut off from those advantages. I did Erasmus myself in 1992—a long time ago, but the advantages I gained then have stayed with me ever since. It breaks my heart that future generations will not be able to take advantage of it.

The Turing scheme that has been suddenly created on the back of an envelope to replace Erasmus is a pale shadow of those real rights. Presumably it was named after Alan Turing, as he was someone who was treated abominably by the British Government. It is an act of vindictiveness against future generations of students, and those who are responsible for that deception should hang their heads in shame.

In Scotland, all of our universities want to remain part of the Erasmus programme. We are, as a Scottish Government, trying to find ways to do that. I urge the UK Government, if they want this to be a global Britain, to respect the internal democracy of the United Kingdom and allow Scotland to maintain those international links. There are ways that we could do it and we are working on the proposal.

Just as Scotland wants to stay in Erasmus, we want also to help our creative sector. Another thing we are losing is musicians' visas. According to the Musicians' Union, 78% of musicians and creatives have travelled to the EU or the European economic area over the last year to trade, to do their business and to do the cultural exchange—that soft diplomacy—that global Britain surely relies upon. There was an offer from the EU side to maintain a 90-day visa that would deal with the EEA as a bloc for all our creatives travelling abroad. The UK Government rejected it in an act of vindictiveness against our creatives, because they did not want inward travel to come to us. Again, I really hope that can be reversed, because it was a poor decision.

These are the real-world consequences of the loss of freedom of movement. The debate in the UK—and much of the debate in this House—seems to be predicated on the idea that inward movement happens only in one direction. There are millions of UK nationals enjoying freedom of movement rights across the European Union, which has been a huge boost to our society and to the soft power that global Britain surely depends upon. The SNP wants those rights back.

As the loss of those rights becomes clear, the people of Scotland will have a choice. As I say, I wish global Britain well—although not with much enthusiasm, I have to say—and I hope it works, but I will put forward a different proposition to the people of Scotland: independence in Europe. Nothing in EU membership was holding the UK back in what it wants to do. I echo the concerns mentioned by the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) about the lack of ambition on human rights, climate change and environmental standards—all the things on which we think the UK Government have engaged in a race to the bottom, rather than maintaining high EU standards.

The SNP will be putting forward independence in Europe, which will regain rights for our exporters, for our universities, for our students and for our people with freedom of movement—a huge societal and economic boost. Unlike in 2014, at the time of the first independence referendum, those real world rights have just been taken away from us, and the consequences are clear. We will be able to set that against the aspirational advantages of global Britain. I look forward to that discussion and to holding the Government to account for their promises. I wish them well in fulfilling them, but I am confident that they will be nothing compared with the losses that we have all suffered by leaving the European Union in

the worst way possible, and the lack of clarity that emerges from the continuing talks that will need to be maintained to take the future relationship with the European Union forward.

Whatever global Britain becomes, geography will not be altered. Britain is a medium-ranking state within the European continent. Scotland is comfortable with that, and independence in Europe is our political answer to the best aspirations of the people of Scotland. I think it is the best aspiration and the best answer to global Britain as well.

7.11 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Although I sympathise with the sadness of the hon. Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith) about our now having a trade border about 30 miles south of here, I see no reason why it would be improved if there was a trade border 20 miles south of Edinburgh. That strikes me as a very odd argument for free trade and for improving the lot of people in Scotland—or, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) said, the people of England. It would be a loss to us all.

In fact, free trade has enriched us all. I was delighted to hear my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State refer to Cobden, who spoke of the opportunities for us all. She also rightly spoke about the opportunities in Asia and CPTPP, and I look forward to seeing her bring back that agreement, which is important not just to us but to the Governments of Japan, Australia, New Zealand and, indeed, many others. She also spoke powerfully about the opportunities to reach into different markets in places such as India—I am sorry that the Prime Minister could not make his trip, but I welcome the opportunity to develop that market—but she did not speak about the challenge we have in trade with China. I look forward to her mentioning what she will do about the unfair labour practices we see in parts of China and the implication of that for free trade around the world, and particularly here in the UK.

Trade, of course, is not just good for the people of the UK; it is good for everyone. It is the best form of aid. While I welcome the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead about the 0.7%, it is certainly true that actually investing in countries around the world would make a transformative difference. I look forward to British businesses investing heavily in Nigeria, Somalia, Somaliland, Kenya and many other places to transform lives by transforming economies.

We can have fair trade and we can have free trade, but that also depends on the rules. That great Scotsman Adam Smith spoke about the rules when he spoke about the market, because the market is nothing without the rules; it is not fair unless there are principles that underpin it. I therefore look forward to the Government taking the opportunity at G7, and indeed when they get to COP, to look at the rules that apply to us when it comes to not just the goods we speak about in the WTO but the data that we see flowing around us.

A company in the United States has just made a decision on who can and cannot communicate on its platform—most famously involving the sitting President of that country. What does that mean for the data exchanges we will have around the world? We need to be shaping those rules and setting them again. There is a huge opportunity

[Tom Tugendhat]

for the UK to retake that position at the heart of the international law-based system, restate the importance of the rules in our world and be the leading light in it.

7.14 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind) [V]: In three minutes, it is quite difficult to cover all the issues one wants to cover in a debate like this, but I want to make a few points. First, I do not think anyone so far has mentioned the covid crisis that we are in the midst of, the inadequacy of the British response to it, the unfairness in the distribution of vaccines in the richest countries and, perhaps equally serious, the lack of availability of vaccines to many of the poorest and most vulnerable people all around this planet. Surely, if we are to play a part on the global stage, we have to play a part that ensures that we eradicate the dangers of contagious illnesses all around the world; otherwise, we will ultimately all be vulnerable to the effects of them.

This debate takes place in the aftermath of Britain finally leaving the EU only a couple of weeks ago, after the Government cobbled together at the last minute a trade deal with the EU that many of us felt unable to support because we did not believe it gave the protections necessary on environmental and working conditions and a number of other issues. But the issues are already piling up, with the loss of trade, the difficulties with exports and the problems of vast amounts of bureaucracy and paperwork, all of which could have been avoided if the Prime Minister had seriously wanted to negotiate a proper trade deal with the European Union, which he had plenty of time to do. But he was always looking over his shoulder, preferring to do a deal with his former friend Donald Trump, the outgoing—an unlamented loss—President of the United States.

We live in a global world, as the title of this debate—global Britain—indicates, and that means that we have to recognise the huge power of global corporations. Rolls-Royce is losing jobs at Barnoldswick in order to outsource those jobs to other parts of the world, including Spain and Singapore. The abuse of human rights around the world, which others have drawn attention to, has to be considered in our trade deals. Those human rights abuses lead to the loss of life and to refugee flows. There are now 65 million refugees around the world. Also, in all these trade deals that are being done, let us be absolutely clear. Let us make sure that everything we say at COP26 about net zero being achieved by 2030, or a bit later in the case of some Governments, is actually going to be met. Let us ensure that we have a trade deal that meets those targets by insisting on environmental and labour standards all around the world, and that trade deals do not become a race to the bottom, leading to damage to working conditions in this country and all around the world. It is in our hands to do this, and it is in the hands of this Parliament to scrutinise and hold to account what this Government do at the same time.

7.17 pm

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): Looking back along the timeline of history, we see that it is punctuated by years when dramatic events and their consequences have altered its course. I believe that 2021

will be such a year, when we repair and rebuild our post-covid world. We will also better appreciate the frailty of our global order, with authoritarianism on the rise, the disunity of the west and a fast-changing relationship with an ever more assertive China. If 2020 was the year in which we calibrated our view on China and saw that it was not going to mature into the responsible global citizen we had hoped for, in 2021 we are likely to see Beijing unashamedly advance its own competing strategic agenda, exploiting battered economies across the globe and ensnaring ever more states into debt through its infrastructure and digital programmes. We face a turning point this year: either we support global democracy and repair it, or we allow the world to splinter into two dangerously competing spheres of influence.

Of course, 2021 brings a change in guard at the White House, with President-elect Biden promising to commit to rebuild alliances, to stand up against geopolitical threats and to return a sense of purpose to what the west believes in, stands for and is willing to defend. So this is a pivotal year and a time for Britain to step forward. Let us recall the last time there was a global reset. It involved the United States and Britain. It was Roosevelt and Churchill, through the Atlantic charter, who set the tone for the new international architecture, which now needs to be revisited.

The opportunity for Britain cannot be overstated, but our hard work is cut out in front of us. We talk up global Britain and the special relationship, but our international stock is not what it was. We have become too risk-averse and too distracted. Mention has been made of cuts to our soft power because of our aid budget. Indeed, the integrated review has yet to be completed. We need these answers in order to understand what our defence posture should be.

I encourage No. 10 to expand its bandwidth so that we can reassess and confirm our place in the world. The international to-do list is huge: reviving international organisations such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation; updating the Geneva conventions; securing a viable climate change agreement; and, of course, coming up with a unified strategy on China. None of those issues can be addressed without the appropriate alliance. I have said this before, but my single recommendation to the Government today is to advance and empower the G7 group of nations, widening it to include Australia, India and Korea, and advancing it from a talking shop to a new coalition with genuine clout. This is half the world's GDP around one table. This formidable partnership, committed to collective security, democracy and the international rule of law, can be the vehicle that offers the leadership and designs the fresh international architecture our world now desperately requires. I encourage the Government to work with President-elect Biden and make this happen.

7.20 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab) [V]: The year 2021 is pivotal for the UK on the global stage: we will host the COP26 climate change summit; assume presidency of the G7; co-lead the action coalition on gender-based violence; and undertake a new chapter, having exited the EU. Against that backdrop, I await the findings of the Government's integrated review of international policy, which provides an opportunity to clarify what

the UK stands for internationally, and how we will hope to lead and achieve on the global stage not just through trade.

First and foremost, our development policy should be underpinned by a core commitment to tackling poverty among the poorest communities. The pandemic has meant that that commitment is needed now much more than ever. The World Bank estimates that covid-19 will push about another 100 million people into poverty, reversing hard-won gains. I am therefore concerned by the absence of an explicit commitment to tackling poverty in the Government's new strategic framework.

Our aid policy should enable communities in developing countries to lead and shape their own development, using their own knowledge of what works best at local level to create long-lasting change. For example, local women's rights organisations are grounded in their communities, with long-standing and trusted relationships. Their work is strategic, lasting and cost-effective. The United Nations Population Fund estimates that the pandemic will lead to an additional 2 million female genital mutilation cases and 13 million child marriages, so their work is needed more now than ever. To ensure that the Government meet their own commitments on girls' education, global Britain must mean leadership on addressing violence against women and girls, which is a key barrier to girls globally accessing education in the first place. I was saddened when Baroness Sugg stepped down, but I admire her reasons for doing so. Can the Government confirm when her important role on gender equality will be filled?

In 2018, just 0.3% of UK aid was spent on ending violence against women and girls globally. We can and must do more. Alongside greater funding, there needs to be a robust framework to guide the Government's work on gender equality. I urge the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to adopt and use the Department for International Development's strategic vision for gender equality.

The UK needs to advocate for a world that respects internationally agreed rules and practices, including respecting human rights and the rule of law. We must call out the actions of those who break these rules, whether the Ugandan Government's treatment of opposition politician Bobi Wine, or threats to human rights defenders in Colombia. Perhaps one of the greatest tests of this is our relationship with China. In Hong Kong, the rights and freedoms of citizens continue to be eroded following the introduction of the national security law. We need to work with like-minded international partners to stand up to these abuses and support pro-democracy campaigners.

7.23 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. It is right that we should be debating global Britain this week, the 75th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, and the House of Commons will want to mark with sadness the passing of Sir Brian Urquhart, one of the principal architects of the UN and a fine British civil servant. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) said, the power of a passionate, compelling vision for global Britain has the ability to unite the United Kingdom, all four parts of it, in one vision, at a time when that Union is under great pressure.

I want to make two specific comments about global Britain. The first is about the what. As my right hon. Friend said, we await the report, because we have had the money but not yet the report on what global Britain is going to stand for, but it seems to me very important that global Britain should represent values, rather than geographers. This enables us from time to time to agree with China but to disagree with Donald Trump. The UK has been a very bright light in many difficult parts of the world, standing up for the rule of law and human rights against Islamic terror, standing against meddling Russians and Chinese human rights abuse, and standing for women's rights and the fight against starvation.

When it comes to the how, I think that the international rules-based system is the key. The UK has real leverage on this: our seat in the United Nations; as a leading member of the Commonwealth, that important north-south organisation, which embraces so much of the world; our principled position in NATO; the fact that we are a European power, in or out of the European Union; our relationship with the United States; and, of course, the British language, which, in terms of commerce, trade and law, gives Britain such a pre-eminent position, quite apart from the City of London as an international centre. And as others have mentioned, we have development. Over the past two decades, Britain has become a development superpower—the ideas of British universities, the actions on the ground of Britain's international non-governmental organisations, and the policy formation of the thinktanks—which is why I ask the Government to think again on breaking the 0.7% promise, on which every single Member of this House of Commons was elected just one year ago. Remember that the 0.7% has already been reduced.

Daniel Kawczynski: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Mitchell: I am afraid that I cannot give way as I have so little time.

Daniel Kawczynski: He will get an extra minute.

Mr Mitchell: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Daniel Kawczynski: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend. He is a champion for DFID spending, but does he agree that, now we are outside the European Union, our intention to lower tariffs for third world countries will, in the long term, result in much more support for them than just the DFID money?

Mr Mitchell: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. Of course, he is right that trade is the key, but in order to get to a point where countries can trade, we need many of the very important services that DFID has been providing in some of the poorest parts of the world. Remember that the 0.7% has already been reduced, because it is connected with our gross national income, by nearly £3 billion. If this cut goes ahead, the development budget will be reduced by nearly 50%. That is the worst thing we could do in a pandemic, which we know will never be defeated here until it is defeated everywhere. It is the most terrible timing—when we approach the chair of the G7, when this year we will chair the United Nations Security Council and when we have the most important COP in Glasgow in November. It would be a

[Mr Mitchell]

terrible mistake. I urge the Treasury Bench to think again about this £4 billion reduction—just 1% of the borrowing this year. It should not be carried out in this way and it should not be carried out at this time.

7.27 pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC) [V]: Global Britain reimagines the past, ignores the present and, in its naivety, diminishes the future. It is a product of the exceptionalism that diminished the UK's relationship with the EU. Global Britain captures the arrogance of the Westminster Government towards the non-England UK.

The Foreign Secretary said that global Britain will be “the best possible allies, partners and friends with our European neighbours”.

Those neighbours are bound together by a European vision of peace, protected by political, economic and social interaction. This was rejected by this Government. Delusion and nostalgia trump political reality, trump global interdependence and even trump geography itself. The delusion is obvious to all, save for the deluded. My party advocates a policy for Wales of proximity to Europe. We recognise our shared values, our diversity, our political and economic interests and the sheer fact of geography that draws us to our mainland.

The Foreign Secretary said the UK will be an “energetic champion of free and open trade”—[*Official Report*, 3 February 2020; Vol. 671, c. 26.]

having just struck the first trade deal ever that put up barriers to trade. Most distasteful is the claim that the UK will be a “stronger force for good”—this coming from a Government who have cut international aid, have supplied arms to autocrats and have lavished praise on demagogues like Donald Trump, and that is going well, is it not?

This year, the Republic of Ireland has again taken its seat on the United Nations Security Council. This achievement for a small nation is an emphatic rebuttal of the Unionist contention that nations like Wales and Scotland are too small and too poor to be independent and successful. These past four years of failure have proved that one London-shaped national interest does not serve our four unique and diverging sets of interests. We have our own international priorities. For now, we must have equal powers to approve future trade deals. That is imperative.

Global Britain's withdrawal from Erasmus is a disgrace: curtailing the life opportunities of our best, and with no reciprocal arrangements for students from our neighbours. But not to worry, we will have, I am sure, a “world-beating” alternative, no doubt destined to join all the other world-beating triumphs of this Government. Finally, there is the Government's stupidest self-damaging spasm: the little England denial of visas for performers, rejecting a reasonable and mutually beneficial EU offer of 90-day visas both ways.

Wales can achieve great things as an independent sovereign nation, free to make a positive and honest contribution to address the global challenges of our times. Global Britain comes nowhere near that aspiration.

7.31 pm

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): Naturally, I am glad that we have finally left the European Union in all its manifestations, which I always believed was an unnatural berth for a United Kingdom that was outward-looking and sovereign. However, Brexit is not a panacea in itself. What Brexit does is bring choices and options and freedoms that would not otherwise be there. To make it succeed we have to have vision for our future, we have to have courage in policy and we have to have boldness in execution. Government structures must be re-oriented towards the task, funding not only those institutions we need inside the United Kingdom to make it succeed, but our elements abroad as well, something the Treasury will need to come to terms with.

If I may, I would like to say two things about trade. First, Brexit allows us to have an independent trade policy, but that comes with one major drawback: we actually have to have more exporters to make it worthwhile. Unless we have more goods and services to sell—unless we have more trade—a free trade agreement is little more than another piece of paper. That is why I welcomed the push for an updated and extended transport strategy.

Secondly, it allows us to deal with some global trade issues. Global trade was shrinking before we got to the covid crisis, not least because of the number of non-tariff barriers being loaded into the global economy by the world's richest countries. We are making it more and more difficult for some of the world's poorest countries to access our markets. If we continue that trend, our aid budget will become little more than conscience money while we stop people being able to trade their way sustainably out of poverty. We need to take a strong look at our own behaviour and what we are doing in terms of putting up barriers to some of the world's poorest nations. It is wonderful that we are talking about reducing tariffs for some of the world's poorest countries, but we need to take a good look at the non-tariff barriers that are making it so difficult for them to enter our markets. That problem is being made worse at the present time by the export restrictions on medicines and medical products. They will need to be reduced, otherwise they will accentuate the problems we are facing with covid.

We have a World Trade Organisation that is, frankly, on the edge of collapse. That brings me to the final point I want to make about the institutions where Britain can play a bigger role. Multilateral institutions such as the UN, the Security Council, the OECD, the IMF and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development were all designed for the second half of the 20th century. They need to be brought up to date for the challenges of the 21st century. Those who have shown the way in the United Kingdom, both in politics and the civil service, can give a lead. There are our other partnerships, too. In NATO, our European partners must learn to step up to the plate on spending. The Five Eyes community has far more than just security potential for us. The Commonwealth—a third of the global population, most of whom are under the age of 30—shares many of our political institutions and our legal system.

There are tremendous opportunities for the UK. We can choose to shape the global system around us or be shaped by it. I know what I want for my country.

7.34 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: I speak tonight as the trade rapporteur of the Council of Europe, and as such I want to see democracy, the rule of law, human rights and environmental sustainability embedded in all our trade deals. We stand here tonight semi-detached from our closest and biggest marketplace—the single market—and our closest friends. Over there, when they are looking at deals, they are scrutinising and approving the negotiating mandate, looking at the negotiations, and approving individual deals before they are ratified, but here we have not seen and agreed the mandate, and we have not looked at the negotiations. These deals are already binding in international law because they have already been passed and ratified. The EU deal was dumped on us on Christmas eve in a half-filled sack marked “Take it or leave it”, and we found that it did not even include any services, which are 80% of our economy. The Japan deal, worth £1.5 billion, would have been worth £2.6 billion via the EU. As regards the US, it is good to see the back of Trump and his isolationism and climate scepticism. We should now embrace President Biden in COP26 to ensure that environmental sustainability is central to all future trade agreements.

As regards the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the US and India are standing back, and it is dominated by China, which has 18% of global GDP. China grew by 4.9% even last year through the pandemic. China is no friend of democracy, as we have seen in Hong Kong. It is no friend of human rights, as we have seen with the Uyghur Muslims. We have ended up moving from being a rule-maker in the EU, be it on the environment or financial rules, to a rule-taker from someone who does not share our values. That is why, if we do embrace the Trans-Pacific Partnership, we need to ensure that the UN human rights agreements are included and that, like New Zealand, we are one step removed and we do not agree investor-state dispute settlements. Otherwise those people from China who are building the nuclear power stations of the future, involved in HS2 and providing for 5G will end up being able to hit us, as we have seen in other examples like the nuclear provider Vattenfall in Germany. In a nutshell, with China we need to confront human rights, compete on trade, and co-operate on climate change and health. It is important that our COP26, G7 and Security Council chairpersonships embrace our fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, fair trade and our environment.

7.37 pm

Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con): To anyone in this House or beyond this House who thinks that global Britain is somehow an aspiration, not a reality, I would commend to them the excellent report by Robin Niblett of Chatham House entitled “Global Britain, Global Broker” where he points out that the United Kingdom already has a seat at all the key multinational organisations—the IMF, the G7 and the G20—and is a permanent veto-owning member of the UN Security Council, and that is before we even look at the Commonwealth or NATO. We are fourth-equal place with Germany and Japan in the number of full-time embassies and high commissions, and sixth in terms of defence spending.

I think we have an obligation to define what global Britain means. I would say, before I incur the wrath of my friends on the Northern Ireland Benches and the noble Baroness Hoey, that global Britain also includes Northern Ireland—it is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Of course, it goes to much more than trade—it is also about foreign policy, security, intelligence, development and defence, which are all part of the complex infrastructure that represents the UK overseas. The challenge is for us to distil that into a coherent offer that the world will understand.

I have not spoken on the subject of trade since I left the Treasury Bench. I could say that I resigned or I could say that I did a job swap with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade Policy. As I went around the world as Minister of State for trade, I was struck by the interest there was in the United Kingdom and what Brexit meant in terms of our ability to re-engage. People were interested in green technology, FinTech, the City of London, financial services regulation, and what the UK could do in terms of infrastructure. When I was in Vietnam, Morocco, Algeria, Brazil, Chile and even the United States, there was huge interest. One could almost say that if global Britain were a Tinder profile, we would crash with the numbers seeking to swipe right. I beg the indulgence of the House briefly to place on record my thanks to those who worked with me at the Department for International Trade in my private office: my senior private secretary, Marcus; and St John, Alessandro and Emily. They were a delight to work with; I am not sure they would always say the same about me.

We have talked about values; trade delivers prosperity, jobs and the emergence of a middle class in poorer countries, and it is the emergence of a middle class that leads to the demand and drive for rights such as female emancipation, the education of girls, LGBT rights, freedom of speech and the rule of law—as distinct, of course, from rule by lawyers. We saw the same thing ourselves in the industrial revolution. As we look at doing joint economic and trade committees, trade agreements and all the rest, we should never forget that, fundamentally, this is about prosperity and dignity for individuals around the world. That aspect of what we call global Britain is not just economic or even political but is, in the most real of senses, a moral mission.

7.40 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I am all for global Britain, but I am more for global UK. I want to make sure that Northern Ireland gets its fair share of the action. I know that the Minister is doing his best to ensure that Northern Ireland is kept at the top of the agenda, and that is essential.

I welcome the comments earlier from the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). There is absolutely no doubt that in the first 11 days of this year, the protocol that has been inflicted on Northern Ireland's trade has been a complete and unmitigated disaster. That is not the fault of Brexit, but it is the fault of those who tried to frustrate Brexit. I hope the Government will urgently invoke article 16 and remove the pernicious clauses of the protocol that are damaging trade.

Let me give an example. At the weekend, I had to field a call from my constituent who was moving home from Essex to Broughshane in my constituency. When she

[*Ian Paisley*]

got her white van to Cairnryan, she was told that she required an export and customs declaration form—to move home from one part of the United Kingdom to the other! I was furious. That van had to turn and go back to Essex and she had to enter the boat at Cairnryan as a foot passenger to get to her home. It is utterly and totally disgraceful. If that is how we are treating citizens of global Britain, I am outraged and appalled that that is how citizens are being treated. Let us fix that, which we can do by invoking article 16, and let us fix it now, because the longer we delay, the more we will damage trade.

I had another constituent on the phone today who imports personal protective equipment that is made in Britain—in Yorkshire—and when it got to the Cairnryan ferry terminal it was turned back. It was coming in to help frontline workers in Northern Ireland but it was turned back. That is another disgrace. It has to cease, and the quicker that happens, the better.

I can tell the House one thing: I do not hear any Scots nationalists tonight demanding that they have this special protocol. The protocol has been a disaster for Northern Ireland and we are only on day 11. I hope that the Government fix it very quickly. Let us sort out our internal UK trade—sort out the friction that exists—and then we can get on with ensuring that we really can be a world player in the future of our market.

I wish to put one other item on the agenda: it is essential that we seize the opportunity to be the world leader in hydrogen technology. This country is right at the cusp of that. We missed the battery opportunity; we can be the leaders in hydrogen technology. Let us use every opportunity to make sure we have hydrogen cities, hydrogen power, hydrogen opportunities and hydrogen jobs in the United Kingdom.

7.43 pm

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): Our new national security adviser, Lord Frost, who comes into the post on the back of a considerable success as our chief negotiator with the EU, said that leaving the European Union should be seen as an opportunity for what he called “national renewal”; I completely agree.

Although the EU will always be an important partner, we should lift our horizons to a more global outlook, but what exactly should this new concept of global Britain mean in practice? To my mind, there should be three core elements, or pillars, to the concept of global Britain, and the first is economics. Just as we rely on a successful economy to fund key public services such as the NHS and schools, we need a dynamic, growing economy to fund our defences and our international presence. In economic terms, we cannot simply tax our way out of the pandemic; we need to grow our way out, too. The absolutely sterling work of the Secretary of State for International Trade in signing more than 60 new deals is a fundamental example of how we can do just that.

Secondly, diplomatically, we are and must remain a key player in international forums. We are already an established member of the P5, the G7, the G20, Five Eyes, NATO, the Commonwealth, the OECD, the WTO and a plethora of other international organisations, and we will now host the COP26 conference as well. In some ways, our soft power outweighs our hard power, at least

at the moment, and we remain a respected voice in favour of the international rules-based order. We must always maintain that leadership role in the world community.

Thirdly, militarily, we are, and are likely to remain, a nuclear power for the foreseeable future, and our nuclear deterrent remains the ultimate guarantee of our national security. However, in terms of conventional forces, we are still one of the major military powers in NATO. The Prime Minister has declared his intent that we should become the pre-eminent naval power among European NATO nations. Later this year, HMS Queen Elizabeth should achieve initial operating capability with her F-35 aircraft, the carrier strike. When the Prince of Wales follows her by 2024, we will be one of only three nations on earth to have two new fully functioning aircraft carriers. As the son of Stoker First Class Reginald Francois, who fought at D-day, I am proud to assert that the white ensign has always been a potent symbol of freedom, and it must remain so.

We must now think and act like global Britain economically, diplomatically and militarily. As we bring the integrated review to a conclusion, we should be a strong ally to many, but beholden to none. We should also bear in mind the words of the PM’s other hero, Pericles, who reminds us, “Freedom remains the sole possession of those who have the courage to defend it”. We always did, we always have, and, most assuredly, we always will.

7.46 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Global Britain—a lofty ideal, but with recent months witnessing a dramatic reduction of the UK’s international aid and a hard Brexit, I want to strike a note of realism into the Government’s one-way triumphalism.

Less than two weeks ago, we saw our relationship with our biggest and closest trading partner, five decades after a Tory Government took us into the European Economic Community in a 12-year process, fizzle out in another of these constrained debates—so much for the sovereignty of Parliament. The Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union then began examining the detail of the 1,256 pages of trade and co-operation reduction downgrades. That Committee, too, is now having the plug pulled, when there is so much to scrutinise.

Erasmus—gone, with its replacement set to foster British uniglotism. Touring musicians, facing ruinously costly obstacles for themselves and their gear to get in the van and go—gone. Eighty per cent. of our economy is services, the biggest chunk being financial services. It got 90 mentions while fishing, 1% of the economy, featured 368 times. Too much of this is left “TBC”, and other horrors are only now coming to light. There is no end to red tape, as previously promised, for export/import firms that are reporting untold VAT complications and costs.

The access to criminal databases enjoyed the week before last through the EU arrest warrant—gone. There is no more EU co-operation on defence, the environment, international aid—it is the opposite of global Britain as we shrink on the world stage socially, culturally, and in security and prosperity terms. It is better than no deal, yes, but it is a downgrade none the less, and with no guarantee of keeping up on employment protections and the environment. That is the opposite of levelling up.

On international aid, Cameron, Brown, Blair, Major and even the last Prime Minister—every living Prime Minister—have condemned the cutting of the 0.7% contribution to the world's poorest as morally unjustifiable and practically short-sighted, particularly at a time when the world faces the common enemy of coronavirus. It seems that we are going it alone when collective action would be wise. On having the courage to condemn old friends and allies when necessary, the past PM was the first to hold Trump's hand, but now it is time to hold him to account.

This Government have made a habit of U-turns—they occur daily nowadays. The next one must be to start off with reinstating the International Development and Brexit Committees and then go further, because otherwise, global Britain just becomes a mere Bozza buzzword.

7.49 pm

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I speak as the sole Polish-born British Member of Parliament in this Chamber. Obviously, for me, the three seas initiative is becoming increasingly important as we have left the European Union. The three seas initiative includes 12 countries in central and eastern Europe, bordering on the Black sea, the Baltic sea and the Adriatic sea. They are coming together; all are members of the European Union, and all apart from Austria are members of NATO. It is an increasingly important regional bloc on our continent. The three seas initiative is coming up with a different narrative from the Franco-German axis, which has perhaps for too long controlled the destiny of our continent.

The United States of America has been a very good example in its effective engagement with the three seas initiative, treating those 12 countries as a specific entity, investing in them and supporting them strategically from a defence perspective. In the post-Brexit era, we can show real leadership on our continent by supporting the three seas initiative and putting sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. Now no longer constrained by our membership of the European Union, we ought to follow our American friends in imposing sanctions on any company involved in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which is a real issue for many politicians who represent countries in the three seas initiative.

This undersea gas pipeline that the Germans are building directly to Russia, bypassing all the gas and oil networks that run through our NATO partners, is extremely dangerous because it puts our NATO partners at great additional pressure from Moscow and makes them susceptible to additional energy blackmail, which the Russians have used so successfully in the past. The United States of America has managed to halt temporarily the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline through sanctions on companies involved. I urge the Minister now, in a post-Brexit context, to show the same courage and resolve that his American counterparts are doing in standing up from a moral, strategic and security perspective, challenging the Germans not to endanger our NATO partners in this way, and imposing sanctions on any company involved in this project that is highly risky for the future security of our continent.

7.52 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind) [V]: Blwyddyn newydd dda to you, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to speak in this debate.

After the political rancour of the last four years, it is important that policy makers face the reality of where we are and start mapping a vision for the future. That challenge belongs to those on both sides of the European debate. False hope that the question of Europe can be parked by the next Westminster election seems naive, considering that the agreement contains provisions for periodic full-scale reviews, with the first expected right after the likely date of the next election.

The UK's trade relationship with the EU will always—by far—be the most important one for Welsh businesses. I am glad that the agreement maintained tariff and quota-free access to the European economic area. However, any divergence in standards will in all probability lead to justified punitive action by the European Union. It is disconcerting, to say the least, that Brexiteers are already demanding a bonfire of environmental, consumer and workers' protections. Those hoping that the Brexit culture war is over are living in the bizarre hope that the Tories are going to give up their main political weapon, and that the European Research Group obsessives are all of a sudden going to find a new political project to entertain themselves. This sets the scene for years of further Euro-bashing to make the case for the Singapore-on-Thames group or the "Britannia Unchained" gang.

I remain convinced that the Brexit that was chosen by the British Government will be politically, economically and culturally damaging to Wales. Of course, I hope that my concerns are misplaced. Looking for evidence of this, I find myself echoing the question asked by so many commentators: what will the British state do with this mythical sovereignty that was worth the price of a hard exit? After hearing the Secretary of State's opening remarks, I am not entirely clear about what can be achieved post Brexit that could not be accomplished before. Reminiscing about past imperial glory is not a vision for the future in a highly complex world. If we are to have any chance of making the best of the post-Brexit world, the Westminster elites need to be urgently inoculated with a reality vaccine. A renegade state in the north Atlantic with a reputation for undermining international law and the international rules-based order is likely to find itself located firmly on the inconsequential periphery.

I echo the comments of many speakers in this debate about the regrettable decision of the British Government to cut the international aid budget. My vision for Wales is for my country to be an international force for good in the world, placing itself at the centre of global issues such as climate change, economic justice, human rights, international aid and conflict resolution. I would like to think this would be a mantle taken up by the British state, but the aforementioned priorities are anathema to a Westminster elite intoxicated on its own propaganda, preferring to live in a fantasy of hubris.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Blwyddyn newydd dda i chi hefyd, Jonathan.

7.55 pm

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con) [V]: We have heard from most Members about the national benefits of leaving the EU and the prospects for global trade, and in the limited time I have I want to highlight the positive effects this deal will have on my constituency.

[David Morris]

In trade and business, along with the majority of my constituents, we overwhelmingly embraced exiting the EU and the prospects of trading on different global terms. The new link road in my constituency from Heysham port to the M6 is the quickest route in the country from a major transport artery to a major port. Heysham port has had over £10 million in recent years for upgrades from Government and the private sector, gearing up for increased volumes of trade through Ireland and Northern Ireland. It is only a matter of time before Heysham port is awarded freeport status, which I and the Morecambe business improvement district, among many others, would like to see. Indeed, I am in discussions about making this application in the very near future.

Morecambe and the surrounding area have many international energy interests. After the referendum result had been declared I was given assurances by EDF that the vote to leave the EU would not affect jobs and investment; it was true to its word, and the Hydrogen to Heysham project, which along with EDF includes the European Institute for Energy Research and Lancaster University, has successfully demonstrated the technical feasibility of producing clean hydrogen by co-locating electrolysis facilities at our nuclear site in Lancashire. EDF Energy has confirmed that the project remains on its corporate agenda. EDF is now considering options for building on the learnings of the project to focus on low-carbon hydrogen applications and demonstrate them in the Morecambe bay area. This is clear proof that the EU ought to continue being a partner in the great successes of the energy and academic sectors in my constituency to ensure clean energy for the future.

The Eden Project is coming to Morecambe, paving the way for Morecambe to move forward to a new golden era of regeneration and prosperity. We welcome Eden North, and in particular the future prospects for our young people, who have recently formed North West Youth for Eden. Lancaster and Morecambe College has, under the leadership of Wes Johnson, reached an agreement to train future generations to work in Eden, a prestigious brand with sites across the world. Likewise, the vice-chancellor of Lancaster University, Dame Sue Black, is already championing the benefits of Eden Project North and partnering for the future prosperity of my district in the next generations.

On the space industry, the UK will remain a member of the European Space Agency and will continue to participate in the Copernicus project. This will enable intellectual property to be maximised by high-tech industries in my district. Along with other communication platforms, the UK is now a major stakeholder in OneWeb, the Earth-orbiting communication system.

Finally, I pay homage to the Prime Minister and the previous Prime Minister in getting us to this point. Leaving the EU has not been an easy job, but we will have many options in the future.

7.58 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): As we reset our foreign and development policies, they will no doubt reflect our country's long-standing respect for human rights. Sadly, one of the human rights most at risk globally

today is that addressed by article 18 of the universal declaration of human rights. Protecting and promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief must be one of the UK's human rights priorities, not least because of the extent of violations of FORB in so many parts of the world today, affecting Buddhists in Tibet, Rohingyas in Myanmar, Yazidis in Iraq, Uyghurs in China, Hindus and Ahmadiyya Muslims in Pakistan, Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea, Christians in North Korea and atheists in Bangladesh. That is by no means an exhaustive list.

Tackling religious intolerance needs to be at the heart of our policies, not least because of the wider implications of the risks of not doing so. Those were summed up by the Prime Minister recently when, in replying to my PMQ, he said:

"We all know that wherever freedom of belief is under attack, other human rights are under attack as well."—[*Official Report*, 11 November 2020; Vol. 683, c. 898.]

The right to education, jobs, homes, family life, access to justice, liberty and even life itself all can be at risk when FORB is under attack. This is not only a human rights priority. As the Bishop of Truro said in his report, FORB is

"perhaps the most fundamental human right because so many others depend upon it."

It is a privilege to take up my appointment as the Prime Minister's special envoy for freedom of religion or belief, but that is not the point, nor is the title. The point for me is this: can this role in some modest way make a positive difference—yes, to our projection of global Britain, but more fundamentally, can it make a difference to what Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the architects of the universal declaration of human rights, called the "world of the individual person"? Working alongside the Foreign Secretary and Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, the Minister for human rights, I recognise that this envoy role can and will only make such a difference when the envoy works with others—working cross-party here in Parliament, co-ordinating well with international counterparts and liaising with faith leaders and civil society.

For me, the heart of FORB is based on respecting the unique worth of every created human being. It is about the importance of treating every individual with dignity. It is about saying, "You matter. You have purpose. You are significant. Wherever you are in the world, whatever your faith or none, you are not forgotten. You are not disregarded. You are not overlooked." Having travelled to many countries across the world and heard at first hand of FORB abuses, I want to state my heartfelt compassion and respect for all those who bravely make a stand and suffer for their beliefs.

8.1 pm

Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con) [V]: For centuries, Britain has led the world as a global industrial centre, importing and exporting goods, services and skills around the world. We now have an opportunity to strengthen old friendships and forge new ones. It is an opportunity for businesses large and small, those that have never exported and those that already do. Here in Rushcliffe, we are home to the world-famous Stilton cheese at Colston Bassett and Cropwell Bishop dairies. We make award-winning wines; a taste of Eglantine vineyard's North Star wine will leave you in no doubt as to why. We develop state-of-the-art fitness equipment such as

Wattbike and world-leading nutrition apps such as Nutracheck; I should say that they have kindly given me a year's complimentary subscription, which is perhaps just as well after all that cheese and wine. The east midlands is also the beating heart of manufacturing, with the highest proportion of manufacturing jobs in England based here. We make planes, trains and automobiles and everything in between.

The Government's plan for a network of freeports is a great way to grow our economy, create jobs and encourage investment. Here in the east midlands, there is a fantastic, unique proposal for a freeport that would cover East Midlands airport in North Leicestershire, a new advanced manufacturing cluster focused on green jobs in Ratcliffe-on-Soar in Rushcliffe, and the east midlands automotive intermodal park in South Derbyshire—all situated at the heart of the country, with access to 90% of the population within four hours, on the site of the UK's largest dedicated freight airport, connected by rail to our main deep sea ports and located at the centre of our national motorway network. What better place could there be to launch global Britain from?

East Midlands airport is one of the largest air freight handlers in the UK, with capacity to treble the value of freight handled and create many more jobs on site. A successful bid will act as a catalyst to galvanise redevelopment of the Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station site into a hub for green businesses. What a legacy that would be on the site of one of the last coal-fired power stations left in Britain. It would improve the competitiveness of our region, helping to attract key investment from employers, and it would create jobs and training opportunities for local people. I am excited about the opportunities that lie in store for us as global Britain, and I hope that my right hon. Friends across Government will see the many ways in which a freeport in the east midlands will help to deliver these.

8.4 pm

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD) [V]: Global Britain—what does that mean? Here is what I hope it means: a United Kingdom that leads on the world stage, defending and strengthening the international rules-based order; a United Kingdom that puts human rights, social justice and ending global inequality at the heart of its work and lives those values in its trade agreements; and a United Kingdom that recognises there is no planet B and that it is about deeds, not words.

What do this Government's deeds tell us about their definition of global Britain? It seems to me it means isolation from our closest allies, cosyng up to presidents who incite violence and sedition, and reneging on manifesto promises to the world's poorest by cutting the aid budget. If that is global Britain, we must change direction now.

Coronavirus knows no borders, and to truly defeat it we have to protect those in lower-income countries who are going to struggle to access the vaccine. Credit where credit is due, the UK has helped to put \$1 billion into the COVAX facility, but I remain deeply concerned by global vaccine inequity. COVAX is committed to vaccinating up to 20% of the populations of the countries covered by it, but the other 80% must be provided for from elsewhere, and the vaccine companies are overwhelmed. How do we know that they are not prioritising the highest bidders and the biggest orders? In effect, are we

creating a higher income, lower income divide? I fear we are, and it is not right. The UK must show global leadership and do more.

Take the example of Palestine. The situation there is dire. Many have rightly applauded Israel's incredible effort to vaccinate its population, but we should note the programme excludes the 5 million Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The vaccine has been coming into illegal settlements. Israeli settlers are being vaccinated, but their Palestinian labourers living only a few hundred metres away are not. It is heartbreaking, and if we can help them in Palestine or elsewhere, then we should. We have ordered 350 million doses of vaccine for a population of 66.5 million. Even with wastage and the need for two doses, what are the plans for the rest? Can the Minister outline what we will do to support lower-income countries further?

Finally, on aid, I want to put a marker in the sand. The Government do not need to legislate for the temporary cut. The law itself is designed to allow Governments not to meet 0.7% in an emergency, as unwise and cruel as such a cut may be. The only reason to bring legislation would be to cement the cut, using the current economic crisis as a smokescreen. I hope I can count on the support of other colleagues who have spoken against the aid cut in the House to fight this move should it come. It is not necessary and it needs to be resisted.

8.7 pm

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab) [V]: I refer Members to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. The Foreign Secretary set out the Government's vision for a truly global Britain that would act as an even stronger force for good in the world, yet for many persecuted peoples around the world, his vision does not match the reality, and nowhere is that more true than for Kashmiris still living under an ongoing Indian military occupation. Under this occupation, thousands of civilians have been killed and many more injured, and there is a vast litany of other abuses that the Indian Government must answer for, which have been well documented by numerous human rights organisations, from illegal and arbitrary detention to rape.

Far from improving, after 70 years the situation has dramatically deteriorated since August 2019, following the decision to revoke articles 370 and 35A and impose a brutal blockade of Kashmiri towns and villages, with civilians cut off from power, food, water and medical supplies and their access to communications dramatically curtailed. These actions are tantamount to the ethnic cleansing of Kashmiris.

Despite those grave human rights abuses, our global Foreign Office is nowhere to be seen. At every opportunity, it has refused to condemn the abuses. It will not even engage with the issue, telling us that it is an internal issue for Pakistan and India to resolve between themselves. We also hear that the UK Government are close to signing a trade deal with the Indian Government and, just as I warned during the passage of the Trade Bill last year in relation to the rights and high standards ahead, of trading with no concessions obtained from the Indian Government to uphold human rights in Kashmir and no conditions to prevent the grave abuses that have been taking place.

[Imran Hussain]

The policy of this Government towards Kashmir is not one of a global Britain, but that of an isolationist, self-interested Britain happy to shirk our moral, historical and diplomatic responsibilities and give in to a far-right, nationalist Modi-led Government in India. So if the Government really did want to prove that we are a truly global Britain that lives up to our global role and global responsibilities, they would put resolving the decades-old dispute over Kashmir at the top of their agenda. They would get our Indian and Pakistani allies around the table to find a resolution in Kashmir, ensure that we do not sign any trade deal with India that does not address human rights abuses in Indian-occupied Kashmir, use our responsibility as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to uphold UN resolutions for the free and fair plebiscite asked for over 70 years ago, and ensure that the sons and daughters of Kashmir are given their birth right of self-determination.

8.10 pm

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con) [V]: This is an important debate. Like many here, I was elected on a promise to move past the stagnation of the last Parliament and finally enact the will of the people as expressed in the referendum. More than that, however, I believe we are here to heal the wounds of that battle and start to speak for a global Britain that is confident of itself and of its place in the world as we strike out with a new sense of purpose. That striking out is not just about trade deals, although let us not hide our light under a bushel in that regard, with the incredible achievements of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the team in making more than 60 of these in quick order. Trade in British goods delivers jobs and secures British interests. Striking out is also about confidence and projection, reigniting ties with old allies and forging new ones, too.

We do not have to look far beyond the current pandemic to understand exactly what a roused Britain can do. We have developed our very own vaccine here in the UK. The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is from a partnership between many, but that vaccine is a bold statement of what global Britain can achieve. At low cost and able to be stored in a regular fridge, it will provide hope to so many in the developing world. A global Britain does not stop with production. We have committed over £500 million to ensuring that developing countries get equitable access to vaccines. This pandemic has been a great leveller, and it is absolutely right that a global Britain ensures that our own recovery is not balanced on the backs of those who can least afford the economic cost. I hope we will go further, as we continue development of monoclonal antibodies in UK, offering hope to those who have suppressed immune systems and for whom the vaccine will not work. I hope we will look at making such landmark biopharmaceuticals available to them when they need them globally too.

While our actions around the pandemic will tell a tale of their own about Britain's new role in the world, so will our actions in other fields. Just as the pandemic is a global challenge, so we must show leadership in other areas that are global challenges. I am delighted the Prime Minister has announced today that the UK will commit at least £3 billion to climate change solutions that

protect and restore nature and biodiversity. Climate change is the great challenge of our age, and our treatment of it is the legacy that will pass to our children and our children's children. We now have the opportunity to shape how and with whom we trade to advance high standards, champion democracy and the rule of law, and reflect and project British values across the world. We have the opportunity to show global Britain in action—confident, optimistic, and out and into the world.

8.13 pm

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I was unsuccessful, unfortunately, in being called on 30 December last year to speak on the UK-EU agreement legislation, so I am very grateful for the three minutes afforded to me on this occasion.

Decades ago, it was almost unthinkable that the United Kingdom should leave the European Union, but I always had a conviction that the best future prosperity for this country was as an independent nation using, and being a conduit between, our unique global links—through the Commonwealth and our strong alliance with the United States of America—and our proximity to the continent of Europe. In the UK-EU trade agreement, that is what we have achieved. We have continuing trade with our European friends and allies, and the ability, as we heard from the Secretary of State for International Trade in her opening remarks, to forge global trade deals with countries as far afield as Canada, Japan, Singapore, Turkey, Mexico and elsewhere. I know that in the coming months and years, more trade deals will be achieved.

Global Britain is not just about trade; it is about using our other strengths, which we have had historically as an island nation that is outward looking—whether they be in defence, intelligence, our soft and cultural power or our international aid commitments. I welcome the refocusing of those development commitments on tackling global crises such as climate change, and pandemics—both the one we are facing and those we want to guard against in future—and the crisis in education.

Just as we should not only be focused on trade, vital though it is, we must not be afraid to challenge those in the world who do us and the global community harm. With China, there is its abuse of liberties in Hong Kong, its abuse against the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang and the fact that it was, at best, guilty of neglect in seeking to cover up the initial impacts of the covid-19 epidemic, which grew into a global pandemic. As an international nation, we need to build a global alliance on such things to guard against them in future.

8.17 pm

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: In my maiden speech in this House almost a year ago today as the newly elected MP for Vauxhall, which is located in the heart of London—one of the most international, diverse and recognised cities in the world—I highlighted with pride the global nature of Vauxhall. Our schools are home to over 50 languages, spoken by the children of migrants from across the world who, like me, are proud to call Vauxhall their home. The global nature of the communities in Vauxhall brings richness and vibrancy. Just walking down Kennington Road, Clapham High Street, Stockwell or just about any street in Vauxhall,

we can feel like we have visited several countries in under 10 minutes; we are likely to hear my constituents speak in Portuguese, Italian, Arabic, Tamil, Yoruba—my late mother's native tongue—and so many more.

For me, global Britain is not just about trade deals, regulations and borders, as important as they are. It is not just about Britain projecting our hard power abroad or always trying to be the biggest, the first or the best. Global Britain is about the lived reality of every Vauxhall resident, characterised by the social and cultural ties that bind us together—generations of co-operation and the exchange of values. Throughout this awful pandemic, I have seen the true nature of global Britain shining through. I have seen it in our diverse communities in Vauxhall coming together to help their neighbours and to keep our public services running.

I fear that the hard Brexit path that the Government are taking us down and the isolationist vision for a newly independent Britain on the global stage are not something that I support. I urge the Government to give due consideration to the ties that bind us—our shared values, our histories, our values and experiences—as we work out who we want to be in the coming years and months.

8.19 pm

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): It is a shame that we are doing this in the middle of a lockdown, but for the sake of the debate let us not dwell on that; let us look forward to the bright future that will soon be upon us. We are on a new path, having delivered the Brexit that people voted for in 2016 and reaffirmed in 2017 and again in 2019, now with a fabulous trade deal with our continental partners delivered in 2021—an achievement that many thought was not possible. As the Secretary of State said: zero tariffs, zero quotas. I am comfortable with that change of direction, having voted at every opportunity to ensure that the demands of my constituents—a significant majority of whom voted for Brexit—were finally listened to and acted on.

Now it is time to put all the division aside and to come together behind a common vision for our future. I would argue that the concept of global Britain should form the foundation of that vision, but what does it mean in practice? I offer some thoughts based on my discussions with my constituents in recent years. To my mind, it means that we return to a leading role in responding to global challenges and in making the most of opportunities for our country. We are indeed standing on our own two feet, but we do so surrounded by friends and allies both in Europe and across the world. That means reinvesting in those relationships, championing the rules-based international order and demonstrating that the UK is open, outward looking and confident on the world stage. It is about rediscovering the powers that we pooled through our membership of the EU and using them in a way that most benefits this country, as we have for many years with the powers that we reserved.

Global Britain must not seek to undermine EU standards, nor accept any diminution in food hygiene, environmental or animal welfare standards. We are better than the EU in this.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman share my view of the opportunities that come from Brexit, for example, in mid-sized democracies

such as Australia, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa and South Korea? The opportunities are there; we just have to play the game and work in tandem and in partnership with those countries.

Giles Watling: I could not agree more. We can step back to where we were before we joined the common market and reach out to those countries. There is no positive outcome from a race to the bottom in any standards. We can reach out to those countries and seek to lift our standards.

Our NHS must never be on the table in any future trade negotiations. I would not support any trade deal that threatens our institutions and rights. I know that that is what my constituents expect. They also expect that global Britain will continue to lead the way outside the EU. They anticipate, as I do, that we will take this opportunity to re-emerge and become a pre-eminent campaigner for global free trade. I want to go further domestically and truly level up this country. Global Britain cannot begin to speak of successful standards, rights and institutions to others if we have not yet got our own house in order. That means dealing with the deprivation we see in isolated pockets, including in my own constituency of Clacton.

When we speak of levelling up, of course we must deal with the north-south divide, but we must not forget coastal areas, many of which are located in the so-called prosperous south-east, which, ironically, contains the most deprived ward in the UK. Where is it? It is in my constituency, in Clacton. The local council is doing sterling work there, but Essex County Council and Tendring District Council need help to finally lift the area out of deprivation.

I was so proud when, at a moment of crisis and maximum danger in this country, an army of volunteers stepped forward in Clacton and across the country. In fact, we had too many volunteers. When this is all over, we must bottle that community spirit for the future and continue to work together across political lines for a relentless improvement to our way of life: global Britain.

8.23 pm

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP) [V]: I note that in her introduction the Secretary of State declined to mention fish exports in her list of “jam tomorrow”—and a good job, too. The fishing community has cried betrayal over the post-Brexit trade deal, with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation saying that after all the promises given to their industry, it is hugely disappointing.

Taking back control of UK waters for fishing has resulted in a marginal repatriation of access, spread over five years, that fails to recognise the complex dynamics of the industry and which will almost certainly leave businesses worse off, but the immediate crisis is the near inability of Scottish fish exporters to get their product into the EU now, amid a dysfunctional system and an incoherent Government bureaucracy, leaving boats tied up, lorries idle and cold stores full. If that were not bad enough, we now know that the situation threatens to get worse, as the authorities in the Netherlands and France bring to an end their two-week grace period for document errors. That could create even higher losses for hauliers and exporters.

[Dave Doogan]

It is not just fishing: Scotland's renowned seed potato sector, worth more than £100 million annually, selling 20,000 tonnes of its product into the EU, will no longer have access to EU markets. Of course, that includes the significant Northern Ireland market. Not tariffs, quotas or paperwork—just banned. That is a Brexit disaster for Scottish seed potato growers, who are a needless casualty of a badly negotiated deal by the UK Government. I look at exporters in Angus and more widely across Scotland and I see sweeping new non-tariff barriers to trade, additional costs and pressures on the movement of goods—all completely avoidable.

On Erasmus, I was at university as a mature student with a young family, but I keenly remember the enriching fraternity of European students on campus and in classes. It saddens me greatly to know that my kids—one at university, one on the way—will not share in that richness of European diversity as I did.

Nothing could underline the marginal nature of Scotland to the Union more than the ambivalence of the UK Government to Scotland's distinct ambition in retaining our EU membership. That was on the back of the hollow vow before the 2014 referendum and the paper promise that Scotland should lead rather than leave the UK and that voting for independence would see us lose our EU membership—the irony of it all! Those dark arts scared just enough people into voting for the Union in 2014.

I sincerely hope and believe that we have seen the last of those betrayals from the UK state and that the people of Scotland will put an end to this failing relationship in the interests of everybody involved. The UK Government are demonstrably not governing in the interests of Scotland. If global Britain is about to leave the station, I wish it well on its journey, but I hope and believe that Scotland will get off before the doors close.

8.26 pm

Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con) [V]: Cornwall is known around the world as a top-rate holiday destination, and it absolutely is. However, a truly global Cornwall means year-round jobs for Cornish people, and that is vital for Truro and Falmouth.

It was once said that a Cornishman could be found in every mine in the world, and as the world has changed so have the fortunes of the Cornish. However, I would argue that a global Cornwall absolutely still exists. Penryn-based Allen & Heath has been at the forefront of audio technology for over 50 years. It started life building mixers for the likes of The Who, Pink Floyd and Genesis, and today Allen & Heath mixers are used across the world by top DJs, clubs, broadcasters and studios. Its digital and analogue mixers are made overseas but still designed in Penryn, from which the company is still run.

In recent years, Cornish luxury tea grower and producer Tregothnan brokered a deal that will see it exporting its range to the US and to Kazakhstan. This first-ever English tea company created a range of teas home grown in British soil and secured the contracts at a Government networking event at No. 10. Tregothnan has an export rate of nearly 50%, with its largest fanbase in the far east. New stockists include Taiwan, Thailand and Singapore—

and, yes, this home-grown Cornish company also sells tea to China: a tribute to the capabilities and creativity of British talent.

Pendennis Shipyard, based in Falmouth and founded over 30 years ago, is a leading superyacht custom new build and refit facility. The company is still privately owned and employs 390 people locally. It has also acquired a marina and service centre in Barcelona, where it employs a further 30 people. Its pre-covid turnover was in the region of £50 million to £55 million and 80% of that turnover was exported annually. Crucially to Cornwall, Pendennis also runs a successful apprentice scheme, training more than 290 apprentices, and a third of the current Falmouth workforce are existing or former apprentices.

That is just the tip of the iceberg. We should all be optimistic for the future of global Cornwall, from the lithium under our feet to the daffodils we see in the fields. We look forward to the UK's presidency of the G7 and, of course, to COP26 and all the opportunities that lie ahead. Cornwall is packed full of home-grown talent, goods and services, and I look forward to working with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to promote them all.

When we welcome the world back to Cornwall after covid, with the tall ships at Falmouth in August and the Tour of Britain racing through Truro in September, I hope that visitors will look at Cornwall differently and agree that global investment in Cornish companies creates fantastic prospects for the future of the UK as a whole.

8.29 pm

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): Much of this debate will quite rightly focus on the Government's baffling approach to trade deals, which has seen them take months to renegotiate agreements, only for them to end up as copy-and-paste jobs. However, I want to use my time to focus on a separate but no less important element of global Britain. It may be a long way from Durham, but there is no doubt that Heathrow airport has been a key symbol of global Britain for many decades. Now more than ever, it serves as a major physical gateway to the rest of the world and its vital importance, which the crisis in Dover before Christmas exposed so clearly, will only increase as the Government distance themselves from the EU.

However, this most critical piece of the country's infrastructure is right now being consumed by industrial strife, which threatens its smooth operation, and that is all down to the cavalier and reckless attitude being shown by greedy Heathrow bosses towards their loyal and hard-working staff. The shameful fire-and-rehire threats from both airport management and British Airways have triggered strike action, which escalated throughout last month and into the new year. Cargo handlers, security guards, engineers, firefighters and now, potentially, Border Force staff who are seeing their rights stripped away under the cover of covid are all standing up to exploitative employers and withdrawing their labour as a last resort. Strike action is never taken lightly by any group of workers, least of all those in critical occupations such as those at Heathrow, but these cowboy management practices have broken the trust between the workers and their bosses, and Heathrow staff have been forced into a position not of their choosing.

The Government frequently state that they wish the UK to act as good global citizens abroad, but at home they turn a blind eye to exploitative fire-and-rehire practices. When will they get a grip on this situation, rein in these rogue bosses—British Airways, Heathrow Airport Ltd and now even the Home Office—and protect this critical infrastructure while defending the frontline key workers who are keeping our country moving throughout this pandemic?

8.32 pm

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): I would like to focus my brief remarks on the economic opportunities that await a global trading Britain in the years ahead. Once the world has overcome the enormous challenge of covid-19, which we surely will, I believe that the 2020s can be a decade of expansion that will improve the lives of all our constituents. That is the defining purpose of any economic policy: to improve the lives of the people we represent, to increase the number of good jobs in every community and to give economic security to families. Rightly, the UK Government have put the fire power of the world's fifth largest economy at the service of individuals and businesses affected by covid, and that in turn has hit our public finances. The only way to bounce back from covid, to save jobs and to fix our public finances is to trade our way to an export-led recovery. That must be our objective.

We all have examples of great local firms that can take on the world and help to enhance global Britain. In my own Scottish Borders constituency, we have a proud heritage of textile manufacture, and the products produced by Borders textile mills such as Hawico in Hawick and Lochcarron in Selkirk are, without exaggeration, the best of their kind in the world. These global success stories are testament to a skilled local workforce expanding the global markets for those firms that have a direct impact in the small rural border towns that I represent, and creating more skilled jobs, more opportunities for young people and more reasons to stay and build a life in the area.

Businesses in the Borders are ready to take on the world, and there are three things I would ask the Government to do to help them. The first is to make the most of the greater freedom and flexibility that an independent trade policy gives us. Instead of the one-size-fits-all trade deals designed for 28 highly diverse nations with very different climates and landscapes, we can now tailor our trade relationships more closely to our needs. It is extraordinary that the SNP opposed the recent EU trade deal, effectively voting for a no-deal Brexit that would have created uncertainty and disruption for Scottish businesses.

My second request is that we do more to encourage businesses that have not yet exported their goods to seize the opportunity to expand their market. My third request to my colleagues in Government is to remember that their responsibilities are for the whole of the United Kingdom. I know that Ministers are well seized of that point. Scottish businesses are served best when their two Governments, UK and Scottish, are working together.

As we emerge from the shadow of covid, there will be no time to lose in the race to rebuild our economy and to make a success of the 2020s. There is a world of opportunity out there. It is time to put past divisions

aside and all pull together as one United Kingdom to make a success of global Britain for the benefit of all our constituents.

8.35 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab) [V]: This evening, we have heard a great deal about global Britain. I think of the 60 million people who call this country home. They each have a unique story, history and background. Many of those 60 million people were born on foreign shores, or are the children, grandchildren or great grandchildren of those who came to the United Kingdom in search of a job, prosperity, hope and peace. Now we have left the European Union, it is vital that we do things in the right way.

In 2009, the UK signed up to the principle that all new trade treaties signed by the EU should contain commitments on the protection of human rights as an essential element of each agreement, giving the EU the power to suspend or revoke those treaties if the other party was engaging in serious abuses of human rights. Nowhere in the entire four-and-a-half years of the Brexit process did this Government state that leaving the EU would mean departing from that principle for our own future trade agreements, yet last month we signed new treaties with Singapore, Vietnam and Turkey, none of which have clauses relating to human rights as an essential element of the agreement.

While we welcome the continuity agreements with 10 countries that were signed in December, some 11 other countries were sadly left out in the cold. Members of this House have received no formal or appropriate explanation for the failure with those 11 countries, so I hope the Minister will explain in detail the reason why deals could not be done in time with Albania, Algeria, Bosnia, Ghana, Montenegro and Serbia. Will he tell the House the exact status of those negotiations now? Could he also tell us the status of negotiations with the other five members of the East African Community besides Kenya—Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, South Sudan and Burundi—which have been left to rely on a generalised preferences scheme, rather than the formal trade deal with the UK that they previously enjoyed and hoped to build on?

The treatment of our Commonwealth cousins in Ghana is a shame on all of us. The Republic of Ghana has been treated disgracefully by Ministers in recent weeks and months. We know now from the Ghanaian Government that the UK negotiators turned up late for meetings and were badly briefed. They left early with nothing resolved. We also know that the Ghanaians expected to meet the Secretary of State, only to be faced with one of her junior Ministers.

I say to those on the Treasury Bench, and I do so objectively, that we must proceed with caution. We need the help, co-operation, good will and respect of nations across the world if we are to make this work. That means we need to be professional, respectful and act like adults. We need to ensure that we take our place as a global advocate of good governance, human rights, decency, respect and co-operation, and the sooner the better.

8.38 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con) [V]: The importance of this subject, if not this abbreviated debate, with its précis-ed contributions, can hardly be overstated, but,

[Crispin Blunt]

as my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) noted, it goes much, much beyond trade. It remains somewhat vaguely defined by Her Majesty's Government, so I hope this debate is part of a consultation process before the Prime Minister, supported by his Foreign and Development Secretary and his Defence Secretary, reinforces the Trade Secretary in defining what global Britain will mean under his Administration and how the United Kingdom will pursue those objectives. But this is not just about defining Britain to the world; it is about addressing our own electorate in the wake of the divisions that have riven our politics over the past five years around Brexit.

What global Britain says about our values has a vital audience, both domestically and internationally. We need to address the anxieties of those who voted to remain, who thought that the vision and values of Brexit were some kind of backward step to a nostalgia for an imperial Britain long gone. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), I much commend today's paper "Global Britain, Global Broker" by Robin Niblett, the director of Chatham House. I highly commend his 68 pages of analysis, which in many ways just pose the questions that we have to answer.

I believe that we have a golden opportunity to live and define our values in policies shorn of previous attachments to the interests of a great power, or being a leading member of a bloc aspiring to great power status. In previous times, those great power interests were often contradicted by the values that we wanted to express. Needing to protect our great power status meant that we could not express our values properly. British understatement was often the way in which we chose to express those values, but we can now be much more full-throated about what is right: the golden thread that is the British sense of justice, our standing up for the underdog—and that means standing up for minorities and individual liberty.

We can no longer afford to be careless about the signals that we send, and those signals are currently contradictory. The International Trade Secretary, in her role as Minister for Women and Equalities, knows the position that I hold on the Government's response to the consultation on the Gender Recognition Act 2004. She knows that I believe that it was deeply unfortunate and that it will continue to take a toll on how we are perceived. The appointment of my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) as the Prime Minister's global envoy for freedom of religion has its own contradictions, but I greatly welcome her speech in this debate, in which she quoted Eleanor Roosevelt and the values to which she is attached. I hope that that sense of representing all the minorities will continue.

Development expenditure being cut is another sign that has caused concern for our allies around the world and for the presentation of the United Kingdom's position, but I really hope that it can be made up for by how we develop the strategic defence and development review that will enable our diplomacy and values to reinforce it. There is a great opportunity, and I trust that we will take it, to address concerns both at home and abroad and make a very positive statement about the United Kingdom and its future.

8.42 pm

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab) [V]: I have to disagree with the Secretary of State: this is not global Britain in action. Plans by the Government to cut UK aid commitments from 0.7% to 0.5% of gross national income—a real-terms loss of £4.6 billion—are unprincipled, unjustified and completely immoral. The World Food Programme has warned of "famines of biblical proportions" in 2021, and the UN now predicts that as many as 207 million people will be pushed into extreme poverty by 2030 because of the severe long-term impacts of the pandemic.

Cutting our aid budget means cutting a direct lifeline to millions across the world. Women and girls in the poorest countries will be hardest hit. How can the UK continue to claim a leading role in advancing gender equality if it pushes forward with cuts to the UK aid budget? It is crucial that we commit our resources carefully and strategically to ensure that funds directly reach the communities and individuals most in need. This is the worst time for us to be turning our back on those in greatest need.

In my own constituency of Liverpool, Riverside, we have a proud history of internationalism and a strong tradition of helping those in need. Fantastic campaigners from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and the Liverpool Friends of Yemen have worked tirelessly to fundraise for the al-Sabeen baby and children's hospital in Yemen, throughout the war and more recently, to aid its fight against coronavirus while simultaneously battling the largest humanitarian crisis in the world.

In Yemen, 80% of the population—more than 24 million people—need some form of humanitarian assistance and protection. We have a moral responsibility to step up and do everything in our power to help and support these people. I am so proud of the way that our community has pulled together to help others in dire need and I wish that we could say the same of this Government. Oxfam has reported that, during the past half-decade, Britain has earned eight times more from arms sales to members of the coalition fighting in Yemen than it has spent on aid to help civilians caught up in the conflict.

The world is currently facing a common enemy like never before yet the response across the board has been to leave the poorest and the most vulnerable to fend for themselves. It would be entirely indefensible and inhumane for our leaders to cut one of the few resources to support the most marginalised at this time. I call on this Government to do the right thing: to commit now to maintain our aid commitments to the poorest and most in need across the world.

8.45 pm

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): In 2016, the Government began using the phrase "global Britain" in the aftermath of the referendum. We received clarity last year from the Foreign Secretary who let it be known that the Government's vision for a truly global Britain included showing our allies that we would remain great partners and friends, that we would be an energetic champion of free and open trade, and, finally, that we would be an even stronger force in the world. So far, I have seen action that would only diminish our standing and reputation on the global stage, such as the scrapping

of international programmes for students in the United Kingdom to meet and network with their counterparts across Europe, which are their closest peers.

As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Erasmus, I was devastated to learn that the Government had chosen not to participate in the programme post Brexit. The Erasmus+ scheme allowed students to broaden their horizons, learn new languages, and forge international networks and relationships. As it stood, it could have contributed heavily to the Government's vision of a truly global Britain. Scrapping the programme and announcing the new Turing programme, with limited details on what the scheme will entail, I am concerned that the Government have scrapped a brilliant programme for another that falls short. It is very underfunded and does not share the many benefits of the Erasmus+ programme. If we are truly aiming for global Britain, we must also consider how international students fit into the new Turing scheme. At present, the idea of reciprocity seen in the Erasmus+ programme does not seem to be present in the new scheme.

While we speak of a truly global exchange programme, we should be celebrating the good that British education can offer international students as well as celebrating the cultural benefits of learning from them, too. International students give us our local communities and we must do more to encourage and support them to choose Britain in their own exchange programmes.

Something woefully lacking in the Government's vision of a global Britain is our own world-renowned manufacturing industry. This is an industry that has been ravaged by the pandemic and overlooked by the Government during the Brexit negotiations. I want to see the Government finally prioritise this sector, save our businesses and employers and give them better assurances. Members will know that manufacturing has a deep root in my city of Coventry and in the west midlands. The west midlands can boast of the Rolls-Royce site at Ansty, which is the only site that can weld the vanes of plane propellers. It is one of only a handful of sites around the world that can produce fans with their plane engines. We risk losing our proud heritage of world-class expertise in the aeronautic industry. We need to capitalise on British talents, support our homegrown industry and ensure that jobs are not exported from this country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am keen for the Government to let us know where those two important tenets of our British society can fit into their global vision.

8.49 pm

Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con) [V]: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to this important debate. Global Britain means a lot more than just a couple of words now that we have left the EU. This is about reassessing Britain's place in the world and championing the good that this nation has done and will continue to do in an ever changing global market. I am proud that the UK has been at the heart of the international effort to tackle covid-19, which just shows the good that this country can do through our international engagement. The development of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, for example, which is a game changer in our global fight against covid-19, has demonstrated that this country is one of the world's best when it comes to science and research. In my

opinion, the argument is also sound and compelling that Britain must do its bit to help vaccinate populations across the world.

This year is going to be an excellent one for the UK's global leadership, with our presidencies of the G7 and COP26 giving us a fantastic opportunity to highlight to the international community what a strong force for good global Britain can and will be. Our values are shared by so many across the world—a liberal democracy and a capitalist society, looking out for our most vulnerable. That is why I am glad that at the G7 summit this year, which is to be hosted by the UK, we are welcoming India, South Korea and Australia—the D10, or the 10 democracies. My hope is that this band of liberal democracies will help the world to stand up to autocratic regimes across the world. The D10 band of countries can be a force for good. While we as a nation have always been a leader, we cannot do it alone. The pandemic has shown the benefits of all countries working together to defeat this virus. This new band of countries is the key to unlocking that change and is the compassionate case for our future as a free trading, independent nation contributing towards humanitarian issues across the world.

We have already made 63 trade agreements with countries around the world. When combined with the trade and co-operation agreement reached with the EU, this covers £885 billion of UK trade. Mutual recognition agreements on conformity assessments have also been separately reached with the US, Australia and New Zealand. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade for all her work and thank her Department for setting the agenda of global Britain as a free trading nation. There has never been a more important time for the UK to be out in the world, delivering on our commitments, helping the most vulnerable and showcasing what the UK has to offer.

8.51 pm

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance) [V]: "Global Britain" may be catchy, but it is not an inclusive phrase. Britain or Great Britain is not the same thing as the United Kingdom. In terms of substance, there is a danger that global Britain is just a front for little England. The UK is retreating on the international stage. Its influence and, indeed, its sovereignty were amplified by working through the European Union alongside other multilateral institutions. With the incoming Biden Administration, a likely return to alliance and co-operation and a greater focus on global institutions, there should be some reflection on the course now being taken. In the context of the support for and reliance upon a rules-based international order, it is worth reflecting on and recalling the damage that has been done by the games that were played around the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill.

I am a supporter of free and fair trade in the liberal tradition. It is often overlooked that the UK was able to open new trade markets through the European Union. The test of any independent trade policy is whether it is capable of improving what the EU could have achieved for the UK through its much greater negotiating strength. At best, the jury is out on that. There is a danger that, in an effort to push the boundaries in reaching agreements, standards on labour rights, the environment, climate

[Stephen Farry]

change and human rights are compromised. In the modern world, those are all intrinsic aspects of trade agreements.

Reference has been made to the current problems with the movement of goods into Northern Ireland. These problems relate to Brexit itself and the nature of the UK-EU trade deal. They are manifesting across the UK, so Northern Ireland is not alone in these problems. The subset of challenges arising from the protocol relate in large part to very tight timescales for implementation, poor information and a lack of engagement from companies based in Great Britain. Where there are structural problems, they can only be addressed by fresh flexibilities and derogations being agreed by the UK Government and the European Commission through the joint partnership council and the specialised committee. Those pushing article 16 of the protocol as a remedy are offering a populist, ineffective and false solution. Please note that no major business organisation in Northern Ireland or beyond is calling for article 16 to be invoked.

Looking ahead, the promotion of democracy, human rights and good governance must be central. The UK must be a leader in the United Nations on peacebuilding and human security. It must be a leader on climate change, both at home and abroad. I am concerned that these concepts have been given very little space and attention in the integrated review to date. That needs to be addressed if we are going to talk about a genuine global UK.

8.54 pm

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): After nearly 50 years of being shackled to the European Union, today we can say with confidence that Britain is back—back as a sovereign, independent and truly global nation. Let us, however, reflect that instead of being a nation with its sovereignty restored, trading on equal terms with Europe, we could so easily have been legally trapped in a backstop, which would have left the UK locked into the EU rules with no escape. Had some of us caved in to the pressure that we were under to vote for the withdrawal agreement, I fear that today the integrity and sovereignty of the United Kingdom would have been compromised. With the fresh start that this gave our then new Prime Minister, he was able to free the United Kingdom from the entanglement of the European Union and restore Britain's sovereignty, which my constituents in Romford, and the British people, voted for.

Of course, our British family of overseas territories and Crown dependencies must always be included as part of global Britain. I cautiously welcome the agreement reached with Spain over Gibraltar, which I am assured by my friends on the Rock does not compromise the integrity of Gibraltar, which is and remains wholly British, as it always must. The Prime Minister reassured the people of the Falkland Islands in his Christmas message that the Government will do everything they can to support the islands, but that support must also be extended to all Crown dependencies and overseas territories; their needs and interests must be secured in future negotiations. Her Majesty's Government have a duty to represent their interests too.

We also have an opportunity to build a stronger alliance with Canada, Australia and New Zealand. We share so much in common with the CANZUK nations

through family ties, history, culture, language, and, of course, with the Queen as our common Head of State, so let us work to make this alliance a reality too. Indeed, there are also all 54 nations of the Commonwealth—young and diverse—which make up almost 2.4 billion of the world's population. The Commonwealth must also be at the heart of Britain's global strategy.

Finally, we must never forget our special relationship with our companion nation on these islands, Ireland. We must work to strengthen areas of mutual understanding with our Irish friends, building ever closer and stronger bilateral relations between our two uniquely intertwined nations. As co-chair of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, I look forward to bringing members of both the British and Irish Parliaments together to discuss opportunities to collaborate closely as true friends and allies.

The United Kingdom must be bold in using our rediscovered freedom to go out into the world and reclaim our global leadership on free trade, enterprise and liberal democracy, spreading those values, which have given this nation a history of which we can all be rightly proud.

8.58 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): The measure of success for global Britain comes not just in rhetoric, but in the actions that we take on the international stage, particularly in the face of international injustices. I will therefore use my time today to draw the Minister's attention to the situation in Sri Lanka, and particularly to the vital upcoming UN Human Rights Council meeting.

The challenges in Sri Lanka are well documented. Its President and his brother, the Prime Minister, face accusations of crimes against humanity for their role in killing thousands of their own people—Tamil civilians, at the end of the civil war. They have placed their closest allies in senior Government positions, including military commanders accused of war crimes and politicians accused of corruption, violence and common criminality. Just this weekend, I received thousands of emails from shocked and frightened members of the Tamil community following the destruction of the Mullivaikkal Tamil genocide memorial monument at the University of Jaffna—an act that completely undermines the process of truth, justice and accountability that would set Sri Lanka on a path to lasting peace.

How the UK responds to the ongoing injustice in Sri Lanka and in support of democracy, human rights and the rule of law will speak volumes for our leadership role on the international stage. The 46th session of the UN Human Rights Council will take place in March; what preparations are the Government making to ensure that a new resolution on the issue is agreed? Such a resolution should maintain human rights monitoring by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; mandate a mechanism to gather, preserve and analyse evidence for future investigations and prosecutions that build on the work of previous UN investigators; and call on the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a report on options for international action for the promotion and protection of human rights, justice and accountability in Sri Lanka. I urge the Minister, in the strongest terms, to ensure that we use the unique opportunity that March provides to

continue the global leadership that we have previously demonstrated on this issue and show on the international stage that we are truly global Britain.

9 pm

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my colleague from the Treasury Committee, the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh).

When politicians break manifesto pledges, they normally pay a price at the ballot box at the subsequent election. Think of George H. W. Bush and his “Read my lips: no new taxes”; he then raised taxes and did not get a second term. Think of Nick Clegg and his pledge on cutting tuition fees to zero; tuition fees were then tripled and the Liberal Democrats lost 85% of their parliamentary seats at the next election. However, the breaking of a manifesto pledge to spend 0.7% of national income on helping the world’s extreme poor will probably be seen as a good thing by quite a few UK voters, yet the victims are unable to speak up in today’s debate. That is why it is so important for those of us who have had the privilege of seeing the good that UK aid does around the world to speak up on behalf of those who will lose out from the decision at the spending review to cut the aid budget to 0.5%.

Obviously it is not a good idea to break any manifesto pledge, but it is deeply shameful for the only manifesto pledge broken to be the commitment we made to the world’s poorest. If Members have seen the way in which nutrition is given to babies in Ethiopia or Somalia, they will realise that more babies will die if we cut the UK aid budget. If Members have witnessed the invention of the cold-chain deployment of the Ebola vaccine to the furthest reaches of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, paid for by UK aid, they will know that it has helped us to develop the cold-chain deployment of the current Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. In fact, deploying vaccines saves lives—including lives here in the UK. Anyone who has seen the enthusiasm with which girls in Sierra Leone study their lessons will know that the best chance that poor countries have to move beyond aid is through universal access to quality education. Fewer children will finish school if we give less in aid.

We have heard today how global Britain will be presiding over the G7 and COP26, and there are going to be excellent uses for UK aid at those events. We will also be giving a generous amount to GAVI, but would it not be wonderful if it were the UK vaccine that was being deployed around the world? This is a year in which we should be increasing our aid budget, not cutting it.

9.4 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con) [V]: This debate is led by the Department for International Trade, but in truth, if global Britain is to move from good intentions to successful strategy, it will need to involve all of Government, every constituency and many people—every immigrant nurse, every exporter, every person in our diverse communities who may have come from anywhere in the world but is contributing to our cities and our nation. In many ways, the pandemic is a metaphor for what can be achieved, for the key ingredients of our huge progress on vaccination have come from academics, scientists, the Government-created vaccine taskforce,

taxpayer and corporate investment, pharmaceutical and regulatory leadership, and now primary care networks working closely with the NHS and the Army. That combination, involving so many skills, translates into a huge international commitment through GAVI, which was led at its recent summit by the UK. This involved a huge commitment of £330 million for each of the next five years by our own nation, as well as a huge number of other countries, with Oxford-AstraZeneca becoming the first manufacturer to guarantee huge numbers of doses of vaccine for global distribution.

So the idea that the UK has become little England, cut off from the world, does not match the reality of global Britain and the way in which we are facing the greatest global challenge of 2020-21. In our chairmanship of the G7 and the climate change summit COP26 this year, we have other opportunities to try to help the world resolve some of our greatest challenges. This means not only leading by example, which the Prime Minister’s 10-point green plan and his financial commitments bring alive, but working with the crucial partners to achieve common goals, and that includes both the United States of America and China. Global Britain therefore needs calm diplomacy focused on delivery; strong values; and a pragmatic recognition that this House accepts that there is little social justice without a strong economy and that exports bring huge mutual benefits to both our partners abroad and here.

There is so much I would like to say, including about the valiant work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, supporting open societies, recognising the great efforts we are making for the trans-Pacific partnership in Asia and, above all, the opportunity to show that we can, as President Reagan put it, achieve anything we want to so long as we do not mind who takes the credit.

9.7 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab) [V]: I want this country to be outward looking and multilateralist, and that includes confronting difficulties. We should not retreat from the middle east because of past conflicts, and we must be prepared to toughen our response towards the regime in Iran. How much effort should we expend trying to appease a corrupt theocracy that has no regard for human rights or international conventions? We should give more support to those who challenge that regime. We should not tolerate Iran’s warmongering or support for terrorism. But a multilateralist Britain also needs to build peace in the middle east, which is why Labour Friends of Israel has been so prominent in making the case for an international fund for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Legislation passed by the US Congress provides an opportunity; it creates a \$250 million peace fund and includes two seats for international partners. The fund aims to underpin a future peace, in much the same way as the International Fund for Ireland has done. We of all people should recognise the value of such a fund. It is through peace building and co-existence initiatives that we lay the foundations for a lasting peace. It is through strengthened civic institutions that we ensure it endures, even in times of difficulty. This fund has been pioneered by the Alliance for Middle East Peace, and will provide support for non-governmental organisations and people-to-people projects. We became the first country to endorse such a concept when then Minister Alistair Burt launched

[*Steve McCabe*]

the people for peaceful change initiative in 2018. That project has now ended and future intentions remain unclear. By building on developments in the US Congress, we have an opportunity to demonstrate to our new friends in the White House that a post-EU Britain is indeed a global and multilateralist Britain.

In a debate last November, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), pledged to ask officials to look specifically at whether this country should seek to take up one of those seats. It would be good to hear in this debate that real progress has been made and we are now poised to play our full role.

9.10 pm

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con) [V]: We debate this evening at a time when the values we stand for as a country, when the values of all liberal democracies of the world, seem more under threat than at any time in living memory. The western world, once confident and convinced of the powers of capitalism, democracy and free trade, has been shaken by two decades of terrorism, ill-managed overseas conflicts, a devastating financial crisis, the European migrant crisis and a lurch towards nationalism and populism. Now, economies are ravaged by covid-19, and last week we saw the bastion of American democracy—the Capitol, the literal shining city on the hill—overrun by a mob demanding that the results of a free and fair election be overturned because their leader refused to accept the result: actions we would normally associate with a tinpot dictator, not the leader of the free world. And so in front of us is the greatest challenge since we rebuilt our world after the second world war. We must take on the democracy deniers; we must re-establish and defend the rules-based order; and we must champion free trade. The challenge we have is great. We see Russia and China. We see threats to democracy and trade all around the globe.

Britain is already a global power: a world leader on foreign aid spending; the second highest defence spender in NATO, with that set to increase; a permanent member of the UN Security Council; a leading member of the Commonwealth; and a country that has shown by its action that it respects and enacts the results of democratic referendums and elections. We are a believer in free trade between free nations because it enriches our people and spurs economic growth and prosperity around the globe. That is why we have signed 64 trade deals since leaving the EU, worth over £885 billion. We are among the leading nations on earth in fighting climate change. Over the past decade, the UK has cut carbon emissions by more than any similar developed country, and it was the first major economy to legislate for net zero emissions by 2050.

This year, we have a great opportunity at this crucial juncture for our world—at this epoch-defining moment when we, the liberal democracies, can choose either to simply watch as those who care not for liberty, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly or democracy overturn the rules-based international order, or to stand up for the values of the enlightenment, for democracy, for globalisation. The United Kingdom has been handed

the opportunity to lead—to guide the world forward into the next decade of the 21st century. With our presidency of COP26, hosted here in Scotland this year, and with our presidency of the G7 coming at this most critical and crucial of years, we have the opportunity to be bold and to signal to the world that, though bruised, the values we hold dear are enduring and that, working together, with confidence in who we are and what we stand for, we can take action to combat the greatest threats to our planet and our people. A global Britain, with Scotland at its heart, will lead the fight in the struggles of this century, and I think, with conviction, that we will win.

9.13 pm

Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind) [V]: It pains me to say that under this Government, Britain is world-beating for all the wrong reasons. We are facing the highest number of excess deaths in Europe—one of the worst covid-19 death rates in the world—and our worst ever recession. We chose not to implement a zero-covid strategy to save UK lives. It is alarming that this is the global Britain that is promised by the Prime Minister and his allies—a Britain that has alienated itself on the world stage by cosying up to Donald Trump, and which is forming a reputation across the world for rhetoric, incompetence and mismanagement.

This Government act as though someone can only love this country if they wrap themselves in the Union Jack, refuse to recognise the horrors of our colonial past and ignore everything that does not make Britain great, yet I believe that, as a former empire, Britain has a unique responsibility to redefine its role on the global stage. It is vital for us to consider the impact of Britain's colonial legacy on modern-day global insecurity. For instance, it is crucial that countries in the global south are not denied access to vaccines due to financial constraints. It is also shameful that the Government are cutting development funding at a time of global crisis. Turning our backs on the world's poorest is a political choice, not an economic necessity. It is especially crucial for the UK Government to be ambitious about changing the unjust dynamics of trade and global debt, forged through centuries of violent extractive colonialism and imperialism. The Jubilee Debt Campaign found that more than 60 countries are spending more on paying their creditors than they are on their population's health. That is a direct consequence of the uneven power dynamics of empire, and it must end.

Despite what the Government may believe, it is possible to love Britain because of the NHS, because of our proud trade union history and because your parents were able to arrive from Nevis, settle in Leicester and build a life for themselves and their family. I want our country to ensure that none of our citizens goes hungry, that it is a welcoming place for everyone and that we are a force for human rights, climate justice and equality at home and abroad. That is the patriotism that I wish the Government would subscribe to and which must guide Britain towards a new path on the global stage.

9.16 pm

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con) [V]: I start by paying tribute to the Secretary of State for International Trade and her Ministers, because securing agreements for £885 billion in trade in one year is no mean feat.

I turn first to our EU trade deal. It is a good and pragmatic deal—a deal of which the British people can be proud as we chart our own future. For Rutland and Melton, our 63 trade deals and the EU agreement mean that thousands of businesses can better trade worldwide, our incredible food producers such as Long Clawson Dairy and Samworth Brothers are boosted by increasing recognition worldwide with geographical indicators, and our farmers get a better deal free from the bureaucratic tentacles of Brussels. With our new-found freedoms, I hope that locally, if the Chancellor heeds my cries, we will benefit from an east midlands freeport at East Midlands Airport.

Moving forward, we must seize the negotiations with New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the US to further our longstanding alliances. Through these deals, we also have the opportunity to join the CPTPP. As much as Britain is a trading nation, global Britain means more than boosting exports. We should build stronger economic and security partnerships with our Five Eyes and NATO allies to better tackle the rising threat of China and other nations to our security, economy and health, and to combat corruption in international institutions.

Trade deals with like-minded allies will enable us to establish coalitions for free trade and human rights worldwide and to diminish and isolate those who seek to undermine our values and nations. As global Britain, we should step forward to become the world leader in the prevention of atrocities. We need a stand-alone unit at the Foreign Office to do that and to stop genocides, such as that in Xinjiang. More than any time since the second world war, the UK has a chance to define for itself its place in the world. This place will be a great one that lifts other nations with us.

I go back to my maiden speech, where I said that for 1,000 years, Rutland's motto has been “multum in parvo”, or “much in little”. The same is true of this great country, for it is not through our vastness that we have become a beacon in the world, but rather through the commercial talent of our citizens, the power of our ideas and the strength of our democracy and laws, which by unapologetic defence have stood the test of time.

In my maiden speech, I also raised a Greek aphorism “gnōthi seauton”, meaning “know thyself”. That is a sound basis for British foreign policy, because our great nation must be temperate where possible and decisive where necessary. We must ruthlessly defend our values, progress every opportunity for our people, stand by our allies, promote liberal, free market economies and protect the most vulnerable, because a global Britain is one that unapologetically stands tall on the world stage, certain in the knowledge that those who seek to dim the light of our great nation and our values will surely fail.

9.19 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): The British Government's cut to the aid budget is a clear example that global Britain is about looking after the UK's own priorities while reducing support for the world's poorest. Abandoning the commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on overseas aid, but simultaneously finding millions of pounds for a festival to celebrate Brexit has left many questioning global Britain's priorities. This cut to the aid budget will have a catastrophic impact, leading to

increased poverty and instability around the world, further exacerbating the covid-19 crisis. Surely if UK Ministers wanted global Britain to lead the charge, this pandemic would be the perfect time to exemplify that leadership. I argue that cutting the aid budget is not global Britain; it is the actions of little Britain.

Last month, it was announced that the UK would no longer partake in Erasmus, even after the Prime Minister's commitment to remain part of the scheme. In this debate, it is important to remember who will miss out from the UK no longer partaking in Erasmus; there will be so many missed opportunities for young people. I am proud to serve as honorary president of the British Youth Council. The BYC has serious concerns that, although the Turing scheme may replace the formal education aspect of Erasmus-plus, the Government have taken no action to replace the non-formal strand of the scheme. Withdrawing from the Erasmus programme is not global Britain; it is the actions of little Britain.

The UK Government claim that, as global Britain, they can establish a great trade deal with the United States, but they seem to forget that, since 2019, a 25% tariff has existed on single malt whisky imported to the US.

Jim Shannon: The news today indicated that online sales of whiskey—I think of the Echlinville distillery in Kircubbin—have exceeded expectations. I know that the hon. Gentleman and I have different opinions on the constitution, but does he not agree that the opportunities for whiskey sales across the world are growing?

David Linden: The hon. Gentleman will certainly find an ally in me in hoping that we sell more whisky, not least because it is one of the most important industries in Scotland, employing 11,000 people. Scotch itself is worth £5.5 billion to the UK economy, so I heartily endorse that.

While the UK is negotiating a free trade deal with the States, the tariffs remain in place and exports to the US have fallen by 30% since they came into force. That means that jobs in the supply chain are very much at risk. Time is of the essence for the whisky sector, and it is imperative that the UK Government work with the Biden Administration to ensure that the issue of whisky tariffs is a priority in any future trade deal. I certainly hope that that will be the case, given the so-called special relationship.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Alyn Smith) said, global Britain is not the SNP's project. We wish it well, but we certainly do not want to be a part of it. Instead, we seek an independent Scotland rejoining the European Union as an equal member alongside our EU partners. We see the power of smaller nations and what they can achieve: the Republic of Ireland now sits on the UN Security Council and New Zealand leads the world in covid-19 elimination. That is the prize we in the SNP firmly have our eyes on, and we will not be distracted by hollow slogans like global Britain.

9.22 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD) [V]: Three minutes is not a great deal of time to talk about a subject as big as Britain's place in the world as global Britain, so this evening I want to challenge the House to think a little about the signals we are sending.

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

I mean it as absolutely no disrespect to the Secretary of State for International Trade, but I rather wish somebody else had opened the debate. I wish the Secretary of State for international development had come to the Dispatch Box to boast that Britain was one of the handful of countries that had a commitment to spend 0.7% of its GNI on overseas aid. Of course, we could not have had that, because the Government have abolished the Department for International Development and now seek to walk away from the commitment to spend 0.7% of our GNI on aid. As others have said in this debate, that commitment put us at the top of the world's nations, rather than in the rather backward and downward-looking position we are now left in.

If the Government want the focus of today's debate to be on trade, let us take them at their word. As the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) said, let us focus on the tariffs currently being imposed on Scotch whisky, which have cost us something in the region of £450 million in lost exports already. It is a pretty open secret that we were close to having a bilateral deal with the US last week but we did not get it over the line. That is because it was just too difficult for Government Departments within Whitehall to agree on a common position that would have delivered that deal. Rather than having Ministers come and crow at the Dispatch Box about the great achievements of cut-and-paste trade deals, they would do better to focus on the real challenges that face us as we now try to create these trade deals across the world, because that one issue of tariffs in one sector shows just how challenging this is going to be.

The challenge to the House tonight is what the narrative is going to be as we create this global Britain. Is it going to be one that is merely transactional—all about trade? Are we going to create a global Britain that is actually rooted in values—rooted in support for human rights, wherever they are found, and the rule of law—or are we going to be looking at this just as a question of pounds, shillings and pence?

9.25 pm

Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con) [V]: Having listened to some of the nay-sayers today, I would refer them to a quote from Theodore Roosevelt:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man...in the arena".

Well, global Britain is now in the arena, and this is about us engaging globally in our new, less constrained world. We need more trade and investment to propel our economic growth and create jobs as we recover from coronavirus. The UK, in reaching out to the world, needs to build its own platforms to support this.

I want progress in our levelling-up agenda for all parts of the UK to participate through agendas like putting the first freeport in the north-east of England at Tees port and Teesside airport; investing in proper rail capacity through connections like Ferryhill station on the Leamside line, affording efficient links for our businesses; and creating specialisms in the space and hydrogen sectors in places like the north-east. This will allow the north-east to fully participate in these opportunities.

With the Brexit deal now properly done, and having secured deals with 63 countries around the world covering £885 billion of trade, we need to grasp these opportunities for all our regions. We can develop as a scientific superpower. NETPark in Sedgefield is positioned to develop global expertise, creating more high-value local manufacturing and generating more export power. We need to commercialise our innovation expertise. This can be the platform for investing in training and skills. The Turing scheme excites me by creating a broader opportunity for students. With our overseas placements no longer limited by language, skills or money, all students now have equal access to what the world of education can offer. With the dedicated appointment of my right hon. Friend the Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma) to focus on COP26, the UK can lead on climate change and a green recovery.

I have every confidence that we have the desire and capability to develop a fully global Britain, and I look forward to supporting our Government in these endeavours.

9.28 pm

Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con) [V]: Today Britain is forging a new path as a sovereign nation state. We will stand by our long-held values of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights. We will work hard to support our European friends and neighbours and our allies around the world and will continue to stand by the world's poorest. But we must also seize the opportunity of our new freedoms—the opportunity to cast Britain as an icon of an outward-looking modern state. To do that, we have to recognise the changing factors disrupting the world as we know it today. First, the world's economic centre of gravity has shifted east, and the Indo-Pacific region is now the fastest-growing region in the world. Secondly, the rise of technology is profoundly changing how we live and work. Those who cannot keep up will lose out.

We need to prepare ourselves for the century ahead. We should be proud of the talents born across these islands of our shared achievements to date. We are the world's fifth largest economy, with more Nobel prizes and world-leading universities than any European country. We are a diplomatic superpower and a nuclear power, and we benefit from our leadership roles in the UN Security Council and the G7. We have a leading global financial centre and we consistently attract the highest foreign direct investment in Europe. Along with China, the US and India, we are one of the top four breeding grounds for tech unicorns—those rare new companies that achieve billion-dollar valuations. However, the world does not stand still and nor can we. We must now use our hard-won freedoms to keep up with a changing world—the freedom to revise our regulations at speed to meet the pace set by the world's brightest innovators, to strike new trading relationships that suit our distinct economic strengths and to spur on our specialist sectors.

Britain's record on covid-19 vaccinations—vaccinating more people than the rest of Europe combined—has reminded us all of the importance of an ambitious and agile state that controls its own regulation. We can use progressive regulation to push new boundaries, from AI to FinTech to life sciences to gene editing, and we can also be ambitious with our new global partnerships, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. Our new trading freedom means Britain can join the CPTPP. Already the largest trade agreement by population, if the US joins, it will

be the largest economic free trade agreement in the world. We can do more to collaborate with our Indo-Pacific partners, from space development alliances to green finance to protecting our shared values. We are also the biggest funder of COVAX, the global vaccine alliance, which will ensure we can get at least 1 billion doses of coronavirus vaccines to more than 90 developing countries.

Through innovation and partnership, we are helping to get the vaccine to those who need it most, proving that an independent Britain is not only good for us, but good for our friends across the world. Indeed, that is a fitting first step for a new truly global Britain.

9.31 pm

Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con) [V]: Across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, over 125,000 people have already received the coronavirus vaccine. This is a truly staggering feat, given that this time last year many of us had never even heard of covid-19. Just last week, I spoke with the chief executive of Staffordshire County Council and the leaders of our NHS team locally who are rolling out this vaccine in Stafford. I thank all of our healthcare workers, members of the armed forces and volunteers who have helped to make this vaccination programme possible. I know there are still millions of people across the UK eagerly waiting for the vaccine, but if the operation at the county showground in Stafford is anything to go by, I have every hope that the vaccine will help us to defeat the virus. Our experience of coronavirus over the last few months has, sadly, taught us that some people will have to seek hospital treatment and some will also need intensive care, so I thank everyone for the enormous personal sacrifices they have made over the past few months to follow the guidance, and I say thank you for all they have done to literally save people's lives.

Unfortunately, in many less developed countries, responding to this need through existing health systems will be near on impossible. For example, Tanzania has just one doctor for every 30,000 patients, while most African countries have fewer than 20 ICU beds for their entire populations. So not only will the virus be more difficult to contain, but the ability to care for those severely infected will be limited. Therefore, today I call for every country to strengthen their preventive measures to fight this immediate crisis. It is absolutely essential that we have strong, resilient health systems to fight this global pandemic. Investing in healthcare workers, as well as providing adequate protective equipment and other essential medicines, helps to prepare low and middle-income countries to deal with the immediate threat of covid-19 and helps to avoid thousands of preventable deaths. Of course, there is no one single model for handling this outbreak and no two viruses are the same, but I believe that this worldwide sharing of experience has helped us to slow down the spread of coronavirus and is helping to protect the lives of my constituents in Stafford and around the world.

Vaccines are an area in which Britain has a long-standing history in leading the world. We are a founding member of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and we are continuing to champion access to vaccines. So while this pandemic has devastatingly demonstrated that we are all only as strong as our weakest healthcare system, I think the UK has shown tremendous leadership and co-operation, which is what is needed to fight this disease and to ensure that covid-19 is ended in Stafford and abroad.

9.34 pm

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con) [V]: I welcome today's debate. I am hugely optimistic about our future as a sovereign free-trading nation, although I appreciate that not all share that view—indeed, we have witnessed this evening how Labour and SNP Members wish to talk down Britain. Unlike them, I am confident about our place in the world. For evidence of this, we need look no further than the remarkable achievement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade and her team, who have successfully negotiated over 60 continuity agreements since we formally left the EU almost a year ago.

The Government have set out their welcome ambition to join the CPTPP. Perhaps we should also consider in greater detail CANZUK, which could bring Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK together as an international powerhouse. Far from being the little Englanders the remainers have always made Brexiteers out to be, we are pursuing a vision of a truly global Britain. I am pleased to play my small part in this through my role as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to the western Balkans. Although I have been in office for only three months, I have seen the huge potential for expanding the relationship between the UK and each of the six countries in the region. There are considerable opportunities across a range of sectors, most notably in renewables and infrastructure projects. Furthermore, there are opportunities throughout the supply chains, offering infinite possibilities for SMEs in the UK to get involved.

The forthcoming COP26 world conference will focus attention on the green agenda and create a massive opportunity for the UK to showcase what our industries offer in the global markets that are open to them. In contrast to what the doomsayers claim, post Brexit we retain the status of a respected partner that is able to continue to punch above its weight thanks to a dynamic economy. We are one of the greatest military powers in the world and have a reputation as one of the most effective exercisers of soft power. Few can match our diplomatic footprint, as I have seen in my role as a trade envoy. Our ambassadors in the western Balkans have shown themselves to be people of great ability. They recognise that the UK brand is a powerful one and maintain Britain's reputation as a country that offers fantastic opportunities.

I was delighted to hear the Secretary of State refer to freeports. She knows that I have long advocated such a policy. I am of course eager to ensure that the Humber ports receive freeport status. It is clear that the UK's best times are ahead of us, and I very much welcome the efforts of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for International Trade to refocus our policy so that it is fit for the 21st century.

9.37 pm

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the chance to wind up this first debate of 2021 for the official Opposition. We have heard powerful speeches from the shadow Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), and from my hon. Friends the Members for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), for Newport West (Ruth Jones), for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy), for Liverpool,

[Gareth Thomas]

Riverside (Kim Johnson), for Bradford East (Imran Hussain), for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi), for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) and for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe). Also notable were the speeches from the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) and the hon. Member for Leicester East (Claudia Webbe). It was difficult to disagree with the right hon. Members for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) and the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) that cutting our aid and abolishing the Department for International Development is hardly going to build confidence in the global Britain brand.

The International Trade Secretary's speech was, sadly, not quite so encouraging. She and the rest of the Cabinet spent 2020 putting up barriers to trade. She unsuccessfully chased Donald Trump for a trade deal—indeed, it was striking that not once in her speech did she mention President-elect Biden. Vital markets in Asia and important allies in Africa were neglected or treated poorly last year. The one advantage that Ministers in the Department for International Trade start the year with is that expectations of them are not high.

The deal with the European Union that the Prime Minister negotiated, while better than no deal, is proving already to be very thin gruel. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton noted, 80% of our economic output depends on services. We might reasonably have expected Ministers to fight harder to maintain our access to EU services markets, but there is nothing on, for example, mutual recognition of professional qualifications, and the Prime Minister's claim that his deal means certainty for financial services—one of the industries where Britain leads the world in jobs and skills—will surprise many who work in that industry.

Never has any party embraced with such enthusiasm a trade deal that is set to generate unprecedented levels of red tape and form filling—new red tape for farmers, new plant and animal health checks, new red tape for manufacturers, new rules of origin checks, and new safety and security checks. Businesses will have to get used to an estimated 400 million new forms. Not surprisingly, one of the fastest growing areas of employment in global Britain is in handling all the new red tape.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend recall the Prime Minister saying that, if businesses were presented with new forms, they should just rip them up, apparently?

Gareth Thomas: My right hon. Friend makes a good point, but, sadly, we are seeing lots of new jobs being created in this very area: customs clearance agents, import customs agents, international customs agents, import customs brokerage agents and customs clearance clerks—all these new jobs being created because Ministers appear to want dynamic export-oriented British firms to fill in more forms.

Since the Government's new trade agreement with the EU came into effect, we have also seen rising numbers of export consignments from Great Britain to Northern Ireland and the EU turned away because they do not have the right customs documentation, we have seen EU businesses stop selling their products to the UK by

mail because of new VAT rules, and we have seen thousands of companies grappling with the new rules of origin to determine whether their exports to the EU now face tariffs. So businesses—never mind the House—might have expected to hear a little more from the Secretary of State on what she was going to do about those problems.

As the shadow Secretary of State made clear, on rollover agreements, the truth is that the process has been a bit of a mess. Only 31 of the 63 countries listed on the Department for International Trade's website have fully ratified agreements with the UK. Twenty-one have provisional agreements pending ratification, eight have bridging mechanisms pending the signing of deals, and in three cases deals have been signed but are not yet in effect. Clearly, not all of it is the Government's fault, but leaving it so late to secure these agreements has caused completely unnecessary headaches and costs for many businesses trading with those countries. Prime Minister Trudeau's suggestion that Britain did not have the "bandwidth" for a deal with his country hinted at a rather different reality from the one that the Secretary of State and her cheerleaders have implied today.

Indeed, the total inadequacy of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act process as a means to guarantee proper parliamentary scrutiny of new trade deals signed by the Government has been exposed. Look at the eight continuity agreements that took effect on 1 January before they had been formally ratified: not a single one with a word of debate in Parliament. Continuity agreements with Canada and Mexico have not yet taken effect because ratification is taken more seriously in those countries than it is here, and one more agreement, with Cameroon, came into effect on 1 January without even being laid before Parliament. Think about that—it became law before any of us even saw it. If ever a process merited amendments from the other place being accepted to improve scrutiny of trade agreements, it is surely the events of the past month.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West pointed out, the House has received no formal explanation as to why 11 continuity agreements could not be concluded in time. So it certainly would be helpful if the Minister of State took a bit of time in his winding-up speech to go through the reasons why deals could not be done with, for example, Algeria, Albania, Bosnia, Montenegro and Serbia. The Government's dismal treatment of Ghana—a key Commonwealth ally—is particularly surprising. We know that UK negotiators turned up for meetings late and badly briefed and then left early with nothing resolved. What hung over all those negotiations was the threat of very heavy tariffs on cocoa, tuna and bananas if a deal could not be completed in time. That, sadly, is what has happened—twice already now, including today. I hope that a deal with Ghana can be completed soon and, when the Secretary of State finally signs that long overdue and much needed deal, it should come with a much needed apology.

It is also striking that, in the year when the UK will be hosting the world's climate change summit, not one of the trade agreements that the Secretary of State signed last year saw any progress on the environment and climate change. Also, as other hon. Friends have mentioned, many of the deals that the Secretary of State signed did not include even the most basic provisions on human rights. It was good to hear the right hon.

Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) briefly require the Secretary of State to mention India. The Secretary of State has been astonishingly quiet on trade with the Indian subcontinent. India's market is set to be the world's fifth largest within five years, and given that Britain is bottom of the G7 for growth in our trade with India, a little more effort to open those markets would, I say gently, be timely.

Trade deals involve give as well as take, so it would be good to hear a little more openness from the Minister of State tonight and ultimately from the Secretary of State about what we will have to give in the trade deals she wants to sign this year. Australia and New Zealand, for example, are both great allies, but with a considerable interest in our agricultural markets. Japan, too, is a great ally, but we must remember that the Japan trade deal signed with great fanfare appears, according to the Government's own analysis, set to benefit Japanese exporters five times as much as British exporters.

When it comes to future negotiations, the Secretary of State has once again spoken in this debate as if the UK's membership of the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership—the CPTPP—should be seen as a no-brainer and a done deal. Membership of the CPTPP may indeed be a very welcome and positive step for our country to take, but I think the Government owe it to the House—we certainly owe it to our constituents—at least to ask some basic questions about that membership and what it will really mean. Will it, for example, mean signing up to secretive investor-state dispute settlement processes, with all the risks that that poses for our ability to protect public services, consumers and the environment from corporate profiteers? Will it mean having to accept the CPTPP's “list it or lose it” approach to private competition in the public sector? Will it mean being obliged to accept palm oil from Malaysia and other producers, regardless of the public pressure in this country for a ban? Will we really be able to renegotiate the provisions of the CPTPP in our own interests before we sign up to it, or will we just have to accept the provisions that are already there? Of course, that might ultimately be the right thing to do. The benefits may well outweigh the costs, but the Government have not yet made that case. They have not yet answered the most basic questions. It is not just the other members of the CPTPP that they need to convince, but Parliament and the British public as well.

After almost 50 years, we have left a trade alliance with our closest geographical and economic partners—a decision that was not taken lightly. It certainly was not taken without debate, so before the Government plunge us into another trade grouping, perhaps a little more discussion might be worthwhile: maybe an impact assessment, and certainly serious and meaningful consultation.

9.48 pm

The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands): I thank the 52 Members across the House for their informed contributions to the debate. Following our exit from the European Union, on 31 December the United Kingdom left the EU customs union and single market, taking back control of our trade policy and becoming an independent trading nation once again. We have reached an ambitious agreement with the European Union, changing the basis of that relationship from EU law to free trade and friendly co-operation.

After four and a half long years of debate—including, most notably, in this Chamber—we have followed the instruction of the British people as expressed in the 2016 referendum. I am sure that I speak for many in this House when I express a sense of relief that this matter is now settled and that vote honoured. It was a vote for Britain's relationship with Europe and with the rest of the world to change—to recognise some of the challenges of leaving the EU, but also to embrace a great number of new opportunities. In other words, it was a vote to forge the global Britain that this country can be.

Among the 52 speakers we have heard from, the longest speech—I thought I ought to reply to it—was from the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry). In fact, we heard from both Islington tonight. The right hon. Lady's speech was mainly complaints about the trade and co-operation agreement. I will pass her questions on to the Cabinet Office. Now, it was rumoured that she was close to quitting the Front Bench rather than voting for the new UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement, and tonight we heard some of the details of her opposition to that agreement. At times it sounded like she wanted to rejoin the EU. She misunderstood some of the complexities of trade agreements—yes, there is the continuity of the effect, but we still have to negotiate the terms and details. That means things such as rules of origin, tariff-rate quotas and so on. There are quite complex negotiations involved, but we have been very successful: 63 countries with which we have trade agreements have been rolled over so far, covering 97% of that trade.

The right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury repeated her complaint about the provisional application of some of these trade agreements—deals which have not yet been fully ratified but which take effect. One might think that that does sound a little bit alarming, but it is entirely normal for trade agreements. Indeed, many of the original EU deals at the time were provisionally applied. I checked back on the details of some of these agreements and found one, the CARIFORUM agreement—a very good agreement, by the way—which is still provisionally applied today, despite having been signed in the year 2008, so the Opposition complaint that these deals have been provisionally applied for perhaps a few weeks bears nothing compared with the 13 years for which the trade agreements signed under the last Labour Government have been provisionally applied.

I thought, “Well, presumably somebody in the Labour Government at the time might have done something about this,” so I checked back and found out. Who was the Trade Minister at the time? It turns out that it was the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas); he might have been able to stop it at the time. Then I thought, “Well, if the Trade Minister did not stop it, who was the Minister for International Development who covered the Caribbean? Maybe he or she might have stopped it.” But it was him as well—the hon. Member for Harrow West. He was perfectly happy in 2008 for a deal to be provisionally applied still 13 years later, but now he is complaining about the provisional application of some of these important details.

The hon. Member for Harrow West was also complaining about the CRaG process, so I checked back again. I wanted to know who was the Minister for international agreements at the time that CRaG was passed by the

[Greg Hands]

last Labour Government. I thought, “Who could that have been? Who would this person be today to be complaining about the CRaG process?” It turns out that it was none other than the hon. Member for Harrow West, in his role as an International Development Minister. Tonight we heard all those complaints, but sometimes such practices went on 13 years after the last Labour Government.

Anyway, we have heard from a high profile array of speakers, each frustratingly restricted to three minutes. We could have sold tickets for this debate. Instead of taking out a Netflix subscription, the people locked down at home could have been watching the House of Commons. We have had a former Prime Minister, two former members of the Cabinet, three current Select Committee Chairs, a former Leader of the Opposition and two former Trade Ministers. It has been a star-studded debate.

The former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), made a speech that will definitely get some attention; I agree with her calls to reject isolationism. We have heard from former Cabinet members. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) spoke passionately about the Commonwealth and NATO, and my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) spoke about vision and boldness in trade, which he never lacked—nor, indeed, does his successor as Secretary State for International Trade. The former Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), was listed on the call list as Labour, but I am not sure; I think he is still an Independent. He took the title of the debate, “Global Britain”, and forgot the Britain bit. He did talk a bit about global, but it was mainly a speech against global corporations and his complaints about their role in the world today.

The Chairs of the Select Committees on Foreign Affairs, on Defence and on International Development—my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), and the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion)—all made very good points. My hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling spoke about how trade can transform lives in Africa; the Defence Committee Chair set out a huge to-do list on how we should work with President-elect Biden, which we very much look forward to doing; and the hon. Member for Rotherham spoke about development and women’s rights. Nobody is more passionate about girls’ education than our current Prime Minister, and I think we have been delivering on our important role there.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), who is at once my successor and my predecessor in this role, gave thanks to the DIT team; we thank him for his important work in the Department from 2019 to 2020. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) expressed his genuine concern about the Northern Ireland protocol and made some important points about hydrogen technology and other things.

Let me zip through the other speeches. My right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) quoted the words of Pericles; we were all expecting to hear Churchill, but instead he quoted

another of the Prime Minister’s great heroes and we thank him for that. My hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) talked about Nord Stream 2, my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) about the importance of Heysham as a port, my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) about the importance of human rights, my hon. Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Ruth Edwards) about both manufacturing and Stilton, and my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Simon Fell) about international development and vaccine development.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) skewered the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury, on China—she had no answer. He was passionate about that very important subject. We will hear from the Foreign Secretary tomorrow about China.

From the Opposition, I liked the speech that the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi) gave about the living reality of her global diverse community in Vauxhall. I disagree with her on isolationism: I do not think that that is the direction that the UK is taking under this Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) praised his own community. He is quite right that the NHS will never be on the table in future trade deals.

The hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan) attacked the Government on fishing. How extraordinary to hear a speech attacking the Government on fishing from the SNP—a party that is committed to rejoining the EU common fisheries policy! It was an absolutely extraordinary speech.

David Linden: Will the Minister give way?

Greg Hands: I will not, because I am going to go through Members’ contributions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Cherilyn Mackrory) talked about global Cornwall, which I thought was a fantastic thing, and about Cornish exports to the US, Kazakhstan and Taiwan.

The hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) raised something that we have to clear up. The Secretary of State—this is on the Government’s website and we have announced it—has agreed the main elements of consensus on a new agreement with Ghana. That is a great relief to all of us, and I know that it will be and has been welcomed by many in Ghana. There is also no diminution of human rights in our trade agreements, as hon. Members will have seen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) made a thoughtful contribution; he also cited Robin Niblett of Chatham House. My hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) spoke about the importance of local exporters in his borders constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Dr Wallis) spoke about showcasing what the UK has to offer. My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) said that Britain is back, and he is absolutely right. He also spoke about the importance of the Crown dependencies, which will play an important role. I have regular dialogue with the Crown dependencies—Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man—on their role in future trade agreements.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) was passionate about her time as Africa Minister. I read her piece on “ConservativeHome”; the Government position is that we will return to 0.7% as soon as the fiscal position allows it. There were also good speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Gloucester (Richard Graham), for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns), for Sedgefield (Paul Howell), for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho), for Stafford (Theo Clarke) and for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), who all made excellent contributions in support of the Government’s free trade agenda. Unfortunately, I do not have time to reflect on every single one of those speeches, but this has been a successful, very well subscribed and star-studded debate and it has been a great pleasure to wind it up for the Government.

This year marks the beginning of a new chapter in our national story, going into the world as a sovereign, independent trading nation. The responsibility now falls on all our shoulders, both in the Government and in this Parliament, to take full advantage of the freedom of action that our country has regained. This year will be our opportunity to show what global Britain can be, striking trade deals with new markets and reasserting ourselves as a liberal, outward-looking, free-trading nation and, most of all, a force for good in the world.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Global Britain.

Business without Debate

COMMITTEES

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): With the leave of the House, we will take motions 2 and 3 together.

Ordered,

NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

That Caroline Ansell be discharged from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and Fay Jones be added.

PROCEDURE COMMITTEE

That Andrew Griffith be discharged from the Procedure Committee and Mr William Wragg be added.—(*Bill Wiggin [V], on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Supporting the UK’s Social Fabric

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

10.1 pm

Jon Cruddas (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab): I rise to speak about tomorrow’s publication from the think-tank Onward entitled “The Policies of Belonging”, which is part of its “Repairing our social fabric” programme. To avoid any confusion, I am well aware that Onward seeks to develop new ideas for the next generation of centre-right thinkers and leaders. Clearly, that does not include me—at least I hope it does not—and I might therefore be expected to use my time to attack the report and suggest it is part of a right-wing plot to dismantle the social fabric and ensure there is no such thing as society. On the contrary, I am here to welcome this piece of work and to congratulate the project’s supporting partners, which include the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Power to Change and Shelter. This work could well provide the basis for a new cross-party conversation about how we rebuild the social character of the country as we emerge from the pandemic.

It is in that spirit of across-the-aisle co-operation that I have given half my time in this short debate to the hon. Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger). The paper he produced last September proposing a new social covenant and tomorrow’s report are thoughtful contributions on how we rebuild our country in the tough years that lie ahead. They both deserve a wide audience across all parties. However, the danger is that we relegate such thinking in preference to economic policy. This remains an historical tendency in both of our political traditions, despite what we know about how people wish to live and what they value, which stretches beyond questions of GDP, utility and economic calculus.

Last year, Onward introduced its UK social fabric index, which measures the relative social strength of every community in Britain, a significant new metric for politicians and public policy makers alike. Its covid-19 community report highlighted resilient local responses to the pandemic over the past 10 months, yet also detailed the limited opportunities for communities to genuinely take back control. The overall argument is quite simple but telling: the social divides that bedevil our country are just as strong as the economic divides. Talk of levelling up, therefore, needs to encompass social as well as economic policy.

A desire to level up communities is not new. It has informed, among others, the community development projects of Harold Wilson, the single regeneration budgets of John Major, and Tony Blair’s new deal for communities. Yet none of those has unlocked the way we level up communities, not least, arguably, because of an overreliance on economic issues. In truth, politicians tend to gravitate towards grant funding issues, job creation schemes and physical infrastructure to foster community. We are most comfortable with that agenda. A more sustainable proposal would be to empower communities to respond themselves and endow them with the resources to do so.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and congratulate him on securing the debate. I very much agree with what he says. Does he agree that the charitable sector is a foundational

[Jim Shannon]

partner in the make-up of the UK and that churches and community groups need help at this time to set up online and effective ways of carrying on their sterling work? While it is great to see some churches running online youth quizzes, for example, for others the technology is simply out of their reach, and they need help to purchase and use it. Does he agree that we should be encouraging churches and community groups to be more involved? Perhaps the Minister can ensure that that happens.

Jon Cruddas: I very much agree, and that is the tenor of much of the report being published tomorrow morning, so I urge the hon. Member to read it. The charitable sector and faith groups have been on the frontline of confronting the pandemic in my community, and I will comment on that in a minute.

All the evidence suggests that citizens want the power and responsibility to revive their communities, so how can that be achieved? The report suggests, first, giving individuals the power to repair their social fabric through civic sabbaticals, youth-serving years, character education and new permanent volunteer schemes; secondly, giving individuals the capital to do so through new tax changes to support individual activities, reform of precarious housing, funds to support new civic leadership and adapting the apprenticeship levy; thirdly, giving communities the power to repair their social fabric with community improvement districts, new community councils, business rate exemptions and the reuse of empty buildings and shops; and fourthly, giving communities the capital to do so, controlled by the community themselves, with new social infrastructure funds, higher education reforms, community land trusts and charitable enterprise zones. The 17 specific policy recommendations are well worth a read tomorrow.

This year could well shape a new cross-party dialogue about rebuilding our communities. As the MP for Dagenham, I feel that 2021 is an important year to have such a debate, as it marks our centenary. Modern Dagenham was literally built or born on 7 November 1921, when the first house on the Becontree estate was completed. Some 27,000 homes containing over 100,000 residents would follow, spread over 2,700 acres or 4 square miles, building the largest council estate in the world—a unique experiment: a state-led cottage community built from nothing. It was Lloyd George making good on his promise made immediately after the armistice to build “habitations for the heroes who have won the war”.

The first migrants felt like pioneers, moving from east end slums into a muddy and empty wilderness, but a resilient community was created. Indeed, by the 1950s and '60s, analysts from the Institute of Community Studies—now the Young Foundation—regularly used the estate to extol the virtues of settled extended working-class families, yet the twin effects of deindustrialisation and the right to buy dismantled a once stable community. We became, and still are, the fastest-changing community in the country, driven by the cheapest housing in London.

Today, in our centenary year, we are seeking to forge new partnerships to re-establish that sense of community, and we are having some success. Traditionally, the community sector has been weak, but the council has recently worked to change its structures and culture and

to work with and support the community in new ways that are more participatory and less paternalistic. Local services have been made less siloed and more friendly and integrated through an initiative labelled “community solutions”. We have invested in London's first youth zone. BD_Collective has been formed, which is an independent platform for local civil society that now provides the borough's infrastructure support in terms of civic and social support. We have Participatory City, a £7 million five-year experiment launched in 2017 to foster new forms of community activity. With four shop fronts and a large warehouse, it delivers scores of new community projects among a growing network of over 5,000 local people. We also have Collaborate, supported by Lankelly Chase, which helps to guide the local community on place-based change.

When the pandemic struck, all this came together in an alliance of council, voluntary and faith organisations organised through nine local community hubs, labelled the Barking and Dagenham Citizens Alliance Network, to help the most vulnerable. Approaching 6,000 families have been helped with food, medicines, prescriptions, referrals and advice. Just days ago, it was announced that borough community organisations are set to benefit from a new endowment fund transferred by the council to a place-based charity called Barking and Dagenham Giving—the first authority in London to permanently endow such a fund in support of local community groups—with an additional investment of over £800,000, to be topped up annually.

In Dagenham's centenary year, major new initiatives are helping to rebuild our social fabric, but the Government need to do more to help us. The social fabric of Britain frayed after years of neglect. The ties that bind us together are in urgent need of repair. The best way to honour our collective sacrifice over the past 10 months would be to endow communities with the resources to foster a more civic culture. The agenda published tomorrow by Onward to repair our social fabric is a major step in that regard. As we enter—hopefully—our final lockdown, we should resolve to repair the social fabric on which we all rely. There would be no better monument to the hardship and heartache of the past year. I now give some time for the hon. Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger).

10.10 pm

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con) [V]: I am pleased to be able contribute to this important debate and pay tribute to the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) for securing it. I am a great admirer of him, his work and his world view, which I find I largely share. I think of him as a great conservative, despite what he just said, and am pleased to be working with him on the Onward panel. I join him in endorsing the report that is to be published tomorrow and congratulate the team who have put it together.

This is a topical and important debate, and not just because what we call social fabric is a “nice to have” that everybody agrees with—we all like village halls, Girl Guides and so on. This agenda is profoundly important to the future of our country, partly for the obvious reason that what people want above all else is strong communities—we derive huge value personally from the strength of our neighbourhoods—but, more profoundly, this debate matters because what we call social fabric is in fact the foundation of our prosperity.

The House has just spent the afternoon debating global Britain; I am not sure that this topic was discussed, but the source of our prosperity as a country and, indeed, our offer to the world is in our local communities. We became the world's first industrial power because we had a culture that enables co-operation, shared values and the moral sentiments that underpin free markets. These are possible only because people trust each other. The country is made up of the communities within it, and our responsibility as politicians is to strengthen our communities and strengthen the foundations of our national prosperity.

The hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham spoke about his constituency in east London, which is obviously a place quite different from Devizes—he said that it began in 1921; we trace our origins to 4,000 BC, when the first prehistoric Neolithic structures were erected in my bit of Wiltshire—but actually there are many similarities. We, too, have entrenched social challenges: rural poverty and social isolation are particularly vicious because they are often hidden. Also like Dagenham, however, we have tremendous organisations and there is a very strong community that is responding to the challenges. I pay particular tribute to Community First and the Wiltshire Community Foundation, which I am privileged to work with.

Devizes is a place where people take responsibility for themselves and for their neighbours, as we are seeing now in the rush to get people vaccinated. On Friday, I spoke to three long-established family businesses in the constituency: T. H. White agricultural engineers, Gaiger Brothers builders and the brewers Wadworth. All three are suffering—naturally, as businesses are during this crisis—but all volunteered to help to put out the word among their workers, and in some cases paid their employees to help drive people to vaccination centres in the weeks and months ahead.

We need to trust in the spontaneous energies of communities, as I have described, but we also need to recognise that activity of that sort does not just happen. If we want more of it, especially in more disadvantaged places, we need to take action and the Government have a responsibility. Let us recognise what has happened over recent decades. As the Onward research demonstrates, our social fabric has grown threadbare over recent decades. Since 2000, a quarter of all pubs throughout the country have closed, and a quarter of all post offices and a fifth of all libraries have shut their doors. Partly that is because of how we all now work, shop and socialise—the changes in our economy and our society—and partly it is because of funding cuts, especially since 2010. I want to acknowledge that: I recognise that austerity fell most harshly on local government, which then cut non-statutory services the most. Youth services, which I worked in during those years, fell away particularly sharply—some estimates suggest that 70% of funding for youth services was cut in the 2010s. So what do we do? Well, we do need more public funding. I particularly welcome the investments that the Government have made. Hundreds of millions of pounds have been committed to youth services. During the pandemic, in the first lockdown last year, there was £750 million of emergency funding for civil society and for charities.

I pay tribute to the work that the Minister for Civil Society, Baroness Barran, and the Ministers in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport are

doing to support the charity sector. I would, of course, welcome more funding. I have called very specifically for a new endowment funded from dormant assets, which are potentially worth many billions of pounds, to finance social infrastructure and community projects. I also hope that the new levelling-up fund, announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor at the spending review in November, will live up to its billing and help support the infrastructure of everyday life, which means, in my view, not just trains and broadband, vital as those things are, but also the libraries, the youth clubs and the social enterprises that bind places together. In fact, broadband is a big part of the social fabric. I hope that we can do a deal with tech firms to get our communities properly connected. I see a major role for libraries in particular as the hubs of digitally connected local communities.

Finally, on money, I welcome the kickstart scheme that the Government have announced. Along with Onward and other colleagues, I hope that we can adapt that scheme, perhaps combining it with the National Citizen Service, to create a more ambitious project that funds young people, especially those who have suffered with all the disruption to education during this crisis, and those who will suffer from the downturn in the labour market in the months ahead. We need to fund those young people to work on social and environmental projects in their communities.

To finish, whatever we do with public money, there is something more important that we need to get right: the question of power—who is making the decisions about how money is spent and how services are organised locally. We are one of the most centralised countries in the developed world. To my mind, taking back control was not just about Brussels. If all we do now is bring power back to Westminster, as we have done, we will have failed the people of this country. That, Madam Deputy Speaker, is why I think the social fabric agenda is so significant: we need to put the power to determine what happens locally in the hands of local people. The Onward report makes a number of recommendations along those lines and I made some in my report last year. We are in the midst of a great constitutional change: the restoration of power to the UK. We need to restore power to the communities, too.

I welcome this debate. I thank my friend the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham for what he called this cross-party conversation. I hope that we can go beyond that. The battle for politics should be over this agenda. We should be fighting in this place about who owns the community agenda, and I think that my party has a very good claim to that.

10.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Warman): May I start by thanking the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) for securing this important debate and for getting such great cross-party consensus on the importance of this topic? It might not be of any help to his election leaflets if I say that he is a great champion of the centre right, as is Onward, but I think that we can all agree that, whether it is centre right or centre left, this is a vital topic for us all to be discussing.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about a participatory rather than a paternalistic way of having this conversation. That is an absolutely key focus for this Government,

[Matt Warman]

and I know that it is an absolutely key focus for my noble Friend Baroness Barran, whose ministerial brief this is; it is an honour to speak on it in the Commons. That strong social fabric is absolutely vital to the health and well-being of our society and of our economy. That is why it is not only this cross-party commitment that is important; it has also been an extraordinary spectacle over the past year to see the importance of that fabric as communities have come together as they have been tested like never before. It is more important than ever that we pay close attention to those ties that bind us, that we pay close attention to the way that they have been, as the hon. Gentleman described, stretched, and that we pay close attention to the fundamental infrastructure that makes those links possible. Whether it is little platoons or whether it is the big society—whatever we want to call it—they are essential to our response both to the pandemic and to our future.

We know that many people across the whole country are concerned about a growing lack of belonging, about that sense that things ain't what they used to be—whatever that might be. This report from Onward on the state of our social fabric does make for stark reading, as the hon. Gentleman said. It provides evidence of a long-term decline in the social fabric and it adds to a growing base of evidence for a link between weak social fabric and higher levels of deprivation.

I see in my own constituency—in Boston, in particular—levels of deprivation but intense levels of social pride. That sense is something that we can all build on. It has been highlighted by the Onward report and by the one nation report on “Connecting Communities” from my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Dean Russell), and we need to do more on that. Deprived areas are not lacking in pride or community spirit; they are often the places with the most community spirit. We need greater investment in the community infrastructure and the institutions that may help those places to address the economic challenges they face, because the two go together.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger) said, the Government have committed to levelling up all regions of the United Kingdom. A major part of that commitment must be creating jobs and investment in infrastructure as it is commonly understood, but we must also invest in the kind of social infrastructure that sits beneath it. Social fabric is about more than levelling up, and we will not level up if we simply address the economic challenges the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham mentioned. We must also recognise—and the Government do recognise—that exploring and recognising the role that building strong communities plays is an essential part of that agenda.

The £4 billion levelling-up fund will help. It will invest in

“the infrastructure of everyday life”,

as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has put it. It is not just transport and jobs, but community infrastructure, local arts, culture and libraries that make a real difference to people and that Members across the House are passionate about. That is why the Government are seeking, through this course of action, to use all the levers available, rather than simply building infrastructure, be it broadband, roads or rail. That will ensure that people

can access the network and institutions that let them connect in every possible sense, rather than simply improving infrastructure connectivity. Those two things together will address the economic inequalities we all want to see tackled.

Supporting change within those communities has not traditionally been seen as the space for Government to act, nor has it traditionally been seen as the space for a Conservative Government to act, but my Department has long focused on enriching lives, whether through sport, the arts or participation in the community at local and national level. We all want to create the conditions for civil society to thrive in order to support volunteering and local giving.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes mentioned the role of tech firms in that. As we move to an increasingly digital world, the role of technology is hugely important. I have worked to encourage the Googles and Facebooks of this world to work more with charities and local businesses. Just as they have done some successful work with schools, there is more that they could do in this area, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said.

It is important to say that the Government's response to the pandemic provides an example of how we have worked to enable civil society and communities to take a lead. The Government have worked hard to enable civil society to identify those challenges, to use its experience and, crucially, to fill the gaps. For instance, the £750 million support package that focused on enabling smaller and local charities and social enterprises to maintain and enhance services for those affected by the crisis saw large numbers of people working within their communities. It facilitated that sort of work to achieve more than would otherwise have been possible. It is important to recognise where the Government have done the right things. I hope that that is easier to do in the environment of cross-party consensus that we have seen this evening.

It is essential that we work to ensure that this potential is realised for the long term in every part of the country. Last summer, when my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes developed the proposals to sustain the community response to covid-19, one area he looked at was volunteering. We hear that many people want to volunteer but they face challenges in getting involved, and Government can help to address those barriers. They can enable us to sustain the community spirit. His recommendation of a volunteer passport, for instance, is one of the things that we are looking at closely. It represents one of a range of possible measures that will contribute to the strengthening of social fabric.

The hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham also mentioned place-based charities. It is important to pay tribute to the role of community foundations up and down the country—my own in Lincolnshire does remarkable work—and to note the recent announcements that we have made about the future use of dormant assets, which can make a real difference, building on what is already there.

As I said, we have seen huge progress in the use of digital technology to enable volunteering as a result of the pandemic. The NHS volunteer responders is just one example; they have supported 130,000 vulnerable people since they were mobilised last April, so we know that it can be done. We have heard great examples in

Devizes, and up and down the country, of people seeing in the vaccination drive yet another way in which volunteers can be harnessed, in the various “cabs for jabs” schemes that have already been established. My Department will continue to aid this effort and others, updating the public guidance to make sure that people can volunteer safely, because, of course, that is now more important than ever. Sustaining that strong, resilient volunteering system must be a legacy of this challenging period. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes for his report to the Prime Minister, and we will carefully consider the recommendations as we respond in due course.

This is a subject that, as the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham knows, we could talk about at great length, but the reason why we should have cause to be optimistic in these extraordinary times is that we have seen the possibilities that can be achieved, and we have seen, not just through those NHS responders, what more can be done. It has been a pleasure to have the

opportunity to respond to this debate. Strengthening the social fabric will continue to be a vital task for the Government. Responding to the Onward report will be an interesting and long-term project as well.

It is slightly too early to say happy birthday to Dagenham as we approach the centenary in November, but I will do so none the less. I do not know whether we can say happy sixth millennium to Devizes, but we should throw that in. Either way, whether a place is 100 years old or 6,000 years old, it is vital now that as a community we use the opportunities, be they technology or community, to level up and work from the bottom up, as I think the hon. Gentleman said. As we recover from the present crisis, it is vital that we build the stronger, fairer country that, across the House, we have seen a clear consensus for this evening.

Question put and agreed to.

10.28 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 11 January 2021

[GRAHAM STRINGER *in the Chair*]

Hospitality Industry: Government Support

4.30 pm

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): I remind Members that there have been at least two sets of changes since we moved back into Westminster Hall. I will try to clarify them so that people are not confused about the procedure that is there to ensure social distancing and keep Members safe.

Members who have not arrived at the start of the debate will not be allowed to intervene or speak. Members are expected to respect the one-way system. Members should also sanitise their microphones using the cleaning materials that are provided before they use them and afterwards. Members speaking in the latter stages of the debate should use the seats in the Public Gallery if there are not enough seats in the horseshoe. Although Members are expected to stay till the end, if there simply is not enough room, it might be helpful if people leave for that purpose. Finally, Mr Speaker has asked that people wear facemasks in the main Chamber, and I think it would be sensible if Members do that in this Chamber when not speaking, to be consistent with the main Chamber.

4.31 pm

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petitions 552201 and 329985 relating to Government support for the hospitality industry.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer, in a debate on support for the UK hospitality industry and the creation of a Minister for hospitality. Before I begin my comments proper, I want to say a couple of words about participation in this debate.

On Friday, the Mayor of London declared a major incident in the capital, and it is abundantly clear that the rates of covid-19 here are incredibly worrying. In my view, that underlines why we must urgently allow virtual or hybrid proceedings in Westminster Hall debates. I know that many colleagues from across the House share the petitioners' concerns about the future of bars, restaurants, hotels, nightclubs and other hospitality businesses, but are unable to be with us today. I assure hon. Members and the petitioners that, in conjunction with cross-party colleagues, we will continue to press the Government and the House authorities urgently to allow and enable remote participation in these important debates.

We are debating a petition with more than 200,000 signatures, started by Claire Bosi, editor of *Chef & Restaurant* magazine, alongside a petition on general support for the hospitality industry, created by Chrissie McLaren, which has about 45,000 signatures.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): I am very grateful for an early intervention. I absolutely support the hon. Lady's call for a hospitality Minister. I was the shadow Minister for tourism when I first came

into Parliament. I wanted that job to continue when we went into government, but the size of Government restricts the number of Ministers it is possible to have, as we will no doubt hear later. In the event that we are not successful in getting a Minister for hospitality, would she support an envoy for hospitality so that we can at least have a voice for this important sector, which has been battered so hard because of covid-19, not least in my Bournemouth constituency?

Catherine McKinnell: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important argument. More than 200,000 petitioners are calling for a Minister for hospitality, and I am sure they will be pleased that there are alternative suggestions if the Minister does not agree to that today.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I mentioned wedding venues to the hon. Lady before the debate. Orange Tree House in Greyabbey in my constituency employs 60-odd people and generates turnover for the whole community with not just bed and breakfast but many other things. When we call upon the Minister to look after the hospitality sector, does the hon. Lady agree that it is important for all regions of the United Kingdom, including Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, to be part of that strategy so that we can work together and help one another?

Catherine McKinnell: I absolutely agree with and endorse what the hon. Gentleman has said, which adds weight to the argument for a voice at the heart of Government who can represent the interests of not only all aspects of hospitality, but all areas of the UK.

I want to put on record that my husband works in hospitality, so I live with its daily ups and downs, not to mention the huge challenges of covid-19. It is not just an interest or concern here in Parliament. The petition speaks to a concern that many hon. Members will have heard time and again from local businesses in their constituencies: that the Government lack a deep understanding of the nature of the hospitality industry and its diversity. The petitioners argue that that is why we need a Minister with responsibility for hospitality to be a voice for the sector at the heart of Government.

The hospitality industry is the third-largest UK employer. It is responsible for about 3 million jobs, generates £130 billion in activity and results in £38 billion of Government revenue through taxation. For levelling up, it is one of the few industries to reach every part of the country, and it will be crucial in our recovery from the present crisis. Unlike the arts or sport, however, it does not have a dedicated Minister.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I support the hon. Lady's call for a stronger voice for hospitality in Government. I do not know whether she is a coffee drinker, but I am sure that she is aware in her constituency, as I am in mine, of the clusters of caffeine seekers outside kiosks and, even worse, inside waiting for a takeaway—they are a pretty common sight. Does she agree that, although those sales are not breaking any rules, they are not essential? We might need to put our coffee culture on hold for the time being.

Catherine McKinnell: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point; perhaps the Minister will comment on that in his response.

[Catherine McKinnell]

This is a timely debate, because although many businesses have taken a significant hit since March, hospitality, which thrives on social mixing and travel, has been crippled by repeated lockdowns and the risks posed by the virus. Local economies with a higher proportion of workers employed in such sectors have been disproportionately hit.

Many restaurants have pivoted to providing cook-at-home and takeaway offers with contact-free delivery or kerbside collection. In these strange times, Geordies can enjoy takeaways from all manner of venues across our city, from the Thyme Square café on Station Road, with its carry-out Sunday lunches, to the cook-at-home offerings from 21 and the Michelin-starred House of Tides on the quayside. None the less, the situation remains incredibly challenging for all. A recent UK Hospitality study found that 41% of businesses in the sector thought that they would fail by mid-2021, and one in five thought that they would have enough cash flow to survive beyond February.

Even when restrictions were relaxed over the summer, most people could still go to restaurants or pubs only with the people they lived or bubbled with. The simultaneous closure of sports stadiums, cinemas, music venues and theatres has a knock-on impact. If the business of people catching up with family and friends over drinks, going on dates, or having a bite to eat after a match or film is lost, that is a huge chunk of revenue. Hospitality also lost out badly from the drop in tourist spend this winter. Other parts of the hospitality sector, such as nightclubs, have remained closed since the first lockdown in March. From the reaction to the recent debate on the night-time economy, I know that Newcastle's iconic nightlife is sorely missed by visitors and locals alike.

On Friday, when I met the petition's creator, Claire Bosi, and some of its leading supporters, including the founder and Chief executive officer of Home Grown Hotels, Robin Hutson, and chefs Tom Kerridge and Angela Hartnett, I heard powerful examples that demonstrate the Government's lack of deep understanding of the sector. To be clear, there is enormous gratitude for the considerable support that the Government have provided through the billions spent on measures such as the job retention scheme, the business rates holiday and various grants, including those announced by the Chancellor last week. The Government would do a lot better, however, if they stopped seeing the sector as being amenable to a one-size-fits-all approach. Ministers' main lever for controlling the virus over the last nine months has been to switch the entire sector on or off at a moment's notice, with little consideration given to its complexity and diversity.

When restrictions were eased over the summer, we saw the reopening of large chain pubs—with customers often bunched together at outside tables—at the same time as small restaurants and bed-and-breakfasts, where social distancing is easier to maintain. The curfew policy suffered from the same one-size-fits-all mindset. It was evidently drawn up with bars in mind, but unlike restaurants they do not have to turn over tables. The curfew might have been appropriate for a city centre bar—although there were many issues with large groups of customers all leaving at the same time—but it made no sense for small restaurants or rural hotels, which might have been

unable to safely spread out the accommodation of all their guests for dinner as a consequence.

August's eat out to help out scheme, although clearly popular at the time, was seemingly designed with little regard to whom it would help and the incentives that it would create. Rather than supporting those who are struggling the most, it potentially ended up being an untargeted giveaway to customers and businesses. It also made eating out much cheaper relative to takeaways and, in retrospect, helping restaurants by targeting subsidies at takeaways might have been more effective at boosting sales while maintaining the social distancing that is so required.

I understand that there are reasons why the Government have made lockdown announcements very shortly before their introduction, but that has caused some real issues for the sector. I was told of a chef in London who had two tonnes of oysters delivered just two hours after London entered tier 3, with no customers to serve them to. Yesterday, we heard reports of chickens possibly being culled due to a fall in bulk egg orders. When hotels were closed by national lockdown or entering tiers 3 and 4, hoteliers were left guessing whether they were even allowed to serve their guests breakfast in the morning. I know that these are not decisions that any Minister takes lightly, but if it is genuinely not possible to give more notice of such changes, what more can the Government do to support businesses that are caught off guard?

The repeated shutdowns of the hospitality sector have also meant that the businesses that supply it have been forced into hibernation for much of the past year. There is a whole other set of issues there that the current support measures—which are largely designed around jobs and rent, not around businesses holding large amounts of stock, often perishable—just do not reach. Little financial support has been available throughout the pandemic. With severe restrictions in place across the country since the autumn, demand for their stock has diminished seriously.

I also worry about the impact of that on-off cycle on the mental health of the staff who work in the sector. They have had to return suddenly to public-facing roles, turning on the charm and smiling at customers, when they do not know whether they will be able to hold on to their jobs for much longer. It has been great to see the widespread recognition of the strains that lockdown has put on the nation's mental health, but we need to pay particular attention to the sectors most affected.

Thanks to the ingenuity and dedication of scientists in the UK and across the world, there is now a clear way out of this crisis. We know that the economic disruption will not be permanent. We will, no doubt, expect hospitality to play a significant part in the hoped-for bounce back of economic activity and employment, in particular among young people. We have good reason to believe that for at least the businesses that manage to survive.

The pandemic has concentrated a tremendous amount of economic pain on workers in certain sectors, predominantly insecure workers, and they deserve our utmost support. However, there has also been a build-up of savings among those more fortunate, who have been able to maintain a steady income. Many have saved the money that they used to spend on bars, hotels and restaurants, rather than splurging it on more parcels from Amazon, but there are limits to how much of that

will ultimately be spent on hospitality in due course. In all likelihood, people are likely to go out to the pub two or three times a week, eventually, but that will not happen soon.

There will be a catch-up on spending in that social consumption—or we very much hope so—when things eventually return to normal. As the nation is vaccinated, the economy reopens and the rules we apply in hospitality inevitably become more nuanced and complex, it is important that we have input from the hospitality sector as to how we can design policy not to repeat the mistakes that were made in the summer of 2020 when the sector reopened.

We need to get ahead of the problems, and the petitioners have argued that splitting that representation between two crowded Departments—the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport—is not working. One of the leading supporters of the petition, Robin Hutson, put it succinctly:

“I’ve long held the view that the hospitality sector requires really focused representation in government. This is about the future of our industry and the campaign and petition showcases the strength of feeling across the country on this issue. Hospitality is a sector that deserves a seat at the top table.”

That responsibility sits across two Departments, which is not a problem. Hospitality sector businesses are businesses, but they are also a creative art—in fact, much of the arts sector relies on hospitality as a source of revenue to underpin its activities. We used to have more Ministers with cross-Department briefs, out of recognition that some issues unavoidably straddle Government Departments, but that seems to be out of fashion at the moment. I worry that it creates an incentive for passing the buck between Departments, which reinforces the case for a Minister for hospitality.

It is hard to believe some of more farcical debates that we have had, such as the controversy about whether a Scotch egg constitutes a meal. If we had a dedicated hospitality Minister, we might not have ended up with that mess. If a new ministerial role is not something that the Government are open to, we must at least recognise that the sector needs a strong voice in Government, with a genuine recognition of its diversity, greater engagement with businesses and a much deeper understanding of the different ways that they are affected by lockdown measures.

The hospitality sector is an industry that has always been driven by passion and soul. It is not an industry in which businesses generally have huge amounts of cash reserves, and we know that many businesses operate at just above break-even point. The industry knows it needs to encourage more home-grown talent, now that it cannot rely on people coming over from Europe. There is a levelling-up piece here, as I have mentioned. Hospitality is one of the few industries that is represented in almost every part of the country. It is an industry that is a gateway for so many people who do not particularly enjoy the academic side of school but who have creativity and graft and can be successful, if just given the chance. If the Government understood and took the industry seriously, it could be a route to transformation in every community right across the country. We need to raise the profile of hospitality and encourage young people from the UK to do apprenticeships and to see entering the industry as a “sky’s the limit”

career. As we set out our stall on the world stage in the post-Brexit era, one of the key things that will attract people to our country—with their investment—is our culture and its offerings, and a big part of that will be the richness and quality of our hospitality.

Newcastle’s hospitality sector has something for everyone: restaurants offering everything from hearty traditional Geordie pub grub to innovative fine dining, hipster-style hang-outs for craft beer and gourmet burgers, and a thriving street food scene. Our nightlife is famous in its own right and is regularly featured in guides and magazines—Newcastle is often one of the top places for an unforgettable night out. However, my fear in the current situation is that the larger, more standardised chains will have the resources to survive into the post-pandemic era, but the smaller, heart-and-soul operations might not. We will see a hollowing out of the sector. I do not want to see my city lose any part of what makes it unique, and I am sure colleagues feel the same way about their areas.

I know there is a limit to how much heart and soul people can give when they have been hammered month after month. Even in the best-case scenario, there are several months of closure ahead. Countless smaller owner-operators are now worse off than they were when the pandemic began. Some took out personally secured loans in March. Having spent the last nine months in difficulty, they are now looking at losing not only their businesses, but their homes. It is a real tragedy, because they were good and viable businesses before this unseen crisis came along.

What does the sector need? The one-off grants announced by the Chancellor last week will of course be strongly welcomed, and they should help more businesses to stay afloat. The resource that the Government have put in through the job retention scheme has been a lifeline to sector employees, but industry representatives have made it clear that the current support is not enough to cover the costs of many businesses and will not secure their long-term viability. We need a longer-term plan to help businesses to plan their survival while the vaccine is rolled out, starting with clarity on how long the new support payments will be available. UK Hospitality and others have called for an extension of the business rates holiday and a 5% VAT rate, to provide certainty in the longer term. I would be grateful if the Minister commented on whether that is under consideration.

I also urge the Government to commit to examine urgently the inadequacies of their support measures as they relate to hospitality suppliers and, as I said in our previous debate on the night-time economy, to consider introducing some flexibility to the local restrictions support grants, to give local authorities the freedom to grant and target support towards the businesses that need it and can use it best.

The petitioners do not expect to go back to dining out, dancing in nightclubs and checking into hotels straightaway; the public health situation is at a critical point, and saving lives must take precedence. However, they want there to be a greater understanding of the diverse nature of their sector and a strong voice for them in Government. Above all, and like us, they want this country’s mix of pubs, hotels, restaurants and clubs, which does so much to enrich our lives, to still be standing when this crisis is over.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): I think it would be appropriate to impose a time limit of three minutes.

4.51 pm

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): It is a great pleasure to reverse roles, Mr Stringer, and to serve under your chairmanship.

Nearly 10 months ago, I asked the Chancellor in an urgent question to bring in an arrangement to reverse the usual flow of funds from businesses to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, and for the nation to pay the wages of people if—and only if—their employers committed to keep employing them. At the time, I asked for that to be done for a few weeks, but 10 months later it shows how little we knew about the virus then that we should still have in place now what became the furlough scheme. I commend the Chancellor for a crucial intervention that saved millions of jobs that would otherwise have been lost. However, having come this far, and after the investment that has been made in keeping these businesses and jobs alive in the hospitality sector, we must make sure that we get through the next few weeks, so that they can continue to thrive in the future.

The furlough scheme, the business rate holiday, the hospitality grants, the discretionary grants, the VAT cut, the bounce back loans and eat out to help out have all been deployed to help hospitality businesses. However, just as the Government did not expect that this pandemic would be with us for what will soon be well over a year, neither did hospitality businesses, many of which are small, personally run and without access to resources and cash. Yet these are the pubs, cafés and restaurants that will be at the forefront of the recovery when lockdown ends—the first to give job opportunities to young people, to give business to their suppliers and to attract people back to our city centres, high streets and villages across Britain. They will also be first to pay their taxes to the Exchequer.

Last Friday, I met—virtually—several of the people who run hospitality venues in Tunbridge Wells and in Tonbridge and Malling, in a meeting arranged jointly with my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat). In a survey of 36 local hospitality businesses, they established that in the year before the pandemic they had collectively paid £4.4 million in VAT and pay-as-you-earn, and that the value of grants and furlough payments to date that have been paid to them is around £3 million. So whatever the precise figures, the point is that these businesses pay their way, and if they manage to survive they will thrive in the future and help to repay the sums that have been set aside during these last few months.

The requests of the businesspeople I met are straightforward, to make sure that they can get through the next few weeks. They ask for the Government to reconsider the requirement to pay national insurance on furloughed employees, given that, at the moment, zero revenue is coming in; to extend the business rates holiday and VAT cut, to reflect the fact that the closure of businesses has been for much longer than was expected; and to extend the terms of the loan scheme, so that these businesses can finance themselves for these crucial few months and so that, at the end of that time, everyone in this Chamber can join together and look back at a pandemic that is over, raising a drink and celebrating the success of continuing businesses.

4.54 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): To say that the coronavirus has been a shock to the system is an understatement. What was once a health crisis spread quickly to become an economic crisis—indeed, the biggest recession on record. The multimillion-employing hospitality industry has been particularly hard hit, adding to existing, pre-covid woes over Brexit supply chains and the loss of its international workforce. Hospitality drives the health of our high streets and the viability of our suburbs and towns. A lot of these business are family run—I know: my late dad was an Indian restaurant person himself. All of these things are now facing existential threat. At the other end of the scale, the collapse of big chains such as Carluccio's, Pizza Express and even Jamie Oliver outlets would ordinarily be big news, but these are not ordinary times, and with the worst death toll in Europe, we hear barely a whisper about them.

I never thought I would live to see the day when a Conservative Government would forcibly shut down businesses, but here we are again. A dedicated Government Minister for hospitality would give food, beverage and leisure accommodation a proper say, rather than them always being an afterthought, suffering the consequences of the latest failed experiment—the tiering system, the 10 pm curfew or whatever it is. At a time of distancing and isolation, a sector based on togetherness and sociability cannot exist on takeaway only. This sector spent a fortune on remodelling, even though social distancing slashes the number of covers available; people instituted one-way systems, enhanced cleaning, and screens to create a covid-secure environment, all seemingly now for nothing. These people are famed for hard work and resilience, but they cannot run on empty, and no one clapped when they provided meals for NHS staff or for children, outside of the Government's initial, cruel insistence that they would not run the free school meals scheme in the holidays.

Coronageddon should not relegate hospitality to being the easiest lever to pull: first into lockdown, last out, in this zig-zag, stop-start way. These businesses need cash flow, and they need to plan for things like fresh produce orders and staffing rotas. As the MP who first spoke of a “curry crisis”, I implore the Minister: the sector is fighting for survival, and bold action is needed. Now is the time for a dedicated Minister, plus additional financial support, extending furlough and rent, rates and VAT relief, because we will all need restaurants, hotels and pubs. Some 56 pubs a week are closing at the moment; that is a matter of shame. We will all need them to get us out of the other side and build consumer confidence.

4.57 pm

Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con): I first declare an interest, in that my husband works for a logistics company and deals directly with the hospitality sector in his role.

Looking at hospitality as a whole, we must first recognise the level of support that has been received generally within the sector throughout the covid crisis. However, three main themes are of great concern. The first is that there are many supporting and spin-off businesses that co-exist within this sector, but that seem not to have been included in all aspects of the support offered. The second is that the prolonged period in

which the sector and those spin-off businesses have had to endure no customer revenue is stretching the limits to which they can wait for the sector to reopen once more, and the third is the lack of customer confidence in when the sector will be able to trade again.

A great many businesses in Loughborough are either directly part of, or related to, the hospitality sector: pubs, restaurants, cafés, bingo halls, nightclubs, bed and breakfasts, and hotels are obvious examples, and we have 290 such businesses locally, employing 3,000 people. We also have conference organisers, wedding event organisers and venues, lighting and audio technicians, event carpet and equipment suppliers, hair and beauty technicians, florists and printers, food production plants, breweries and catering equipment suppliers. Everything from hiring a tablecloth to arranging a major corporate event in Kuala Lumpur can be obtained from businesses in Loughborough. We are a very hospitable place.

Before covid, all of these businesses were not only viable, but thriving. However, economic output in this sector was down 92% in April 2020 compared with February 2020. If we want a V-shaped recovery, we must plan for one and support the businesses that will deliver it. For example, I understand that 264,000 weddings were missed last year. There will be pent-up demand, but if there are no businesses to deliver the events and services when we open up once more, that demand will not be met, and tax revenues will not materialise. There are revenues to be had: 475,000 weddings are currently scheduled for 2021, getting on for double the usual amount, creating the potential for an additional £25 billion in the sector. However, a lack of confidence that events will be allowed to go ahead means that weddings for spring and summer are already starting to be postponed and cancelled. In the meantime, finances are stretched to the limit for the whole of the hospitality sector, while businesses wait for permission to operate again.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) will present a 10-minute rule Bill tomorrow, advocating the abolition and reform of business rates. That would really help pubs and other hospitality outlets, both with immediate effect, and into the future, giving pubs the chance to remain the centre of our communities. In supporting my colleague's aim I ask that business rate relief for the hospitality and leisure sector be extended for a further year to include related businesses during the pandemic.

The best way out of this crisis, for business, is to be able to trade. For businesses to be able to do that with confidence, we need the people we are most concerned about in our communities to be vaccinated, and we are well on the way to achieving that—

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Order.

5 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. You are a very hospitable person, but it is so cold in here—I have stood in warmer graveyards—that it is not so hospitable in terms of temperature. I hope that it will not be a political graveyard for anyone here, but it would founder ye, as we would say in Northern Ireland.

I wholly agree with the way in which the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) moved the motion. I think that everyone can say a hearty “Hear, hear” to what she put on the agenda. It

was a comprehensive piece of work, and I agree that all the regions of the United Kingdom need to swing behind the point she made. She made sound, good points.

To put a little perspective on the case, in Northern Ireland there are 60,000 direct jobs in the hospitality sector. In other words, one in 20 people in Northern Ireland works in the sector. We are a small economy. Before covid, I had 1 million out-of-state visitors to my constituency—principally visiting the Giant's Causeway, a world-renowned geological site. For a place with a population of 1.7 million, getting 1 million visitors dramatically changes the local economy. We have 45,000 jobs directly in food and drink. We contribute about £88 million to the Chancellor's purse each year in direct taxation, and we contribute about £1.1 billion to our entire economic picture; that is, for an economy of £13 billion, a sizeable piece that the hospitality sector provides.

The impact of covid has therefore been staggering and massive, but we must look forward. In the last 52 weeks the hospitality sector has probably traded for only about 13 weeks, so it has not had the benefit of the VAT cut the Government gave it. That must be extended, and I hope that the Minister will relate that to the Chancellor. We need a kick-start plan to open up businesses—to help them to open up when they start back again, probably at some time in March. Loans under the coronavirus business interruption loan scheme need to be repaid, but it should be done softly, and they should be extended if possible.

I want to make an appeal in particular for the music sector, which entertains people when they come to Northern Ireland. I think of great singers such as Sir Van Morrison and others. He coined the words:

“We are not in this together.”

I hope that we get back to being in it together, and that we will be able to get benefit for our hospitality sector.

5.3 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): The hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) complained that it is rather cold in Westminster Hall today. I can recommend the House of Commons Library to him. It is an absolute furnace there, where I prepared the great oration that I was going to make, 90% of which is now going to be chucked because of the time limit. However, that is a measure of the importance of the debate, because so many people want to contribute to it. That is why our time is so limited.

When I last looked, more than 206,000 people had signed the petition, and the group with the highest number was people from the New Forest. In New Forest East alone almost 300 businesses are in the food and accommodation sectors, employing 4,000 people and constituting 10.8% of the working population. The hospitality industry is the UK's largest employer of under 25-year-olds and, as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) said in her able introduction, the importance, post Brexit, of our having an appealing environment for people to come and invest in cannot be overstated.

As the vaccine programme is implemented, one might reasonably expect the reintroduction of tiered restrictions on a gradually reducing basis. That is where the significance

[Dr Julian Lewis]

of adequate ministerial representation for the hospitality industry comes into play. For a sector of this size—the third largest in the UK—ranging from pubs through to restaurants and hotels, tourism and travel, not having a separate specialist and dedicated voice at the core of Government has led to a justified sense of disregard and discrimination.

Robin Hutson, who was mentioned earlier and who is my constituent, said, “It is our belief that we do not have a respected, truly invested senior Minister with deep sector knowledge, but who also has the power and the ear of the PM to effectively defend our corner.” It took more than four months for the Treasury to respond to one letter that I sent from a concerned constituent. Having a separate dedicated Minister would prevent that sort of delay. It would matter less that responsibilities are spread over more than one Department if only it were the same Minister who held the post in each Department. It is not uncommon to have a specialist Minister with a focused role in more than one Department. Initially, that could be on a temporary, emergency basis, as a hospitality industry recovery Minister. If it is found to work well during that phase, making it permanent might well be the logical next step.

5.6 pm

Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on securing this important debate. This discussion is not before time. Within the wider hospitality industry, I will focus on the pub trade, as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on pubs.

We all recognise the crisis that the pandemic has caused pubs over the past year, with takings having collapsed through the floor, thousands of staff made redundant, and the closure of many pubs that may never open again. Not all of that damage was inevitable. Landlords invested many thousands each in making their establishments covid-secure during 2020, only to have rules changed or imposed on them at short notice, collapsing their trade time and again. I remain angry that many of those restrictions were put in place without any scientific evidence for them. We asked for any available, but it seems that Ministers simply thought that they should be seen to be doing something—whether enforcing pub curfews or requiring farcical definitions of substantial meals, prohibiting the trade of wet pubs.

Decisions that were not based on scientific recommendations led to public resentment and non-compliance, as well as the exasperation of the industry, which is doing its best. Now that we are in full lockdown once again we have another example. Official guidance suggests that pubs are permitted to sell alcohol only for delivery as opposed to takeaway. What is the reason for that decision, which puts them at a disadvantage to off-licences and supermarkets? I cannot believe that there is a scientific basis, so that discrimination must be because there is not a strong enough voice in Government making the case for pubs and the wider hospitality sector.

I am glad that the Government recognise the need for further support for businesses that are prevented from trading by law, but one-time £9,000 grants are a drop in

the pint glass. Pubs up and down the country need the reassurance of a proper financial package that recognises what they have lost this year and what they contribute to our communities as a vital social hub. When the pandemic is over, people will want to congregate in relief to see their friends again. It will be devastating if the venues in which they can do that have died in the meantime.

5.9 pm

Damien Moore (Southport) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. Of all the different sectors that have been coping with this pandemic, the hardest hit has probably been the hospitality sector. To follow on from what the hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) said, pubs are not just a business; the local is a centre of the community. It helps people. It helps their wellbeing. It quite often helps them to feel more connected to the outside world.

My resort constituency of Southport is a centre of hospitality, and has been for over 150 years. A third of all my businesses in the constituency are based around hospitality, supporting jobs. There are not only the businesses that are static in my constituency; we also have various annual shows. The flower show is the largest independent flower show in the country. We have an air show, a musical fireworks competition, a comedy festival, and a food and drink festival, and in 2017 we attracted 235,000 visitors when we hosted the Open golf championship.

This is a booming industry in my constituency in normal times. In 2015 it accounted for 24% of my local economy, and by 2020 the figure was 30%—a situation that I want to see continue. I want to see the industry not only survive the pandemic, but thrive in future.

I must say to my hon. Friend the Minister that we are very grateful for all the support that the Government have provided. Many Members will go through the menu of things—no pun intended—such as eat out to help out, furlough, business loans and so on. We all know that they have been an absolute lifeline and we are very grateful; my local businesses are very grateful for them.

Looking to the future, we have things such as the town deal that we have put in a bid for. If we get our town deal, we will then get the private finance that will help us to get a brand-new theatre and convention centre, helping all those businesses that are reliant on the one that we have at the moment, which is closed.

I point out to the Minister again that we need a clear road map. We want to work with the industry, in collaboration with the industry. The short notice that we have been giving some of these businesses has been quite wrong. We must not say it on a Thursday if the pubs have to close on the Saturday—and then throw all the beer away. Similarly, we must not ask them to open on a Thursday when they have no beer brewed. We need to work with them, staging the points at which they will open those businesses.

We want to ensure that people feel satisfied. In nearly every survey that has come back, people were satisfied with the covid security in these businesses. We need to extend the VAT support. We need to look at business rates, of course. Beer duty is something that keeps coming up and it is important. A hospitality and tourism recovery fund would help. Giving the industry a voice and a seat at the table with the decision makers is absolutely vital—it is critical.

I asked the owner of Rueters Bar what he thought of the Government's support so far for businesses in the hospitality sector, and he said, "A dream." I said to him, "What can we do to help it in the future?" He said, "Continue the dream." For those who make our dreams become realities, let us ensure that we support our hospitality sector.

5.12 pm

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate and to speak in support of an industry that is important to Ceredigion. Taken together, hospitality businesses, such as restaurants, cafés, pubs and bars, and the events catering industry employ about 4,500 people in my constituency, equating to more than 16% of all employees, and that is without accounting for the many supply chain jobs that depend on the sector.

For these businesses, measures such as the furlough scheme have proved invaluable, with more than 7,500 workers in Ceredigion supported by it in the early months of the pandemic. Both the VAT reduction and the business rates holiday were warmly welcomed. There can be no denying that these interventions offered the sector lifelines as the pandemic hit and that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was right to bring forward support measures such as the furlough and the self-employment income support schemes, even though they required extraordinary public expenditure. There are strong arguments in favour of continuing this level of intervention for some time yet.

The vaccination programme offers us some hope that we will see the level of covid disruption reduce significantly this year, but hospitality businesses across Ceredigion tell me that they are deeply concerned about their immediate prospects for survival. The hoteliers, restaurateurs, café owners and landlords I speak to fully understand that the pandemic was never going to be an easy time. Their expectations have long been calibrated to focus on basic survival. Support measures have been welcomed, but much of the grant funding has long been spent to cover fixed operating costs that simply cannot be avoided. Too many owners, ineligible for the Government's income support schemes, have had to deplete their personal savings in order to keep their businesses afloat and their employees in jobs.

The Treasury has received details from the Federation of Small Businesses of a proposal for a directors income support scheme, which I urge the Treasury to consider adopting, as it would help many of these small business owners. I also support the proposals made this afternoon, such as the one-off grant to help businesses to bounce back once restrictions have been eased, and the proposal to pause national insurance contributions for furloughed employees as a way of alleviating the burden on businesses that are still, in many instances, required to remain closed by law.

To inject some much-needed confidence into the sector, I urge the Treasury to consider extending the business rates holiday for the forthcoming financial year, as well as extending the hospitality VAT reduction scheme into 2022. I am aware, of course, that such measures would mean further significant expense for the Exchequer, but I argue that that would be money well spent. Not only would it give businesses in such an important sector the

support that they require to see out the pandemic, but it would avoid a terrible situation whereby businesses that have previously received Government support are forced to close for good, leaving their employees without a job and previous Government support or investment being made in vain. In other words, do not spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar.

5.15 pm

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I congratulate the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on securing this debate.

The restaurants, pubs, hotels, bed and breakfasts, campsites, attractions and other businesses that make up hospitality are a vital part of North West Norfolk's economy, contributing around £500 million a year and making up about a fifth of the jobs, and 2019 was a record year for that sector. Of course, last year it was a record in the opposite direction. That collapse in demand and the redundancies have hit younger people disproportionately. In these challenging times, the Crown Inn, the Rose and Crown and other premises have adapted by selling takeaway meals, but not being able to sell alcohol in closed containers with those meals is unfair and is having a damaging impact. The rules should be changed. Where there are issues, enforcement should be taken rather than this blanket approach.

These businesses are at the heart of our community. We have only to look at venues such as Bank House, the Anvil Inn and many others that, unable to open, have offered their premises as vaccination centres. Given their importance, my constituents are grateful for the support that the Government put in place to help them bounce back. That has provided a lifeline, but I have been contacted by many businesses that signed the petition and which say that the new lockdown gravely threatens their future after months when they have been unable to open properly and unable to trade. The one-off grants of up to £9,000 are very welcome, but many employers have taken on considerable debt and have to cover national insurance costs for staff who are furloughed. Those businesses tell me that more help is required. It would be tragic, as others have said, if the benefits of the support to date are lost if firms are unable to hang on until the vaccination programme has had the impact that we all hope for.

In July my right hon. Friend the Chancellor responded to calls that many others and I supported to cut VAT to 5%, but the tier restrictions and national lockdown mean that businesses have not had the benefit from the cut, as had been expected, so the cost to the Treasury has been lower. I support the sector's calls, and I hope the Chancellor will look favourably on continuing that reduction until the end of the year. Extending that and the business rates holiday will help firms to survive and be there when the reopening comes. We all look forward to that reopening as the vaccination programme rolls out to the most at-risk groups. People crave normality: meeting for a meal, going to the theatre and having a pint in a pub. We want those places to be there, so we need a road map to get there.

Finally, we need further action to help the sector. One opportunity is through the Government's new tourism zones. Norfolk and Suffolk have developed a strong

[James Wild]

case with a proposal to be the most sustainable place for tourism in the country, with a strong skills offer for young people. The hospitality sector is crucial to our economy and our wellbeing. I urge the Government to continue their unprecedented support and ensure it is well placed to help drive the economic recovery.

5.18 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Stringer. I second the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on virtual participation in these proceedings. I hope that can come sooner rather than later. I also second many of her excellent comments in opening this crucial debate. It was disappointing to come to this debate after the Chancellor's statement earlier—the first statement he has made in Parliament in 41 days. He had very little new to say. I think many of the hospitality businesses in Cardiff South and Penarth and in many of our constituencies would have hoped for something different, given the new and very difficult but necessary restrictions that they face.

I also second many of the points made by colleagues across the House about the support that will be required to ensure that businesses can come out on the other side of this when restrictions can eventually be lifted. I have had a huge number of emails from businesses in my constituency of Cardiff South and Penarth and from concerned constituents who point out that turnover across the sector is down by 40%, and that 41% of businesses might fail in 2021, yet one in six new jobs in the economy were created in this sector. I know that from my own constituency.

Even during the pandemic, businesses were able to set up, particularly during the summer period, and get going, but have found themselves in new difficulties. We have to remember that the sector is much wider than it appears on the face of it. It is not just the pubs, restaurants and caf  s; it is also the food supply businesses, the breweries and the laundries—I have some major laundries in my constituency. It is the wider economy and all the jobs that come with it.

I commend the approach taken by the Welsh Government. A new tranche of the economic resilience fund was announced in December—  340 million for hospitality, tourism and leisure—on top of the   1 billion they announced to support businesses through rates relief and other measures, as well as the job retention scheme and the self-employment income support scheme. The new measures required new support, and on 18 December, they were announced with   110 million of support.

On the situation facing pubs in particular—my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) raised many of these issues—many local independent pubs in my constituency have contacted me because they are in significant difficulties, but primarily I want to raise the case of Brains Brewery, one of the signature brands of Wales. Tragically, it has found itself in significant difficulties.

Brains has its headquarters in my constituency and has been brewing there for many decades. It is one of the things at the very heart and soul of Welsh culture or,

certainly, of Cardiff culture, as anybody who knows groups like the Hennessys will know—they refer to the importance of Brains Dark and many other fantastic brews. Now, while more than 1,000 jobs have been able to be saved through a deal with Marston's, the tragic possibility is that Brains beer will no longer be brewed in Cardiff.

I have been speaking with the Welsh Government, Cardiff Council and others, and I urge the Minister to consider what support can be given to breweries in particular, especially those with particular cultural and historical heritage in parts of the UK. I hope that he can address some of those concerns in his remarks.

5.21 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I rise to speak as the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for hospitality and tourism. I thank all the petitioners who signed the petitions, in particular the 400 residents of the St Austell and Newquay constituency who put their name to a petition and whom I have the honour of representing.

I place on the record my thanks to the Minister: I believe that we have a Minister for hospitality—that may not be in his title, but I know from my work with him over the past year that he has always been available to me and colleagues across the House to address the concerns of the sector. He has also worked closely with the sector, so although I recognise the call for a Minister with “hospitality” in his name, I do not accept the premise that we do not have a Minister for hospitality, because we very much do.

I also place on the record my thanks to, and recognition of, all hospitality businesses across the country for the way in which they have approached the past 10 months, and for the way in which they have adapted, taken a positive attitude to making their premises safe for visitors and worked together to get us through this pandemic. I thank and recognise them for all that they have done.

There is no doubt about the vital role that hospitality plays in our economy, as other colleagues have mentioned. One in six new jobs created over the past 10 years has been in this sector. It is a great vehicle for social mobility, for people from all sorts of backgrounds to get into a career and into management quickly. It impacts every community. The Government have recognised that with the unprecedented level of support that they have given to the sector. Although I would join calls for the need for more support, we should recognise the incredible support that has been put in place and is very much welcomed by the sector.

One of the key points to reinforce, which I do not think has been fully recognised in the support that the Government have made available, is the impact on hospitality of having to close quickly when decisions have been made to protect public health. Those decisions have been right, but the impact that they have had on the hospitality sector has been disproportionate. It is very different for a clothes shop having to close—six or 10 weeks later, the clothes will still be there. The food in the fridge and the beer in the Cellar will not last, however, and has to be thrown away. More support needs to be given to the sector to recognise that.

I join the calls made by many others: we need to extend the support for the sector. I very much look to the Chancellor, in the Budget, to extend the VAT cut—many businesses have not been able to make use of it, because they were closed for so long—and the business rates holiday. I would add that the opportunity should be taken to reform business rates in this sector. They have been unfairly impacting the sector for far too long. Let us take this opportunity to reform business rates, as well as extending the holiday.

5.24 pm

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): The fact that there are two petitions shows how important this issue is. To my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), I would say that Marston's is an excellent brewery that really looks after the trade.

The hospitality industry is a huge driver of our economy, as many hon. Members have said. It employs millions directly and in its supply chain. It is an energetic innovator—my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) talked about how it responded to the pandemic and how businesses opened. In many small businesses, there are individuals who have invested their lives, savings and hopes in the industry and see them at grave risk.

The industry is also a vital part of our social fabric, our communities, our sense of self and our wellbeing. Our hospitality and entertainment environment is one of our big attractions to the wider world. It not only attracts tourists, but is one of the reasons why companies and workers come here, rather than go to many other countries.

Of course, the industry pays a huge amount of tax, but it is on its knees. It has been hit time and time again by Government restrictions, often brought in with notice of only a day or two. Pubs and clubs, restaurants and hotels, betting shops and casinos all put in huge effort and cash to make their premises covid-secure and keep their customers safe. They were being responsible but, frankly, Ministers took precious little notice of that. They did not understand the industry and just shut it down at short notice because they wanted to be seen to be doing something.

What better example than the 10 pm curfew, which made no sense? Ministers took no notice of representations from those who work in the industry—especially pubs, restaurants and casinos. Incidentally, there was very little data to show that the industry was a major cause of the spread of disease. In fact, I talked to the public health officer in my area of Sandwell, and it was quite the contrary.

The petition for a Minister for the industry is perfectly understandable, because the industry falls between different Departments. It represents hundreds of thousands of establishments and falls between the bureaucratic cracks. It needs someone to be its champion in Whitehall.

One quick example is the coach industry. That key part of domestic tourism was left out in the cold, devastating thousands of family businesses and undermining the hospitality businesses they serve. The industry needs someone to understand the whole economic ecosystem and join the dots. A Minister might also have pointed out the chaos and waste that would occur when firms had to dump tonnes of food and barrels of beer because they were not able to plan. That was bad for the businesses and bad for the environment.

5.27 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this important debate after receiving 50 representations to do so from constituents, including from pubs—the Red Lion in Hillmorton, and the Griffin in Kingsway. I want to talk about the impact on supply, as one or two Members have already done. I spent 30 years as a supplier to the catering trade. In that regard, I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

We often appreciate things when they are not there, and we are missing our pubs, cafés and restaurants right now. When they are not operating, it has a significant effect on the suppliers to the sector. Although I welcome the support that the Chancellor has spoken about—he referred to £4.5 billion today—many of the suppliers are not receiving the same level of support as the trading companies. During the pandemic, we have seen food purchases transferred from out-of-home to in-home consumption, and the beneficiaries have been supermarkets, which have done well out of the restrictions. Most have reported higher sales. For example, Tesco sales were up 11% over the Christmas period.

It is often assumed by many that suppliers and food manufacturers are able to switch production and pivot to supplying retail, but catering and retail products are very different, and as a consequence those businesses are losing out. We have heard about the switching on and off of hospitality, which has led to a great deal of stock being wasted. The food supplier, Creed Foodservice, spoke at the weekend about £6,000-worth of milk going out of date because of the decision to close schools. It says that it has written off £150,000-worth of food since April.

The business I ran supplied tableware items—things such as paper napkins, table covers and Christmas crackers. I have to say that an awful lot of the crackers that were bought for Christmas in 2020 were not pulled. Now, they can be held in stock and used for another year, but of course that involves tying up capital and taking up warehouse space, which are costs to those businesses.

Food service businesses continue to pay bills such as rent, electricity for chillers and loan payments for vehicles that are often standing idle. Wholesale distributors are usually high-volume, low-margin businesses, and the fixed costs mean that a relatively small fall in sales has a disproportionate impact on profitability. Too long a period without profit will cause many suppliers to fail.

In addition, the catering trade—restaurants and pubs—often use the cash sales generated in the current period to pay for goods received in the previous period when they were trading. That has led to many suppliers becoming banks and funding their customers. There is very little action that those suppliers can take if the hospitality businesses do not have the cash to pay them. I hope that the Minister in his response will show his appreciation for the supply chain, as well as for valued hospitality businesses.

5.30 pm

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Stringer. I, too, hope that we can return to virtual proceedings in Westminster Hall, so that all Members and staff can contribute

[Navendu Mishra]

safely amid rising infection rates. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for securing this important debate. I also thank the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, and his night-time economy adviser, Sacha Lord, who have done so much in recent months to push the Government to provide a fair financial support package and who have set out the scale of the challenge facing my region.

The hospitality industry is a vital part of our economy and a growth industry. It is the fourth-biggest employer in the UK and contributed £133.5 billion to the economy in 2019. My constituency of Stockport is no different from many others, in that a significant number of people are employed in the sector, many of whom have written to me to express their concerns about the lack of meaningful support provided by the Government. It is clear that the current measures, such as furlough payments, are little more than a drop in the ocean for many businesses struggling to keep their heads above water almost a year on from the start of the crisis. Far more needs to be done if we are to avoid the industry nosediving and hundreds of thousands across the UK ending up unemployed.

In Greater Manchester, more than two thirds of hospitality operators expect to make or have already made redundancies, 80% of which are in the restaurant sector. The failure of the Government to provide more meaningful support is perhaps why more than a third of businesses believe that they will never return to pre-covid levels, and why the hospitality sector expects to lose about 600,000 jobs by next month.

My constituents want the Government urgently to introduce more supportive measures during this period. For example, in the beer and pub sector, many businesses have called for the beer duty to be cut, for more pubs to be allowed to offer a takeaway service, and for wider financial support measures. That is even more pressing given the precarious nature of the pub industry, which in Stockport alone shrank by 25% in the decade prior to the pandemic. Publicans across my constituency, including Veronica Bell of the Sun and Castle, Pamela Clews of the Grey Horse and Ellen Davies of the Gardeners Arms have continued to go above and beyond to ensure that their businesses survive the crisis.

There is also an important point about supply chain businesses, such as Stephensons in my constituency, which supplies the catering trade across the north-west. Without their efforts, many more local jobs would have been lost and pubs would have disappeared for good from our high streets and communities. However, their hard work alone is not enough. Stockport Council recently made a successful bid for future high streets fund investment. Although that is welcome, it will do little to bring a halt to the significant decline in trade.

I therefore call on the Minister to provide assurances that the furlough scheme will be extended beyond its current deadline of the end of April and that other measures will be taken, such as the extension of business rates relief, until the hospitality sector is fully open again, as well as significant safety net measures such as Government-backed covid indemnity insurance policies like those we have seen in many European countries, including Germany.

5.33 pm

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I congratulate and thank my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for securing the debate and for her excellent opening speech. I fully support her comments about remote participation in Westminster Hall.

I thank the instigators of the petition and the 200,000-plus people who signed it. That is an impressive number, but it is unsurprising, given that hospitality is the hardest-hit sector, as well as associated activities such as weddings, events and live entertainment. At the heart of the petition is the fact that people are looking for leadership, which is why they want a specific Minister. They want leadership, focus and understanding. I mean no disrespect to the Minister, with whom I share a lot of these occasions, but what we have had is bits—piecemeal, sticking-plaster support offers—alongside stop-start restrictions that have sometimes felt particularly pernicious for the sector and that have often lacked evidence.

The petition reflects the idea that the Government do not get hospitality in all its forms. As we have heard, hospitality includes lots of different businesses, but at the heart of it are people who have put their life's work, livelihoods and love into creating businesses that bring people together. Often they have used personal assets to guarantee those businesses.

We have heard that hospitality is a huge part of our economy. It was the third biggest employer before covid, generating billions in turnover and tax. Such businesses make up the heart and soul of our town centres, city centres, high streets and communities. They are a key part of the ecosystem and they bring people and places together. We saw that recently in the BBC documentary that Tom Kerridge, one of the supporters of the petition, presented—it was an excellent programme. There is a wider ecosystem, too, from the supply chain that we have heard about to the night-time economy to, taxi drivers and security, as well as hotels, events and weddings. Hospitality is a huge, interlinked and diverse sector, and it employs many young people, those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and women. It was growing before, and it will grow again.

We welcomed the support that the hospitality sector had at the start of the pandemic. It was the right thing to do then, and it is right now that that support continues. Then, however, cash grant support was worth more. The other packages brought in at the time were designed for a much shorter period of time—loans, deferrals, moratoriums and so on. They are now not fit for purpose after nearly a year and growing of closures and lost trade. That is the key issue, which I think other Members have raised: what was initially designed for three months is now not appropriate for the 12 to 18 months that we are talking about.

Supporting businesses is the right thing to do economically. The Government said they would put their arm around the shoulder of the sector, but that must be maintained. Every previously viable business that goes bust will lengthen and deepen the long tail of recovery. That is not just the Labour view, but the view of the International Monetary Fund, the Bank of England and the OECD. We cannot cut our way out of a crisis. Lots of focus early on was rightly on the furlough scheme to protect jobs, but leading businesses now warn

that without further support, those jobs will no longer be able to be furloughed as businesses go bust. A survey out today says 250,000 businesses, many of them in hospitality and associated areas, will fold this year. That is a devastating warning.

Supporting businesses is also the right thing to do morally, because they have closed to keep us safe. It is only right that the Government should step in to support them and keep them going. With light at the end of the tunnel, it is now even more important that there is a proper long-term plan to help businesses survive to that point and then thrive beyond it. I am sorry to say that despite some of the early actions taken, no such plan is forthcoming. We have the sticking-plaster approach to economic support, and there is no plan or route map for reopening. Contrast that with the approach of other countries, such as Germany and elsewhere. Speak to any business and it will say that cash flow is the major issue now. Action simply cannot wait until the Budget, because many businesses will be bust by then.

The furlough extension is welcome, but contributions are now stretching balance sheets. Businesses have taken the loans, deferrals and holidays, and they have not paid the rent, yet it is still not enough. The stop-start nature of the lockdowns has damaged business confidence and liquidity, and we have heard about the costs of restocking and losing stock along the way. Businesses were expecting the job retention bonus, but they had it taken away at the last minute, despite it being priced in. That was all before hospitality lost its golden months of the pre-Christmas trade, so it is no surprise that some of the latest business surveys show that more than half of hospitality businesses have less than three months of cash reserves. Only one in five hospitality businesses has enough to survive until March.

Just this week, we heard of Mitchells and Butlers, one of the oldest and biggest players in the sector, seeking to refinance. It is losing £40 million a month just to stay closed. I do not like to say so, but it feels a little like Ministers are asleep at the wheel. I am sure the Minister will tell us about the billions of pounds that have been spent, but unless the Government set out a long-term plan and a comprehensive framework to see businesses through to the spring, there will be waves of insolvencies and job losses. As somebody asked earlier, that prompts questions about the billions that have already been spent. What was it for if, at the critical juncture, the rug is pulled, and jobs and businesses are lost anyway?

We have to be honest about the announcements that have been made this week. The £9,000 is not available to most businesses; five out of six will get a lot less than that. Even when taken together with the local restrictions grant, it is still a lot less than what was received last time around. It does not even cover businesses in the supply chain, which are again waiting to see whether discretionary grants will come to them; for many, they will not.

What about the medium-sized businesses—the hotels, the chains, the breweries and others? As somebody said earlier, £9,000 is frankly a drop in the beer glass. There is no mention of the excluded, many of whom are associated with this sector. What was an outrage for these people for three months is now economically and mentally fatal for many after nearly 12 months. We called on the Government to begin by using the £2 billion repaid by supermarkets to provide proper support to businesses and the excluded, but they have yet to do so.

I am afraid that a huge amount of business uncertainty lies ahead. The Government urgently need to get ahead of that and make sure there is a comprehensive plan. There is a massive surge of a cash-flow crisis ahead of us, with businesses going bust. In the next few months, we are going to see the end of the evictions ban, the business rates holiday and the Government-backed loans. Corporation tax payments will be due and there will be an end to the VAT cut, the VAT deferral and measures to prevent insolvencies.

Businesses will need to start repaying their VAT deferrals and business rates in April, yet we heard this weekend that hospitality businesses will not even be reopened by then. This is now urgent. Businesses looking ahead at their cash flow are taking decisions about their staff and the future of their businesses today. This cannot wait until March. Something must be done. The VAT reduction will have little benefit for most businesses, because they have been closed during that time.

The failure of the Government to set out what might happen to those deadlines is creating massive anxiety, and will lead to wave after wave of insolvency and consequential job losses, not only extending and deepening the economic crisis, but taking with them all the loans and the previous investment in keeping them going up to this point. It makes no economic sense whatsoever.

Alongside this economic spring plan for businesses, we need a clear route map to reopening, as called for by the British Beer and Pub Association, UKHospitality and others. They want proper discussion now about the route map to reopening. What levels of vaccination, hospitalisations and mortality are needed for reopening, and what does that reopening look like? No household mixing? Substantial meals again? Curfews again? These have all caused extra burden when the evidence is clear.

In conclusion, hospitality businesses and their associated ecosystem need better leadership, focus and understanding. They need cash support that matches business need and revenue loss. There will be no businesses for firms to employ people unless this is done. They need immediate action on the uncertainty created about these cliff edges. That may involve big, creative thinking on some of the big issues coming up the track, with rent deferrals and the huge debt overhang that will need to be addressed at some point. The Government need to stop their scattergun approach, which leads to sticking-plaster solutions, and come up with a proper long-term plan for this hugely important sector in distress.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Minister, I ask you to leave two or three minutes at the end for the proposer.

5.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully): Thank you, Mr Stringer, I will do. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on securing the debate and representing the petitioners so well. They are understandably crying out for help to get across the line, after such a difficult period. Hospitality has undoubtedly been one of the hardest pressed sectors, if not the hardest pressed, over the pandemic. I thank everybody who has contributed to the debate for the way in which they have put the case for their constituents.

[Paul Scully]

Since taking on responsibility for food and beverage hospitality businesses in March last year and establishing a dedicated sponsorship team within the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, we have worked extremely closely with representatives from across the sector, so there has always been development. I will come back to the question of a dedicated Minister in a second, but essentially, this was split across a number of Departments and we now have a dedicated hospitality team that is working really hard.

I also put on record my gratitude to the sector itself for how its representatives have engaged with me and my officials throughout the pandemic. It is important to recognise that the hospitality sector is not just pubs and restaurants: cafés, the wedding sector, nightclubs and all the associated businesses that we have heard so much about today, including specialist suppliers, are also going through this. I thank them in particular for how they engaged with the safer workplace guidance to allow essential businesses to stay open, but also to allow these businesses to reopen at various points. Understandably, as we have discussed, the fact of the matter is that there has been opening and closing depending on the tier system, and that has been a source of frustration for everybody, especially—as my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) says—those that have had to pour away beer and throw away food at various points during this period.

We continue to work together with the sector across Government to make sure that we can strike the right balance between the covid-19 restrictions and the corresponding business support measures. As we have heard, we responded with an unprecedented package of support worth a staggering £280 billion, which included the grants, the furlough scheme, the various loan schemes, the business rates holiday, VAT deferrals, and of course the eat out to help out scheme. On top of that, we released additional funding worth £4.6 billion to help businesses through the current lockdown, which we estimate will help 600,000 hospitality businesses. We have also taken action to protect businesses by placing restrictions on landlords using commercial rents arrears recovery to enforce unpaid rents on commercial leases. Importantly, we have kept all the support measures under review to ensure that, as far as possible, they have kept pace with the changing covid-19 situation and the need to flex restrictions accordingly.

Stephen Doughty: Will the Minister give way?

Paul Scully: I will not give way, just so that I do not run out of time, but I will come back to the hon. Gentleman in a second.

Like those who have taken the time to sign a petition, and those right hon. and hon. Members who have taken part in today's debate, I recognise the importance of the hospitality sector, not just to local areas but to whole communities and to the country as a whole. We have heard that the sector employs around 3.5 million people overall, and in normal circumstances generates revenues of around £63 billion a year. It is strategically important to the UK, as well, traditionally being the first sector to recover following an economic downturn and acting as a catalyst for wider economic recovery and regeneration.

Most importantly, the sector lies at the heart of communities, providing jobs and places to enjoy companionship and supporting mental health and wellbeing, social cohesion and cultural integration. It is important that when we talk about culture—about meeting people—we remember that that is what hospitality is there to do, and it is really sad that the restrictions and lockdown itself are there to stop people meeting people. As we have heard, though, that is not to say that hospitality in itself is the vector for transmission. It is really important that we do not scapegoat the hospitality sector, which has done so much—it has spent a lot of money and put in a lot of effort—to make its venues covid-secure.

Turning to the question of establishing a Minister for hospitality, responsibility is currently split between BEIS and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport: BEIS is responsible for the food and beverage industries, and DCMS is responsible for accommodation, primarily hotels, as part of its tourism remit. There is clearly some overlap between these important industries, and I work closely with the Minister for Sport, Tourism and Heritage at DCMS, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston), to ensure that the interests of this sector as a whole are fully represented across Government.

The close collaboration that we have means that the policy levers in both DCMS and BEIS can be employed effectively to the benefit of the sector. Clearly, it is not within my gift to create a new ministerial post—that power rests solely with the Prime Minister—but I can assure hon. Members that the two of us are doing all we can within Government to understand and represent the interests of the sector. Whether or not we have a dedicated Minister for hospitality, we need to ensure that the sector is in the best possible place to bounce back from covid-19, so that it can play a leading role in the UK's economic and social recovery.

We know that the hospitality sector has often shown great resilience and innovation in adapting; such adaptation is not a new phenomenon. We saw that hospitality was one of the first sectors to recover after the 2007 financial crisis, which helped drive the UK's recovery more generally. In order to achieve the same level of recovery that we saw following that crisis, we are committed to maintaining support to the sector until the vaccines are rolled out and businesses can open without restrictions. However, we also need to think about and plan for the longer-term recovery.

The UK has a world-leading net zero target. I want to see the creativity that helps define the hospitality sector put to good use in helping to tackle climate change, by developing and utilising new technologies and processes to minimise emissions and, importantly, waste. Although this is a challenging time for the sector, it is essential that, as we bounce back, we work with hospitality businesses to build back their industry so that it is stronger and greener.

I thank the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who was unable to attend the debate today but sent me a statement from hospitality businesses in her constituency, supporting the creation of the ministerial position and emphasising the important role that the sector will need to play in our economic recovery and growth. I hope that I have addressed both those points.

We have had a very interesting debate, starting with the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). One of the regular calls that I have with the industry includes Colin Neill from Hospitality Ulster. We also heard from the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley), who talked about Van Morrison. Actually, a Van Morrison gig was one of the last gigs that I went to at the O2, to raise money for the Royal Marsden Hospital. The O2 itself is now one of the Nightingale hospitals, and one of the people who set it up was the chief nurse at the Marsden—everything comes around in a circular fashion, which shows the unusual times we are in.

With regard to the coffee culture that my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) talked about, we should not forget that takeaway coffees also play a part for shift workers, who need such extra support, so not everything that is seen as non-essential is non-essential to certain people.

There is no way we can have a one-size-fits-all policy. Certainly what I have learnt about the hospitality sector over the past nine or 10 months is that a lot of work is being done behind the scenes, whether with me or with my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport, or through lobbying by Colin Neill, Kate Nicholls or Emma McClarkin, or through lobbying from the chief executives of the larger pub businesses, the independent pubs, the restaurant groups and all those sorts of businesses. That means we can address issues such as the 10 pm curfew, which was a blunt instrument, as has been outlined. It clearly stopped restaurants having second sittings, but it also stopped pubs selling a lot of alcohol at that time—a lot of their profit is created at that time but it was also pushing people together. I am also the Minister for London and I saw at that time a 40% increase in the use of the tube between 10 pm and 10.15 pm. The curfew was clearly pushing people together, doing the opposite of what we wanted. It was therefore right to make the case against it and have it reversed.

Dr Huq: Will the Minister give way?

Paul Scully: I will not give way, because I have only a couple of minutes left and I want to give the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North a little time to respond to the debate.

From my business role through to my work with the hospitality sector, and in my work as Minister for London, I can see that any town centre, any city area or any retail area is an ecosystem. People do not go to a hotel, such as those within a mile or two of where we are now, just to sleep in another bed; they go because they want to spend time in the pubs, restaurants, theatres, museums, galleries and all the things that a city such as London has to offer. It is the same with Newcastle, Manchester or any of our fantastic towns across the country, and clearly it is also the same for rural areas such as Cornwall, which my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Damien Moore) mentioned when he talked about tourism in his part of the world.

Indeed, that is a really interesting point about tourism in coastal or rural areas in particular, because we are now in the third winter of their three-winter scenario—we had the winter last year; then we had the summer, when they would expect to make a lot of their profits but effectively it was a winter for them; and now, as we can

feel here in Westminster Hall today, this is really a third winter. It is important that we continue to work very closely with those areas.

I am more than happy to work with all hon. Members to ensure that we do not just hear the understandable cries of anguish from the hospitality sector, but work out what we can do, given the public finances, to continue to flex, work on the recovery and look at how we can stagger the reopening. In a few weeks' time, we will get to the point with the vaccine roll-out, hopefully alongside the plateauing of the case load, at which we will have a better idea of the timescale and can start talking about a road map.

I know, because we talked about this last summer, that businesses, especially the bigger ones that have greater resources and can do that sort of forward thinking, will already be thinking about how to roll out the reopening of pubs, restaurants, cafés and, importantly, the wedding sector, which my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Jane Hunt) mentioned. I would love to get to that point, whether through pilots or just through working with the wedding sector, which is understandably filling my timeline on Twitter and social media—I can see exactly why it is doing that. After that, we can deal with the nightclub sector—we heard about Sacha Lord, who does a remarkable job in raising these issues with me and colleagues—which is a really tough one to crack. Hopefully we can get to the point where it can open.

I could go on forever, but I want to leave some time for the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North. Hospitality brings people together. We have heard a lot of calls for the evidence for why various measures were put in place. If hon. Members look at the infographics and the rules and guidance for this particular part of the lockdown, they will see that there are three words at the top of pretty much every page: “Stay at home.” Unfortunately, that is what everything is about. It is not about meeting. This will be a really tough few months, because it is miserable outside. With regard to exercise and so on, it is not going to be good. We need to offer hope to those businesses and get them across the finishing line so that we have a better summer and ensure that we do not have a fourth winter.

The hospitality sector represents friendship, generosity, enjoyment and happiness. It is a tonic for loneliness and a warm welcome for visitors at the heart of our communities. In short, hospitality matters. We will continue to work with hospitality businesses to get them through the immediate crisis and then help them to build back stronger and greener.

5.58 pm

Catherine McKinnell: I thank everyone who contributed to this debate. We have done justice to the petitioners who raised this issue. There is nothing that we disagree on. In fact, there was nothing in what the Minister said for us to disagree with, other than the fact that he has not accepted the proposal to have a specific Minister for hospitality.

We agree that this industry is vital, but we all have concerns that the Government are not maximising the knowledge within the hospitality industry to ensure that they and the country get it right for the industry. If we put the two together, we can use all that creativity,

[Catherine McKinnell]

energy and innovation to ensure not only that the Government's response is right, but that it is absolutely right for the hospitality industry.

According to the well-known saying, we do not know what we have got until it has gone, but I would say that we do know what we have got; we all know that these businesses are absolutely essential in our communities. They are essential for jobs and opportunities. They are essential for the sense of community. They are essential because they are unique and special and will attract to this country the people we will need in our post-Brexit world. They are also essential because they are a major tax generator for the Government.

The Government should want to get this right and should want the maximum possible engagement with the hospitality industry. A seat at the table and a strong voice for the hospitality industry would be in the Government's interest. I thank the Minister for his response today but urge him to take the idea away and put it to the Prime Minister as something that it is in the Government's interest to create.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petitions 552201 and 329985 relating to Government support for the hospitality industry.

6 pm

Sitting suspended.

Covid-19 Vaccination Roll-out

[SIR DAVID AMESS *in the Chair*]

[*Relevant Documents: E-petition 564155, Prioritise COVID-19 vaccines for first responders (police, fire, ambulance).*]

6.3 pm

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 554316 relating to roll-out of covid-19 vaccinations.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir David, and an honour to lead for the Petitions Committee in this debate. Some may note that, owing to the latest restrictions and recommendations from Mr Speaker, many hon. Members are unable to attend Westminster Hall in person. For reasons beyond the comprehension of the sensible, there is a reluctance by the Leader of the House to make these debates accessible virtually to all Members, so I ask the petition's signatories not to be disappointed if they feel that their voices have not been heard; I have been contacted by many Members of Parliament and hope to reflect what many of them have told me.

The initial petition to be debated is entitled "Prioritise teachers, school and childcare staff for Covid-19 vaccination" and was set up by Charlotte. It has close to 460,000 signatures and the number is rising all the time. A newer petition related to the debate has also been tagged, which calls for first responders to be prioritised alongside NHS workers. It was set up by Laura Sylvester and had nearly 49,000 signatures when I last checked.

I want to be clear from the start that this debate is not about leapfrogging others who deserve the vaccine; it is about ensuring that our teachers, school staff and first responders are able to access the vaccine—it is them on the frontline every day delivering vital services. When I spoke to Charlotte, a primary school teacher from High Peak, she was so mindful of the necessity of vaccinating those people on the list already, but teachers want consideration of where they are placed on that list. Only NHS staff and healthcare workers have been considered as priority groups by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, but I and many others think that overlooks the role that teachers and frontline workers have already played during the pandemic, and the contribution that they will continue to make.

The advice from the JCVI on the priority groups for a covid-19 vaccine, as stated in the petitions, does not include school and childcare workers. The petition therefore calls for those workers who cannot distance or use personal protective equipment to be kept safe at work by being put on the vaccine priority list, and for that to be adopted into Government policy. Some correspondence that I have received since the fact of the debate was published stated that to hold such a debate was a waste of parliamentary time, and that to question the conclusions of the JCVI was to undermine its decisions. However, the role of Parliament is to debate and to scrutinise the Government. The Petitions Committee is a vehicle for genuine first-hand concerns to be expressed on behalf of everyday people. I am honoured to be able to do so.

As a former teacher, I recognise that education is the greatest gift that we can give to our future generations—those who will be facing the consequences not only of

the pandemic but of Brexit. My own son has had his centre-assessed GCSEs and now his AS-levels affected. It is far from what any of us ever imagined would happen. How do we get children back into school and in front of their teachers?

We know the consequences of missing school, especially for the most deprived, and those consequences lead to a widening of the attainment gap. Research by the charity Teach First suggests that school closures risk further contributing to that problem through the digital divide: 84% of schools with the poorest pupils do not have enough devices or internet access to ensure that pupils can learn from home, compared with 66% of schools in the most affluent areas. Access to technology, family home environments and economic pressures suggest that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to miss out on learning as a result of being at home.

There needs to be a plan, there needs to be a back-up plan and there needs to be a plan for the unthinkable. Getting teachers, and therefore pupils, back into school must be one of the key aims for this Government, and that should be reflected in the prioritisation of the vaccine. Think about how much contact a teacher has with human beings in one day, where there is no social distancing or it is practically impossible. Teachers see vast amounts of children in a week, according to a normal timetable, so there are many opportunities for the virus to spread.

We need to give children and young adults the best chance in life, and that always starts with their education. I can tell anyone who has not worked in the classroom environment that it is hard to comprehend the challenges that our teachers face every day. We cannot expect teachers to work in an unsafe environment. Schools have spent a lot of time making their environment safe, and the consensus among teachers is that they cannot give their best through online teaching. Teachers do what they do to inspire, develop skills, build confidence, entertain and impart knowledge. They want to be back in the classroom and to change the lives of the children they teach and want to teach.

The NASUWT has presented evidence showing that staff working in both secondary and primary schools are far more likely to be infected than the wider community, with rates of virus prevalence among school staff being three to four times higher than the prevalence rate for non-teachers. I welcome the announcement made last week by the Welsh Government about prioritising teaching and support staff in special schools. Those schools have remained open throughout the pandemic to support children classed as vulnerable. It is right that they are able to continue to deliver the excellent, vital support that they provide to families of children with additional needs. The Government must also give due consideration to those who deliver childcare in nursery settings. They are the carers of our youngest children. Those settings do not traditionally fall within education, but they must not, because of that, be forgotten.

It is pertinent that England's deputy chief medical officer, Jenny Harries, suggested that teachers and other frontline workers could be included in the next stage of vaccinations, which will cover the next five priority groups, including the over-50s and those with risky underlying health conditions. Many MPs from across the House agree that the reconsideration of the JCVI

prioritisation schedule is necessary. Can the Minister give assurances that the JCVI will reconsider vaccine reprioritisation for certain professions? Will he be able to lay out the comprehensive plan for school leaders and local authorities that will provide the necessary financial and logistical support to implement the plans?

Although I have spoken mainly to teachers, the additional petition talks about the UK Government and the JCVI considering prioritising first responders alongside NHS carers and workers. To put that request into context, it is helpful to highlight the fact that, across the UK, there are just over 210,000 first responders and emergency service workers. It is not beyond the wit of man to make them a priority. Because first responders have an "increased level of exposure with the general public every day and lack of regular testing",

they are at a higher risk of contracting covid-19 and transmitting it to the public. Losing our first responders on the frontline puts the public at risk of not being served when they most need it. Prioritising vaccines will help to ensure

"protection and safety of their health whilst carrying out their jobs on the frontline",

and lower

"the risk of easily contracting/transmitting COVID-19 to co-workers, their families, and the general public".

The reprioritisation of the JCVI list is necessary. Government cannot just say, "This is what the JCVI says," and that that must therefore be set in stone.

However, there is another consideration that the Government could use to address their concerns. That is laid out in "A Plan for Vaccine Acceleration" published by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change on 3 January:

"Almost 1 million people in the United Kingdom have received their first-dose vaccination against Covid-19. This is a Herculean effort from the NHS, which must be applauded. But in the situation we face, it is unfortunately not sufficient."

That is not a criticism of the NHS. It is a reflection on the planning and strategy of the Government. If the Minister and the Department would consider following that plan for vaccine acceleration, there might be some hope on the horizon of our children returning to education and frontline workers carrying out their jobs fear-free, because our teachers and frontline workers, and our children, deserve better.

Sir David Amess (in the Chair): Colleagues, there are a number of changes. First, you will have noticed that there is a statement in the House, so the Minister and shadow spokesman are still detained there. I am sure that colleagues will be kind to the two Members standing in their place, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) and the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), but everyone should bear in mind that they did not expect to be in that position. Furthermore, a number of Members who are on the call list have disappeared and not come back, and are not in the Chamber, so the order in which I call Members will be Opposition, Government, Opposition. I shall try to indicate the order to you. I call Craig Williams.

6.14 pm

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): It is pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and a great delight to be called earlier than I expected. I welcome

[Craig Williams]

the tone in which the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) introduced the petition. She has given a great voice to both petitions. I echo the statement that this is a very worthy and timely debate—anybody who has been filling her inbox to say the contrary is wrong.

There is an undertone of great political agreement about the JCVI's recommendations, because we have Governments of different colours across the United Kingdom. We have a Labour and Liberal Democrat Government in Wales—the Education Minister is of the Liberal persuasion, but they are primarily a Labour Government. We have a Conservative Government in Westminster, and we have a Scottish National party Government in Scotland. Broadly, however, the JCVI has stacked up in its entirety in its recommendations.

I accept the spirit of the petitions and the recommendation for frontline workers and teachers to have early vaccinations. I had my county chair of the National Farmers Union on the phone this morning, and he was pleading for farmers and people working in food processing and in important sectors supplying food—not just to our hospitals, but to our entire country—to receive special treatment as the vaccinations are rolled out. There is a huge lobby around this issue. I cannot think of a better call-up in short order than the Minister, and I am expecting an excellent reply, but we really need a vaccination programme that speeds up at pace across the whole United Kingdom. I will make a number of asks in my short contribution—I know a lot of Members wish to speak.

Although I broadly support the intent of the petitions, I stand squarely behind the recommendations made thus far by the JCVI. We are in the right phasing. The hon. Member for Gower was right to look at opening up the next round of vaccinations, but my plea is to get vaccinating as quickly as possible. We have seen different stages of planning across the United Kingdom. As a Welsh Member, I know we are at a different stage in Wales from the one in England. We also see a different phase of the roll-out in Scotland. My plea is to get vaccinating the groups identified by the JCVI as quickly as possible, and then to vaccinate the wider population. I can see the hon. Lady gearing up—I will certainly give way if she wants, knowing my Welsh colleague well.

Tonia Antoniazzi: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. If schools will be returning to normal practice after half-term in February—that is where we are now, practically across the United Kingdom—does he agree that there is real urgency to know what is going to be different this time round? What will be put in place this time round? That is why there is an urgent need to revisit the vaccination programme.

Craig Williams: As the father of an eight-year-old and a four-year-old starting their education, I know home schooling presents a challenge. I dare say that nobody present wants the schools reopened more quickly than I do, but let us be clear that we need to vaccinate in this country to keep deaths down. Of course education is of primary importance, and people would expect a father of young children to echo what is being said up and down the country, but the JCVI has made it clear that the first phases will tackle the mortality rate. It has

to be the priority of Members in this Chamber and our Governments across the United Kingdom to keep the mortality rate as low as possible.

There are a couple of things that I will ask the Minister to focus on. I would like information published about how many vaccines are being delivered to the devolved Administrations, so that we can hold their feet to the fire on their delivery. I want to see how many vaccines are being supplied. We can then evaluate roll-out processes in the light of day, rather than operate as we are doing now.

I would like further consideration of what can be done for frontline first responders and teachers in future roll-outs. How do they feature? My key ask, however, is that we be as transparent as possible with the vaccine roll-out. We need communication not just with our teachers and first responders, but across the country, to make it clear when people can expect vaccinations and when the schools will fully reopen, so that we can say goodbye to Zoom—especially those of us with a four-year-old. When can people expect their local vaccine centres, GPs, or, I hope and pray eventually in Wales, community pharmacists to get involved in the frontline delivery of vaccines?

My plea today is that we follow the clear guidance from the JCVI and the ambition to keep mortality rates as low as possible, but that we are transparent with our teachers and our constituents to make sure that they see this roll out at speed.

6.20 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): It is an honour to participate in a debate under your chairing, Sir David. It is an extremely important and timely debate, and I thank all the people who signed the two petitions that brought it forward.

For almost a year, covid-19 has impacted all our lives in ways we could never have expected or imagined. Young people have missed vital time in the classroom, businesses have been forced to close, families have been kept apart and, shockingly, more than 80,000 lives have now been lost. The correspondence I receive every day from constituents represents their vast and varied concerns. The common thread is an overwhelming sense of fatigue and the desperate wish for the country to get back to normal.

The vaccine is our way out, our golden ticket to some sense of normality. I put on record my thanks to all those who have worked to make it possible. It should amaze us all that in less than 10 months humans have been able to learn about the virus, develop a vaccine to combat it, test it, conduct three phases of trials and get it approved. That could not have been done without enormous sacrifice, talent and a level of international collaboration that should inspire us all and be applied to a range of areas. Because of that hard work, we can now see light at the end of the tunnel.

The pandemic has demanded huge sacrifices from people all over the world in the name of beating the virus. Now that we have a vaccine, it is incumbent on the Government to hold to their end of the bargain and ensure that the roll-out is done correctly. The stakes are painfully clear. If we can get a vaccine for people most at risk, in the fastest amount of time, we will be able to save countless lives.

That is why, alongside the *Daily Mirror* and the TUC, my party has started the Let's Vaccinate Britain campaign. We are working with trade unions to demand that employers give workers paid time off to get vaccinated. We are encouraging people to sign up to the NHS to volunteer and to speak to their friends, neighbours and relatives about the importance of getting vaccinated. I call on everyone listening to the debate to get involved in that campaign.

Many of my constituents and others in Leeds are already contributing to the national effort. Fittingly, Leeds's first covid vaccine was given to Sylvia Harris, an 80-year-old ward housekeeper who has worked for the NHS since she was 26, but has had to shield at home since March last year. Soon, she will finally be able to return to what she does best—caring for her patients. I thank Leeds United football club for offering its stadium, Elland Road, to be a vaccination centre, and all those across Leeds who are devoting time and energy to making the vaccine administration possible.

We need a huge national effort to get this country vaccinated, starting with key workers and those most vulnerable to the virus. That means conducting round-the-clock vaccinations, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It makes perfect sense for key workers to be vaccinated overnight, allowing daytime vaccinations for the age priority groups.

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister has said that there is no public appetite for vaccinations 24 hours a day. I do not believe that is correct. Key workers, and people who want the vaccine in order to get back to normal, will take it on whatever day or night is offered to them. Older age groups might not be prepared to have the vaccine during the night, so maybe the strategy is to vaccinate the key workers in the nocturnal hours and the older age groups in the daytime hours. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] There is agreement about that across the House.

As the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams) said, politicians across the House have been keen to emphasise the importance of getting children back into school. I declare an interest, as I have a 10-year-old and a 12-year-old, and it is sometimes difficult to motivate them for home learning. I am sure we all know that feeling. We cannot get them back in school until it is safe. Schools cannot operate in a socially distanced way, without access to proper personal protective equipment. Vaccination is the only way we can ensure staff are protected.

It is not just teachers who need to be added to the priority groups. I submitted a written question last week on hospices. The Minister who has just finished in the Chamber, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), can listen to this debate now and to what I have to say. He responded by saying that the JCVI based its advice on the data it reviewed from a number of sources, including the Office for National Statistics and Public Health England. For the purposes of covid-19 vaccine prioritisation, the definition of care homes is all care home premises licensed and registered with the Care Quality Commission. This definition does not include hospices. I want to ask the Minister on duty, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill),

and the Minister who is hopefully watching, why hospices should not be added, because they are just as important as other care settings.

I also want to make a plea for early years. Why is early years treated differently from teachers or other settings? They should not be. Early years settings are suffering at the moment because they are open, and the financial pressures are immense because of the different pressures on their time. Today the leaders of Leeds City Council wrote to the Minister for Children and Families and copied in the Minister for COVID Vaccine Deployment. Councillors Blake and Venner wrote, "We are requesting that early years staff, to include childminder staff working in group settings and wraparound care, are prioritised for the covid-19 vaccine. Early years providers support a large number of children, provide personal care and do not wear PPE. It is of course vital that the NHS and care home workers as well as other priority groups more vulnerable to the virus receive the vaccine first. But we are asking that early years staff form an additional priority group after this." That is another group that can be vaccinated in the evening or at night, putting our youngest away from harm in those settings.

I will conclude by asking about transparency on data, which the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire gently touched upon. We have a lot of data around testing. We know how many tests are being conducted in each local authority area. We know where the roll-out is and where the centres are. If we can have that level of data for testing, why can we not have it for vaccinations? I am sure that other Members, like me, look on the Worldometer website, which has started recording vaccination data as well as testing data, cases, mortality and so on. Soon there will be global comparisons around vaccinations and we will be able to see where the UK stands. We can see that now, but we need to be able to dig right down to see how many vaccines have been supplied to each primary care network, how many centres there are, and how many first and second vaccines have been given. That will start to give the public confidence that there is not a postcode lottery, that roll-outs are happening and that centres are open. That will encourage more people to come forward, not just to receive the vaccine but to support the roll-out.

Data and public confidence are really important. I hope that the duty Minister, the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds, will take that away and provide us with that data. I asked the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon about that in a private call just before Christmas. He said he would get back to me. Now that I have raised it in this Chamber, I hope that he will.

6.28 pm

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir David. Standing here in lockdown again, with the Chancellor telling the House this afternoon that it is going to get worse before it gets better, I have to say that 2021 is starting to look a lot like 2020.

Whereas I could not support the lockdown in November, I could support lockdown 3 last week, because we finally have the ultimate release from the deadly cycle of lockdown in the form of the covid vaccine. I warmly welcome the "UK COVID-19 vaccines delivery plan", published this afternoon. We need to study it, and we will, but the figures suggest we have made a strong start.

[*Steve Brine*]

As the Health Secretary said in Downing Street this afternoon, 2.6 million jabs have been given to 2.3 million people, according to the very latest figures.

I welcome the Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), who is responsible for many of the jabs. He has taken his seat at exactly the right time, because I agree with the previous speaker, the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel), that we should vaccinate 24/7. I think there will be an appetite for that. The idea of key workers being vaccinated overnight, and perhaps those in the older categories during the day if they do not want it during the night, is absolutely fine. Let us at least give them the opportunity. It might be cold and it might be dark, but I will make the tea.

There is no question but that we will see problems, and the Minister will be the first to acknowledge that. Supply is going to be lumpy in the next few days, and that is creating problems. I cannot hide from that. We are off to a flier in my constituency of Winchester, way ahead of many areas. In fact, one primary care network in my district has already delivered more jabs than the whole of France. None the less, it is very frustrating that just today a raft of appointments made for this week in my constituency has had to be postponed because of supply problems. We cannot doubt the fact that this hits public confidence. I thank the Minister for Vaccines for his engagement with me and the primary care network involved this weekend, and plead with him to help us get this corrected and get the deliveries into this part of Hampshire, so that these appointments can be made good and carried out as soon as possible.

Looking at the delivery plan, such as I have been able to this afternoon, I agree about the publishing of data. Daily national data is so important—transparency is our best weapon—but daily regional data will also be really important. I want to see areas with enough supply almost competing to better each other. If Lancashire is doing better than Yorkshire, I have a funny feeling that Yorkshire will want to do better than Lancashire. That is the sort of national effort that we need to see right now. We need to jab for victory, get covid done—whatever three-word slogan the Minister chooses. Let's do it.

As the Minister knows, it is my strong belief that these awful restrictions on our lives cannot be in place for a day longer than they are required, so alongside the published vaccine delivery plan and the daily figures on how we are getting this done, we have to give the public some hope. In the past hour or so, the Secretary of State has said at the No. 10 press conference that just over 88% of those likely to get seriously unwell and sadly die from covid reside within the top four priority vaccine groups. My view is that given that the only metric that really counts, and the reason why public support for lockdown is so high, is the desire to prevent the NHS from being overwhelmed, logic would dictate that once that threat has gone away, we can start to lift the restrictions. We need clear heads if we want to do that. Covid-19 is not a conspiracy or a hoax. We were right to take it seriously last spring, and we are right to take it seriously now, but we are equally right to demand a plan that dismantles the most draconian laws this Parliament has brought in in centuries, and to do so in lockstep with the vaccination programme that we have.

We know the plan commits the Government to vaccinate the top four groups by 15 February, which is great. As Chris Whitty, the chief medical officer for England, grimly reminds us, we expect between 7,000 and 10,000 deaths from flu each year in an average year. The most cautious reading would suggest that the vaccination programme should take covid deaths well below this level, so when we have vaccinated the highest-risk groups, what will we do? When we have completed phase 1 by vaccinating all those with above-average risk in late March, what will we do then? These are important questions, and ones that I will keep asking. We do not lock society down for common colds or seasonal flu; we cannot do the same for the little-understood condition that is long covid, no matter how awful it can be. The many other economic, health and societal impacts of this pandemic are already serious enough, so we need a clear road map out of this that the public can believe in, or this year is going to make the last look tame by comparison.

The petition is right to look at the next phase of the vaccination strategy, but there are so many competing groups asking to be put in the front of that next phase. Supermarket checkout staff interact with huge numbers of people from multiple households, more than any teacher would during any working day. What about police officers? Just this afternoon, I had an email from a constituent telling me about the work that her son is doing in London. Maybe they should be top of the next queue. Pharmacists are going to play a very central role—I declare my interest in the Register of Members' Financial Interests for even mentioning pharmacists. They are brilliant, and as a former pharmacy Minister, I can say they are going to play a brilliant role in the roll-out of this. Maybe they should be top of the next phase's queue.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that when we talk about prioritisation, teachers range from early years to further and higher education, and have widespread responsibilities and contacts, including intimate care with young children? Think of a secondary schoolteacher, carrying their bags around to each and every classroom in which they have to teach under certain systems that have been put in place. I cannot think of another group of people who have that much contact with other humans, and I cannot stress that enough.

Steve Brine: I do not disagree. The hon. Lady probably thinks that I am working up to disagreeing with the premise of the petition. I am not. The point that I am making, before I agree with the premise, is that there are so many competing groups and, while supply is lumpy—supply is limited at the moment—we have to prioritise, which is why phase 1 has to be right.

My overriding message is this. Let us get on with it. Let us have this national programme. Let us implement the vaccine delivery plan. And then we will put all these groups in. With regard to teachers, I absolutely agree: if reopening and keeping open schools is the Government's priority, and the Westminster Government say that it is, surely it is good sense, let alone good politics, to vaccinate educators. I say "educators" because of course it is not just teachers, but support workers and all the other people who make schools happen. That must make sense, but I will just say that if we are going to have schools reopened at the end of half-term, we have almost, now,

lost the opportunity to do that, because we have to give people the jab and then allow three weeks for it to take effect. That now cannot happen before the end of half-term, so there will be a gap, however we cut this particular cake.

Let me finish by talking about early years, which people would expect me to do as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on childcare and early education. The JCVI obviously identified its groups, and some early years workers will be covered by the groups involving the clinically extremely vulnerable and

“all individuals aged 16 years to 64 years with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality”.

It is not the case that no teachers and no early years workers will be covered in phase 1; of course some will be. With regard to phase 2, the JCVI states:

“Vaccination of those at increased risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 due to their occupation could...be a priority in the next phase.”

Its suggested list includes teachers, and I believe that early years workers should be a high priority, based on two key factors.

First, unlike schools, the early years sector is currently open to all children, meaning that staff are coming into contact with similar numbers of children as they were prior to the latest national lockdown. Secondly, it is of course impossible to socially distance from babies and young children. They need close personal care, such as changing nappies, treating cuts and just giving them a cuddle when they bump themselves. All early years settings are currently open to all children, and of course that is vital in providing continuity of care and early education to the youngest children, but with regard to supporting those settings and keeping them open and keeping those staff safe, I think that they have a strong case. Why are they treated differently? That was what the hon. Member for Leeds North West said. Well, early years workers are a fairly mild bunch. They do not have a powerful trade union often speaking up for them. They have only me and a few other people in the House of Commons. And that is possibly the reason why.

This petition makes a lot of sense. I think that, for every person who has signed the petition, that comes from a good place. I think that it comes from a will to see schools, educators and young people treated fairly and kept safe from this awful pandemic. Anything that we can do to roll out the vaccine delivery plan, which the excellent Minister, now in his place, will ensure happens, will move us out of this nightmare, and then maybe I can stop being a grinch about 2021.

Sir David Amess (in the Chair): The debate finishes at 7.30 pm. Five colleagues wish to speak, and I want to call all of them, so I suggest that everyone speak for about five minutes. That will give the Minister and his opposite number time to respond to the debate.

6.39 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I will apologise at this point, because I am listed as No. 11 in the main Chamber afterwards and I want to get to the global UK debate—not the global Britain debate, because I live in the UK; but that is a separate point. As we say at home, it would starve you in here. It is so cold that I think Pfizer could use this room to keep its vaccine at the proper temperature for us all.

It is an honour to follow my colleague the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), who quite rightly said that he has been disappointed so far with 2021. I have finished my 10-day free trial and I want a refund on the rest of 2021. Look, it is absolutely, entirely a matter of free will whether someone takes a vaccine if and when it becomes available. I am delighted that people are being given so much encouragement to take the vaccine. Of course, that has to be mixed with support for testing people and making sure that the right people get the vaccine as quickly as possible. It is absolutely right and proper that those most at risk are at the head of the queue.

I welcome the fact that today the Northern Ireland Executive have prioritised domiciliary care staff receiving the vaccine in Northern Ireland. That started this afternoon. Quite frankly, there is a hierarchy of frontline workers. The hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) was right to point out that educationalists should be at the top of that list, because of their reach across the entire community, whether they are early years workers or schoolteachers, or they manage kids with special needs in schools and institutions that have not been closed down as a result of covid. It is important that those frontline workers do not feel that they are second or third in the queue, and that society recognises their key and important role. It is disappointing to read that in some hospitals, more management staff have received the vaccine than nursing staff. That is abhorrent and wrong, and that balance has to be addressed. It is important that our frontline workers—our nursing staff—get it.

I strongly believe that schoolteachers are on the frontline. If we want schools to open again quickly, we have to start with early years and go right the way through to make sure that children can get back to school for the sake of their mental health, of opening up our society again and, of course, of promoting the welfare of our young people.

Tonia Antoniazzi: The hon. Gentleman brought up mental health, which is really important. I am greatly concerned about my 16-year-old studying for his A-levels. He has just started college with a new group of friends, but he does not have the opportunity to socialise and have the life experiences that we experienced. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is of utmost importance to get children and students back into school and education as soon as possible?

Ian Paisley: The hon. Member has knocked it out of the park; she is absolutely right. It is key that we get our kids back in there so that they can socialise and work together again, and be the engine room of our society for the future. That will only happen when we get them back to school and facilitate that.

I received an email today from Ben Sidor, a student at Queen's University Belfast. It is not just at the school level, but at the university level that people are being denied the positive interactions with their friends and peers that will allow them to become the men and women of tomorrow that society will look up to generation after generation. We must encourage that.

The hon. Member for Winchester mentioned the use of other organisations, which is important. Community pharmacies are key to the roll-out of the vaccine. Frankly, community pharmacists in my constituency have saved

[*Ian Paisley*]

the NHS in the last couple of years. They are undervalued and underrated, yet they play a key role. Getting pharmacists on to the frontline to help with the roll-out is critical.

I also welcome the call to use the skills of our military. The Army is brilliant at logistical planning. We should use its skill to roll out the plan and to make sure that it is quick, efficient and agile, and that it responds to the needs of the community on the ground. There is no reason why our Army could not be used for that positive work. We are quite happy to send it to Sierra Leone to roll out vaccination projects there, so why can we not do that in our own nation and use its logistical planning skills?

I fear that there will be a shortage that will have an impact on certain parts of the United Kingdom. The Northern Ireland protocol already means that PPE is waiting at Stranraer and cannot get into Northern Ireland because of tax inspectors. Can you imagine, Sir David, if the same happened with vaccinations—if they were ready for Northern Ireland, but could not get there because of the protocol? That needs to be addressed urgently, and I raised the point personally with the Chancellor today.

I leave hon. Members with those thoughts. I welcome the debate, which is very important. I hope that those who wish, of their free will, to have the vaccination have that facilitated urgently.

6.45 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) for her introduction to the debate.

I declare an interest: my partner is a teacher who has been dealing with covid-safe procedures in school, and has dealt with many track-and-trace processes, so I have heard about the challenges in our schools very clearly. I have also heard from those in retail. I have close associations with the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers; I declare that interest, too. It is really important that we listen to all those concerns, because there is deep worry in the country about the case rates. In particular, I have heard concerns relating to special schools and the care that they provide; that was mentioned earlier. I have Ysgol y Deri in my constituency, a fantastic school that is part of the Penarth Learning Community. The First Minister in Wales has been very clear that we will extend vaccination to staff working in those contexts, given the care that they provide to often vulnerable young people. That is good to hear.

I commend the Welsh Government on the vaccination strategy set out today by my constituency colleague, the Welsh Minister for Health and Social Services, Vaughan Gething; I know the Minister here also set one out today. It is important that we get information on those strategies out there, because we are hearing a lot of worry and genuine concern. Of course, everybody wants to be vaccinated, including those in frontline work and those who are particularly vulnerable. That is why it is absolutely crucial that we secure the supply and production.

I praise the work of my local health board, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, which in recent days has rapidly scaled up its vaccination plans and the number of vaccinations it has delivered. I spoke to members of its staff this morning. A few days ago, when I visited my GP on a personal matter, I was pleased to hear that the member of staff treating me had been vaccinated and was looking forward to being part of the roll-out programme that the Health Minister in Wales set out today, in which an increasing number of GPs will be involved. Community pharmacies, which have been mentioned, will be involved too. They have a critical role. I am pleased that it was set out today that they are part of the plan in Wales. I hope they will be part of the plan across the whole UK.

The reality we face, as shown in the petition, is that there are very difficult choices of prioritisation. I think everyone recognises that, including many of those who have contacted me to ask, “When am I going to get the vaccination?” It is really important that we follow the best scientific, medical and clinical evidence set out by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation and others. I want assurances that the Minister is considering all the representations that are being made, because it is important that there should be confidence in the difficult decisions that are reached. For example, there has been a lot of anxiety about spreading out the dosing. I have heard concerns from health professionals about that, and I appreciate that there is a live debate on that. We need confidence in all these choices, and in the decisions taken at UK level by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, the JCVI and jointly by chief medical officers. I have a huge amount of respect and admiration for them; they are having to make difficult choices because we do not have enough supply in the country.

That is the point I largely want to deal with. I have already raised a number of issues on that subject with the Minister. I would like clearer guarantees on the schedule for delivery to and around the UK. My constituents in Wales want to know when vaccine procured for the UK is being delivered to Wales, and when the different types of vaccine are being delivered to Wales. We know about the Oxford-AstraZeneca and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines; when will the Moderna vaccine first be delivered to this country, and how will it be rolled out? I have heard positive things about a Johnson & Johnson vaccine; when do we think that will be approved by the MHRA, and when might we see supplies?

First, I would like more assurances from the Minister about our productive capacity in the UK. We all know that things can go wrong; there could be problems with delivery, accidental damage or contamination. Any of those things could happen. How are we scaling up our productive capacity in the UK to create all the different types of vaccines? What new factories are being built? What new facilities are being procured? That is right down to the level of capital equipment available in this country for vaccine production.

Secondly, the other crucial part of the process is the cold chain. We know that there have been issues with, for example, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and the way in which it has to be kept at that hyper-low temperature. Will that be similar for some of the other RNA vaccines? If so, what are we doing to scale up our cold chain and storage capacity to enable such vaccines to be used

more quickly across the country? As we know, the Oxford-AstraZeneca one can be kept in a fridge, but that of course still requires a safe cold chain to get it to all the key locations.

Thirdly, the fill and finish part of the production process is critical. The Minister knows that I have asked him questions about the Wockhardt factory in north Wales. What other fill and finish capacity do we have across the UK? Will he be specific about that? What are we doing to expand it? I want to see those plants operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with the supplies coming in all the time, getting into those phials and getting out to our communities across the country. Fundamentally, that is a UK responsibility and the responsibility of the Minister. I hope that he can give us some assurances on that.

Lastly, at the moment there is rightly a lot of concern about variants. At some point in the future, obviously, we will have to produce tweaked vaccine alternatives to deal with variants that may emerge, in the way that we do with the flu vaccine. Will the Minister give us assurances on how our productive capacity will be there to produce variant vaccines at the right moment, when we need them in the future? We need to get through this first phase, absolutely, but we also have to look at the medium and long term, because this virus is not going away anytime soon.

6.51 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David.

I very much welcome this debate, and I am grateful to my many constituents for signing the petition—I believe Twickenham was about 13th on the list of signatories. Like many other Members, I have received many emails from school staff and early years staff urging me to participate in this debate and to press for the prioritisation of those staff.

One thing that strikes me is that a number of the staff—I very much agree with them—said that they accept that health and care workers, absolutely, and the most vulnerable, so those who are very old and at highest risk, should be front of the queue. Generally, I do not think that the discussion is around those top four priority groups. There is probably more of a discussion to be had on some of the lower groups. The JCVI has said that, after all its priority groups, it is a matter of policy as to whether other groups, such as teaching staff, are prioritised.

The Liberal Democrats have proposed that teaching staff should perhaps be in group 7, but that is up for discussion. Indeed, if we look at some of the data on the lowest priority group according to the JCVI, the 50 to 55-year-olds, they are at very little higher risk compared with the rest of the general population. I would contend that there is a policy discussion to be had on some of those lower groups that the JCVI put forward, and on whether teaching staff and early years staff should go in there.

I must declare an interest as the mother of a two-year-old and a six-year-old. I am utterly delighted that childcare settings are open: my two-year-old is a handful, and my husband could not home-school our six-year-old daughter if my son was at home, so I am very grateful to the staff in early years settings who put themselves at risk day to day.

I appreciate that vaccinating early years staff and teaching staff will not necessarily prevent the spread of disease, because we do not yet have the data to show that; it will merely give them protection, but that is important. We are all united, across the House, in that we want to see schools return as soon as possible. The most disadvantaged are being hurt, and that is not just the very poorest on free school meals. Over the Christmas holidays, I had a conversation with a mother of three who does not qualify for free school meals, but is just above that line—just about managing. She could not afford devices for her kids in the first lockdown, so she was having to borrow to be able to home-school them—it really is hurting the most vulnerable, because the devices for home schooling are not out there as widely as they should be. It is also having an impact on children's and young people's mental health, a subject that I am passionate about and that has already been raised today. Before the pandemic, one young person in 10 had a diagnosable mental health condition; that figure has already risen to one in eight.

I particularly want to shout out for special educational needs and disabilities. By definition, those settings have to remain open, because they have the most vulnerable children. I have had a number of representations from staff and governors in SEND schools in my constituency; one member of staff from Clarendon Primary Centre in Hampton pointed out that, like in early years and some of the younger primary settings, pupils with special educational needs and disabilities struggle to socially distance. The staff provide personal care, including changing, to a wide age range. Some pupils spit and bite; most pupils cannot tolerate the invasive nature of a lateral flow or PCR test. His school has over 60% attendance and his class has 80%—he says, “We are fully open.” More than 50% of pupils in that school are free school meal or pupil premium kids.

It is quite clear that in such settings additional protection for teachers and other school staff is very much warranted, so I urge the Minister to revisit some of the lower-level groups on the JCVI priority list. As I tried to allude to in the main Chamber earlier, there is a desire to have a 24/7 vaccination programme as and when supply allows. The workforce are there to deliver it, so why cannot we include teachers and early years staff?

Our children and young people are really suffering in this pandemic. We owe it to them—and to the people who are taking care of them and helping them to develop into young adults—to protect them as best we can.

6.56 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I thank the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) for her great introduction to the debate. I also thank the hundreds of thousands of people who signed the petition, demonstrating the interaction between the people of this country and the Parliament that seeks to represent them. As many hon. Members have said, vaccination is a light at the end of the tunnel that gives us all a sense of hope, but of course the danger is that that tunnel will be longer for some than for others.

The main topic of the petition is education. People talk about the reopening of schools, but they are open: far more children are being taught in our schools and in

[Tim Farron]

school settings today than during the April-May phase of the earliest lockdown, for lots of very good reasons. One reason why schools have been otherwise closed as part of the lockdown is that we recognise that the science shows that although children do not get badly affected by the disease, they clearly spread it.

We are asking teachers, teaching assistants and other school staff to put themselves in harm's way for good reason, so it is right that they be considered as part of the priority vaccination list alongside others. No one wants to muscle their way to the front of the queue, but we recognise that these are people who are doing an immense service for our children and our country, and who are putting themselves at risk at the same time.

As a Member of Parliament for a very rural constituency, I am aware that delivering a vaccine in a place such as my constituency, which is bigger than Greater London, is a challenge. I am concerned that there are parts of my community where we have yet to get the vaccine rolled out; I ask for the Minister's intervention, through the Clinical Commissioning groups, to ensure that we fast-track site approval. We and the local primary care network particularly want to see delivery of the vaccine at the surgery in Windermere. The primary care network is already delivering it in Grange and in many care homes, but can we get it delivered from the surgery in Windermere as soon as possible? I would like to say the same for the Yorkshire dales end of my constituency: people in Sedbergh in the western dales are having to travel to Kirkby Lonsdale or further to get the vaccine.

It is important, particularly for older people and people who rely on public transport, that we do not overlook rural communities such as ours and that we ensure that the vaccine is delivered close to where people live. Many hon. Members have talked about the importance of community pharmacists; involving them would allow the Government to roll out the vaccine really close to where people live and get it done more quickly.

Although I agree that 24/7 delivery of the vaccine is something that we should be doing, I am deeply concerned because I have talked to health professionals from right across my county and it is clear from the number of sites and the staff that we have that the capacity to deliver the vaccine far exceeds the amount of the vaccine. I would like to hear from the Minister what his strategy is for procuring sufficient vaccines so that we can meet those targets.

I also want to emphasise the importance of data, which people have talked about, so that we can hold the Government to account. For example, I and the whole of the local community would like to know what percentage of over-80s in the LA9 postcode, for instance, have been vaccinated once or even twice. That would ensure that there is healthy competition and would also allow us to hold the Government to account and know whether we will meet the targets. We know that that data exists: NHS England has it, but is not sharing it.

I have talked to local providers of the vaccine through our primary care networks, and they tell me that they could ask a secondary question themselves. They could double-report, but that takes two minutes per patient. That is time when they could be vaccinating patients, so they think that is a waste of time and a duplication.

We know that that data exists because it is being collected, so why is it not being shared? Will the Minister guarantee that that information will be made public this week, district by district—indeed, postcode by postcode?

There is a light at the end of the tunnel for all of us, but the tunnel is longer for some than for others. What a great disappointment that the nearly 3 million people who are excluded from financial support through the coronavirus crisis continue to be excluded today. For them, the tunnel is impossibly long. They face deep debt and find it hard to abide by the rules and regulations, because to do so very often means not being able to pay their rent or look after and feed their children. I would like answers to the questions that I have put to the Minister when he makes his concluding remarks.

7.1 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Sir David, for allowing me to make a few comments. I congratulate the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) on bringing forward this debate and setting the scene very well, as she always does with any issue she brings forward. I have previously highlighted with the Secretary of State for Health the need to include our teachers in the priority roll-call for vaccines. We did that just last week in the main Chamber.

The hon. Lady rightly highlighted that the education of children is paramount. Children are currently out of school and are being taught at home; that is not what families and children need. To expect a mother with no degree in teaching to understand how to teach a child the necessary tools of learning puts stress on the family, and too many children are missing out on learning. Some parents can home-school and others cannot. That is not disrespectful; it is a fact of life.

I have spoken to several teachers who are concerned about the fact that some parents are not logged on to the online learning tools for primary school children. Messages have been sent and encouragement has been given, yet the fact remains that some parents and carers are simply overwhelmed with home schooling. Add to the mix the parents who have to work from home and who are struggling to maintain their work life as well as spend adequate time on their children's schooling. The pressures are immense, and it is very difficult on households. The pressure on teachers from trying to maintain contact and check the work of 30 pupils online is extensive. It is imperative that our children are back in class being taught by those who know what they are doing. It is clear that vaccinating teachers and teaching staff is necessary to keep them safe and keep our children in school.

I understand that the vaccine has not been tested for children, and there is little that we can do there. However, vaccinating school staff will help curb the spread of this virus. In my estimation, that is an essential part of our fight against covid. It is really important that teachers in nurseries and special needs schools also have the opportunity to have the vaccine—doubly so when we look at special needs schools, which are operating at full numbers and where staff are expected to teach with no protection around incredibly vulnerable children. We all know them; we meet them every day. I asked the Minister last week in the main Chamber to consider adding teachers to the priority vaccination list, and I am asking again for that to be done in Westminster Hall—it is probably one of the coldest places on the planet; it is so

cold that we could hang beef in here and it would not go off—that is the truth. That is a fact of life; ask any butcher.

Today in the Chamber, the Minister replied to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) on the issue of teachers and the vaccination. Education is one of the cornerstones of our society. That can continue only if our teachers are at full strength and are able to do their jobs, and vaccination is key to that.

Another issue that I want to highlight, as other Members have done—in particular, the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron)—is the availability of the vaccine in rural areas and the need for support for rural GP practices that have thousands of patients on record. The patients who are most vulnerable need the best vaccine. We must make use of our incredibly capable armed forces logistics branches to arrange and implement in rural communities what could well be a mammoth task for GP practices individually. The fact is that people in towns will be quicker to receive the vaccine, but those in rural areas and in constituencies such as mine and that of the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale really need to have equality in the vaccine roll-out. The precision with which our military operates is second to none, and I believe that it is a resource that we have yet to make full use of.

My mother is 89 years young, and she received her vaccine at 9.40 this morning. It is a happy day for us all, and I am very pleased. I have a sense of relief. Although I have told her to remain at home and be careful, there is a definite ray of hope. We need such hope being felt by every family member of the vulnerable in our society, and I believe that our military—our Army of the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—can support our GPs, who are under pressure, with the standard flu jab programme. It is interesting to read in the papers today that the flu jab—it is really good news, which we should welcome—has been so successful that the number of people dying of the flu has reduced dramatically. The figures for Northern Ireland are very clear.

We have the vaccine, and we have more knowledge than we did this time last year. It is now time to ensure that every person who wants to receive the vaccine will be able to do so in a timely manner. For those who are uncertain about it, or who are certain that they do not want to receive the vaccine, we must ensure that their wishes are respected and that the Government place no restrictions on those who exercise their free choice. Again, I ask the Minister to confirm that and put it on the record.

I am excited about the vaccine—I believe it is very hard not to be. We are in a better place today. We can have some confidence for the future. You and I, Sir David, are confident because we have faith, but we also have confidence in what the Government are doing, which is really important. I am sure the Minister will not let us down. There is a fully trained and obvious ready-to-go resource—let us use the military to get the vaccine out and make a difference to our battle against covid.

7.6 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir David. I want to start by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) for her comprehensive and

compelling introduction to this subject. She raised a whole series of questions, dilemmas and judgments that follow on from the very clear objective that we all share: we want as many people as possible to be vaccinated as quickly as possible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gower clearly set out that lots of people in the country have been discussing this issue, as we would expect, but this forum is the right place in a democracy for us to be discussing those ideas, exchanging views and doing so in a way that is respectful and tolerant of other opinions. She set out clearly, as did other Members, the consequences of missing school, particularly in terms of the widening attainment gap and the digital divide, and she explained why it really has to be a priority to get children back into school as soon as possible. It was so disappointing, if not sadly inevitable, that we had to make the decision to restrict attendance at school. It is also very regrettable that the decision was taken without a proper back-up plan to allow children to learn remotely. I agree with her that teachers inspire, build confidence and impart knowledge, and they do that best of all when they teach in person in the classroom.

We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel), who talked about the overwhelming sense of fatigue that we all feel in dealing with this virus—I think we can all understand that. He described the vaccine as the way out of this situation and said that the wonders of human ingenuity have allowed the vaccines to be developed and made ready in such a short space of time. He gave a very good plug for our party's campaign on the vaccination programme, and he raised the important point that it would be very helpful if employers gave paid time off for people to go and receive the vaccine.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West also raised an important question, which I hope the Minister answers, about whether hospice staff should be included in the priority group for vaccination. He talked about a 24/7 vaccination programme and told us that the Prime Minister had apparently said there is no appetite for it. After talking to Members present and to members of the public, I have to say that there is an appetite for that. Every minute, every hour and every day that we can vaccinate people is another step closer to the freedom that we all want to return to. Let us not miss any opportunity to get to that point as quickly as possible. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) said, the 24/7 approach should apply not just to delivering the vaccine but to the production of it.

My hon. Friend was also right to talk about the importance of getting information out there, because everyone wants to know where we are up to with this. Certainly, my constituency office has had many phone calls and emails asking about the vaccination programme. He also spoke about the excellent work undertaken in Wales to roll out the vaccine. He made the fair point that this is not an easy choice—these are not easy options for anyone—but it is important that we take the best professional and scientific advice available when we take these decisions.

It is, of course, a source of great national pride that we were the first country to approve a vaccine for distribution and that our own scientists were integral to the development of the second vaccine, which is now

[Justin Madders]

beginning to be rolled out across the country. Having found ourselves in this good position, it would be very disappointing if we did not become the first country to mass vaccinate its population. For the grandparents who have not seen their grandchildren, for the businesses that have not traded properly for a year and are facing bankruptcy, and for the NHS staff exhausted by the relentless pressure that this virus has created, we all want the quickest route possible out of this.

To date, as we have discussed, the lockdown strategy has been our most effective weapon against the spread of the virus, but we all know that that has created another set of extremely tough challenges and that there are concerns that even that may not be enough to halt the spread of the new strain. Therefore, as has always been the case, mass vaccination is the key to ending the nightmare, which is why no stone should be left unturned and no component of the state left unutilised, and every member of society who wants to contribute should be engaged in some way so that we all play our part to get as many people vaccinated as possible, as soon as possible. We all share that ambition, but the Government have displayed a pattern in this pandemic of being too slow and of over-promising and under-delivering.

Jim Shannon: Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern—I suspect the Minister does—that the roll-out of the vaccine has been halted in parts of the United Kingdom because supplies are running out? Is there not a logistical issue to be addressed as well, to ensure that that does not happen?

Justin Madders: The hon. Gentleman predicts the journey I am about to embark on. I will talk about that very legitimate point, which hon. Members have raised. AstraZeneca promised 30 million doses by September, but that went down to 4 million by the end of the year and, clearly, much less has been delivered on the ground. All the best plans possible will not matter if the supply is not there. Various Members have raised this issue, so when he responds, I hope the Minister will set out the exact position in terms of supply. How many doses have been received to date from each manufacturer? How many are expected each week? What are the weekly projections for delivery?

I will give the Minister a local example. My vaccination centre in Ellesmere Port is due to open sometime this week, but nobody knows exactly when because nobody knows when the first delivery will arrive. One thing this country is not short of is logistics experts. The Vaccine Taskforce is supposed to have been addressing this for months, so those on the frontline should not have been put in the position of not knowing when the vaccine is going to arrive. No vaccine should be left on the shelves, in warehouses or stuck at a factory gate waiting to be delivered. Greater transparency would be much appreciated. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West said, we could do with a performance dashboard covering not just the total figures published each week, but the proportionate numbers in each category of the priority list, including NHS staff—at clinical commissioning group level as well as nationally—so that everyone can see what progress is being made. There are references to that in the document that was produced today.

Turning to the subject matter of the petition, we know from what SAGE has said that schools are making a significant contribution to the R rate and that, with infections running out of control, the closure of schools—except for vulnerable children and the children of key workers—was, sadly, inevitable. As we have said, however, there are multiple reasons why reopening them has to be a priority, not least the importance of getting children back into the classroom. Although we could not go against the JCVI priority list—indeed, it is likely that a change now would be counterproductive—we believe that, as with the change to the period between the first and second doses, serious consideration needs to be given to the order in which the vaccine should be distributed after the initial phase. Indeed, I think Sir Simon Stevens has said as much today.

Of course, it is worth pointing out that the most clinically vulnerable adults who work in education will receive the vaccine shortly anyway, and we believe that the priority should be to increase the number of people who have received the first dose, so that debates over prioritisation become obsolete. However, if that is not possible, we believe that it is more than reasonable to look not only at the risk posed by particular workplaces but at the wider societal benefits of vaccinating particular groups of workers.

I hope that we have sufficient supplies and delivery networks so that we do not end up in a position where particular groups of workers are pitted against one another, but clearly there is a strong case for priority to be given to those working in education settings. At this point, may I thank everyone who works in education for their contribution? I know how hard many of them worked over the Christmas period to prepare for the mass testing regimes, and we could all hear their exasperation when they were asked to revert to remote working at 24 hours' notice. I am afraid that some of that exasperation actually turned to anger when the Education Secretary delivered his warning that Ofsted could become involved if online learning was not up to scratch. If ever there was a sentence that summed up how he is not listening to the education world, that was it.

When I talk about education, I mean education in the widest sense. As various Members have said today, that includes all those who come into close contact with others as part of their job in an educational setting. For example, if we look at those in special educational needs settings, we see that they are often in much closer contact with others than most people. It is not just teachers whom we must consider but classroom assistants, cleaners, cooks and probably just about everyone who works in a school. We are not only talking about schools; as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West said, nurseries and other childcare settings should be looked at. However, for reasons that are not entirely clear, they remain open at this time. I think we can all see how, in those settings, it can be very difficult to avoid close contact with others.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Just to reiterate, everyone in an educational setting should be prioritised for vaccination. Also, what about student teachers? Does my hon. Friend agree that they need to be prioritised too?

Justin Madders: Yes. I think we have to look at the actual work that they do and the risk on the ground, but clearly student teachers would be part of that process.

There are strong arguments for those in other essential services to be given additional priority. There has been much talk of the police and their role in enforcing covid rules; if 20,000 police officers had not been cut in the past decade, the police might not be in such a difficult place to do that. We should remember that when the police go about their duties, they engage with the public and so, by definition, they put themselves at risk of infection.

Similar arguments could be made for those involved in the vaccination process—not just NHS staff but those who are volunteering. In relation to that, can the Minister update us on how many retired NHS staff have now passed all the requirements in this regard, so that they can assist in the vaccination process? We have all heard the stories about the fire safety training modules that have to be taken; although such requirements are worthy in their own right, it cannot be mission-critical at the moment for those tests to be undertaken. I can put it no better than the retired consultant who contacted me and said:

“This is actually more than I was required to do when I was a full-time NHS consultant. It is grossly excessive, unnecessary and burdensome.”

On the vaccination of NHS staff, we know the unprecedented pressures they are facing at the moment; the latest estimate is that there are some 46,000 NHS staff off sick with covid, and that is before we even consider those who are required to self-isolate. The need for a full complement of NHS staff to be available to work cannot be clearer, so we want to see all NHS staff receiving their first dose of the vaccine as soon as possible. There is also a concern about whether those people who are not directly employed by the NHS and instead may be self-employed are being picked up by the system.

In conclusion, we know that at the moment the vaccine programme rightly prioritises the most vulnerable and is designed to protect life. However, as that group of people receives that protection, it is right that we consider where priorities lie next. The nation's key workers have literally kept the country going in the last 12 months—those in education and in transport, council workers, and many, many others who have gone to work day in and day out, knowing that they risk contracting a deadly virus. They do not deserve to be thanked with a pay freeze. At the very least, they deserve serious consideration for prioritisation in the next phase of the roll-out. Proper recognition of their contribution and of the wider societal benefits of their work demand no less.

7.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Nadhim Zahawi): It is slightly unfortunate, Sir David, that the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), asked a lot of questions, because he took up a lot of time. Nevertheless, I will attempt to answer as many colleagues' questions as possible.

Before setting out details of the plan for vaccination, I thank the hon. Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) for the incredible passion with which she spoke. I apologise that I was not in the room for her speech—I was in the main Chamber, as she will know—but it has always been our strategy to suppress the coronavirus until a vaccine can make us all safe, because we know ultimately that vaccines are our way out of this terrible pandemic.

This afternoon we launched our complete vaccine deployment plan, the culmination of months of preparation and hard work by the NHS, the armed forces—the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) mentioned the armed forces, and they are embedded in the deployment programme—and, of course, local and regional government at every level. The sooner we can reduce mortality from this pernicious disease and bring an end to that human suffering, the better.

It is worth reminding ourselves of just what that suffering looks like. Sadly, yesterday, 563 deaths were reported. The average number of deaths per day over the past week has been 909, and behind every statistic is a person—a father, a mother, a sister, a daughter, a grandfather or a grandmother—with family and friends. We must never lose sight of that.

In the light of the petition that we are discussing and, of course, the time, I will reflect on the basic principles that sit behind our prioritisation and our strategy. Yes, we want to minimise disruption for pupils, parents and teachers; yes, we want to stop the NHS being overwhelmed, and yes, we want to protect UK jobs and businesses as much as we possibly can, but fundamentally it is about saving lives, and operationally it is about saving as many lives as possible, as quickly as possible.

I defy anyone to provide more powerful grounds for action in order to achieve that. We are following the science and we are vaccinating, according to the prioritisation by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which recommended rapid immunisation of our most vulnerable groups. It is worth reminding colleagues, as my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) did, about the first four categories, for whom we absolutely are focused on making sure they have the opportunity of a first dose to protect them by mid-February across all four nations.

I know the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) and others are concerned about supplies, and he has contacted me about that. I can reassure him, having spoken to my counterparts in the devolved Administrations that, while the supply lines have been lumpy—in any manufacturing process, especially one so complex as a novel vaccine that is a biological compound, it is always difficult at the outset, but they very quickly stabilise—we have clear line of sight of deliveries all the way through until the end of February, hence we are able to make the pledge that we will be able to deploy.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Will the Minister give way?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am conscious of time, and I want to get through quite a lot; I will be happy to take the hon. Lady's intervention if I can.

Obviously, if a teacher or a school or childcare worker falls within one of those cohorts, they will be contacted by the NHS at the appropriate time to receive the vaccine, but the importance of starting with our most vulnerable groups cannot be overstated. There is no evidence that teachers or school or childcare workers are at higher risk of mortality. That is the thing: we are protecting against death in this first phase, and our most vulnerable groups account for 88% of mortality; I think my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester gave us that figure earlier. We can safeguard against 88% of mortality if we vaccinate those top four groups, but of course I understand the sentiment behind this petition.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Teachers, and everybody involved in this petition, do not want to be prioritised beyond those four groups; but, if something is not going to be done, if the lateral flow tests are not going to be in place for all pupils going to school on a regular basis and the vaccination is not going to be available to teachers, is there a possibility that schools will not actually be returning at the end of February, and that this is going to be longer term?

Nadhim Zahawi: Schools, as the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) reminded us, are open. Primary and secondary schools are open, delivering both online education and education in school for the most vulnerable children and the children of NHS and social care workers, who look after the people who are most vulnerable and whom we are trying to protect from dying. I understand the sentiment behind the petition and pay tribute to the vital work that teachers in schools and childcare workers do to see us through this difficult time. However, I believe that our strategy of putting the most vulnerable first is the right one, morally, ethically and practically, but I recognise that even with such brilliant work in full swing the next few weeks will be difficult, especially in education settings.

We have always sought to keep schools open, and said that they would be the very last things to close, but the challenges posed by the new variant and the more than doubling of transmissibility mean that we have had to take some difficult decisions. I am confident that as our vaccination programme bears fruit we can begin slowly to move out of lockdown. The Prime Minister has promised that schools will be the very first places to reopen, working on the principle of last in, first out. The hon. Member for Gower asked about testing, and it will continue to play a vital role in getting children back into the classroom as soon as possible.

In the time available to me, I want briefly to turn to some of the questions asked by colleagues. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) rightly reminded us that we do not yet know whether the vaccines have an impact on transmissibility—but they obviously offer protection, in terms of both immunity and protection from severe infection. That is why we are focusing on the most vulnerable people. Of course she was right to highlight the issue of young adults with special educational needs. Some of those will be picked up in category 4, but many will be picked up in category 6 of the top nine categories.

I was not in the Chamber when the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) rightly asked whether hospices are included. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston, also asked about that. Hospices are absolutely included in the cohorts, and we are focusing on making sure that they are protected. Many Members, including my hon. Friends

the Members for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams) and for Winchester, and the hon. Members for Cardiff South and Penarth and for Westmorland and Lonsdale, asked about data. Data is our ally in this endeavour, in the Prime Minister's view and in my view. That is why he has insisted on daily data release, so that the nation can see the progress that we are making in protecting the most vulnerable people from covid. We will continue to publish daily data. On Thursdays we will publish more detailed regional data, and my absolute commitment to the House is as much data as the NHS feel is robust that we can publish. We all reference our own experiences in life but the best way to learn, in my view, is to learn from different teams. Not everyone can give 1,000 vaccinations a day, as some primary care networks have, but we learn from them and we try to put support into other teams, to enable them to do that. *[Interruption.]*

I am conscious that the debate ends at 7.30 and I think I have to give the hon. Member for Gower at least a minute to respond, so I will wrap up there. I apologise to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, who wanted to intervene, and I would have loved to take his intervention, but I am happy to write to him if he emails me with any other queries. I shall give the hon. Lady the last word.

7.28 pm

Tonia Antoniazzi: I thank the Minister for his response and I understand the time pressures that we are currently under and the reason he could not be here earlier, but I remind those watching online that the two debates are both live, and they can still add their names to the petition. Also, on 15 December, UNICEF called for teachers to be prioritised, and we must realise that there are difficult decisions that force difficult trade-offs. They were not asking to be in the top four vaccination priorities, but they need consideration. That begins with safeguarding those who are responsible for opening up the future—looking after the teachers who will give a future to our future generations, and to our children, who have missed so much. I accept all the debate today, and thank the Minister and everyone who took part, but we need to move forward and give the matter that consideration.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 554316 relating to roll-out of covid-19 vaccinations.

Sir David Amess (in the Chair): If you have not already done so, colleagues, would you wipe the microphones? I apologise for the ridiculous freezer that this room is. I will complain to the authorities yet again. I am sorry if anyone becomes unwell as a result—this is not acceptable.

7.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 11 January 2021

CABINET OFFICE

Contingencies Fund Advance

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove): The Cabinet Office has sought a repayable cash advance from the Contingencies Fund of £56,500,000.

The requirement has arisen due to increased costs relating to urgent expenditure, including that relating to the covid-19 response.

Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £56,500,000 will be sought in the supplementary estimate for the Cabinet Office. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £56,500,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

[HCWS691]

JUSTICE

Whiplash Reform Programme

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Robert Buckland): I would like to provide an update on the whiplash reform programme.

The Government remain firmly committed to the implementation of the necessary and proportionate measures set out in part 1 of the Civil Liability Act 2018 and the associated increase to the small claims track limit for road traffic accident-related personal injury claims.

In my written ministerial statement of 21 April 2020, I spoke of the effect and impact that the covid-19 pandemic has had on the medical, legal and insurance sectors and the action that Government were taking to ease the difficulties caused by the outbreak. This included delaying the implementation of the whiplash reform programme to April 2021 in order to enable key sectors of this country's business to focus on delivering their response to covid-19. This pause also allowed the Government to focus resource on the priority delivery of key justice services during the pandemic.

Despite the challenges the pandemic has presented, the MOJ continues to work with the Civil Procedure Rules Committee to finalise the supporting rules and pre-action protocol. In addition, the MOJ's delivery partner the Motor Insurers' Bureau continues to make excellent progress on the build of the official injury claim service.

I do however acknowledge the challenges experienced by all this year in the face of the pandemic. I said at the time of my April statement that the Government will continue to monitor developments in relation to the current pandemic and will, if necessary, make further announcements in regard to the implementation of these important reforms. So we have listened carefully to the concerns raised by stakeholders, in particular the need for as much notice as possible to take the necessary steps in anticipation of these reforms and to prepare their businesses for the changes to how small road traffic personal injury claims are managed. We understand

the importance of industry preparedness and, after consideration, it is for that reason we have decided to allow an additional short period of time to further accommodate this. As such, we will implement the whiplash reform programme in May 2021.

This is a sensible and pragmatic approach to take in order to achieve successful and effective implementation of the whiplash reform programme. Delivering these reforms remains a key Government priority and we will continue to work with stakeholders to ensure that all are sufficiently prepared for the new measures upon implementation.

[HCWS693]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review

The Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health (Ms Nadine Dorries): The report of the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review (IMMDS Review) was published on 8 July last year. I would like first to sincerely thank Baroness Cumberlege and her team for their work on the review. I also pay tribute to the women and their families who bravely shared their experiences and brought these issues to light. Without their tireless efforts to have their voices heard, this review would not have been possible.

The overriding question investigated by the review is how the health and care system listens and responds to patient concerns raised by patients, and women in particular. We must not forget that the Cumberlege review, alongside other independent inquiries including the Paterson inquiry, was commissioned because women did not feel listened to or their concerns acknowledged—today is another step towards righting this.

On the Paterson inquiry, I would also like to provide a very brief update. Work on the Government response was temporarily paused last spring due to the first wave of the covid-19 pandemic. Efforts have since resumed at pace, and I can confirm today that I will announce and publish the Government's initial response in Parliament shortly.

Returning to the IMMDS review, many of the report's recommendations have already been discussed in detail during the Committee stage of the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill, and this has helped us to determine our future direction. We are very grateful to Members from both Houses who have worked with us on this.

I am today updating the House on the Government's response to the report of the IMMDS review, taking each recommendation in turn.

Recommendation 1: The Government should immediately issue a fulsome apology on behalf of the healthcare system to the families affected by Primodos, sodium valproate and pelvic mesh.

In July, when I introduced this report to the House, I made an unreserved apology on behalf of the health and care system to those women, their children and their families for the time the system took to listen and respond. I assure those affected that the Government have listened, and will continue to listen.

Recommendation 2: The appointment of a Patient Safety Commissioner who would be an independent public leader with a statutory responsibility. The Commissioner would

champion the value of listening to patients and promoting users' perspectives in seeking improvements to patient safety around the use of medicines and medical devices.

The central recommendation in the report is for the establishment of an independent Patient Safety Commissioner. This recommendation has rightly ignited much interest and debate in both Houses, and the Government have listened carefully to the arguments made for a Commissioner, and how this might sit within the wider patient safety landscape.

Patient safety is a key priority for the healthcare system. In my role as Minister of State for patient safety, I often hear from and meet with people who have been affected by issues of patient safety. Their stories have common themes—of suffering avoidable harm, of not being listened to—and of a system that is then difficult to navigate when things go wrong. We want to make the NHS as safe as anywhere in the world, and we must retain an absolute focus on achieving this goal.

I can therefore confirm that the Government tabled an amendment to the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill before the Christmas recess to establish the role of an independent Patient Safety Commissioner, in line with Baroness Cumberlege's second recommendation.

The Commissioner will act as an independent advocate for patients, and strengthen the ability of our health services to listen to the voice of patients. The Commissioner will be established as a statutory office holder, appointed by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and will act independently on behalf of patients.

The Commissioner's core duties will be to promote the safety of patients and the importance of the views of patients in relation to medicines and medical devices. To help in carrying out these duties, the Commissioner will have a number of powers and functions, including the ability to make reports and recommendations to the NHS and independent sector, and to request and share information with these bodies.

The Government look forward to working with Members of both Houses to ensure this new post acts as a beacon for listening and reflecting the safety concerns of patients, so that we can drive positive culture change in our healthcare system.

Recommendation 3: A new independent Redress Agency for those harmed by medicines and medical devices should be created based on models operating effectively in other countries. The Redress Agency will administer decisions using a non-adversarial process with determinations based on avoidable harm looking at systemic failings, rather than blaming individuals.

The Government have no current plans to establish a redress agency as set out in recommendation 3. The Government and industry have previously established redress schemes without the need for an additional agency.

Recommendation 4: Separate schemes should be set up for each intervention—HPTs, valproate and pelvic mesh—to meet the cost of providing additional care and support to those who have experienced avoidable harm and are eligible to claim.

Recommendation 4 on redress schemes for sodium valproate, mesh, and HPTs remains under consideration.

Recommendation 5: Networks of specialist centres should be set up to provide comprehensive treatment, care and advice for those affected by implanted mesh; and separately for those adversely affected by medications taken during pregnancy.

Good progress is being made on establishing specialist mesh services, which are the fifth recommendation in the report. NHS England is working with NHS hospitals to establish specialist mesh services which are currently planned to go live from the spring this year.

These services will bring together leading experts to provide multidisciplinary care and treatment for all women who have experienced complications due to vaginal or abdominal mesh procedures.

With a centre in every NHS region, these new services will ensure nationwide provision, and centres will work together to hone their expertise and share best practice.

We continue to consider the second part of recommendation 5, which is for specialist centres for those adversely affected by medicines in pregnancy.

Recommendation 6: The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) needs substantial revision particularly in relation to adverse event reporting and medical device regulation. It needs to ensure that it engages more with patients and their outcomes. It needs to raise awareness of its public protection roles and to ensure that patients have an integral role in its work.

Patient safety is the MHRA's top priority. The MHRA recognises that the major changes highlighted by the report, particularly recommendation 6, are very important.

The MHRA has already begun a substantial programme of work to improve how it involves patients in all aspects of its work, to reform systems for reporting adverse incidents with medicines and medical devices, and to strengthen the evidence base for its regulatory decisions.

Within the MHRA's work to strengthen the evidence base, the safety of medicines in pregnancy is of utmost importance.

In the UK, three quarters of a million babies are born each year, and more than half of expectant mothers will need to take medicines when pregnant. We must ensure that women have high-quality, accessible information to be able to make informed decisions about their healthcare.

To that end, I would like to highlight two important developments of MHRA reform.

Firstly, the MHRA expert working group on optimising data on medicines used during pregnancy is today publishing its report which recommends ways in which healthcare data can be better collected and made available for analysis. This will enable the generation of better evidence on medicines used in pregnancy and will be vitally important when developing clear and consistent advice for women.

Second, the MHRA has established a safer medicines in pregnancy and breastfeeding consortium. This brings together 16 leading organisations from across the NHS, regulators, and key third sector and charitable organisations. Today, they are launching a strategy setting out how they will work to improve information on medicines for women who are thinking about becoming pregnant, are pregnant, or are breastfeeding.

Sodium Valproate

On sodium valproate, in response to concerns raised during the previous debate on the IMMDS review, I am pleased to announce that the National Director of Patient Safety has recently established a Valproate Safety Implementation Group.

This Valproate Safety Implementation Group will drive forward work to reduce harm from valproate through taking action to reduce the number of women prescribed valproate, and improving patient safety for women for whom there is no alternative medication, for example by increasing adherence to the Valproate Pregnancy Prevention Programme. The programme will ensure that every girl or woman knows about the risks of valproate in pregnancy, that where appropriate she is on effective contraception, and that she has a review by her specialist prescriber at a minimum once a year, when a risk acknowledgement form will be discussed and signed by both prescriber and woman herself. Importantly, the Valproate Safety Implementation Group will work with patients to understand how women can be supported to make informed decisions about their health care.

In addition, last week the MHRA published the conclusions of a safety review into antiepileptic drugs conducted by the Commission on Human Medicines. This will help clinicians identify safer alternatives to valproate for the treatment of epilepsy in women who may become pregnant.

I am also pleased to announce that the first data from the new Valproate Registry will become available later this month. The registry is being developed by the MHRA and NHS Digital, and will support work to monitor adherence to the Valproate Pregnancy Prevention Programme, and allow for long-term individual patient follow up.

Recommendation 7: A central patient-identifiable database should be created by collecting key details of the implantation of all devices at the time of the operation. This can then be linked to specifically created registers to research and audit the outcomes both in terms of the device safety and patient reported outcomes measures.

The seventh recommendation in Baroness Cumberlege's report rightly reflects on the importance of collecting the right data for monitoring the safety of medical devices. We recognise the need for improved data collection and analysis for medical devices.

That is why the Government acted in June last year to amend the Medicines and Medical Devices Bill to create the power to establish a UK-wide medical device information system prior to the review report being published, as we recognised the need to deliver such an information system. This system will mean that in future, subject to regulations, we can routinely collect medical device, procedure and outcome data from all NHS and private provider organisations across the UK, ensuring that no patient in the UK falls through the gaps.

The Government are grateful to Members in both Houses, including Baroness Cumberlege, for their support for establishing a medical device information system.

Recommendation 8: Transparency of payments made to clinicians needs to improve. The register of the General Medical Council (GMC) should be expanded to include a list of financial and non-pecuniary interests for all doctors, as well as doctors' particular clinical interests and their recognised and accredited specialisms. In addition, there should be mandatory reporting for the pharmaceutical and medical device industries of payments made to teaching hospitals, research institutions and individual clinicians.

The Government are considering recommendation 8, which is that doctors' financial and non-pecuniary interests should be declared and publicly available.

Any publication of declarations of interest should cover all clinical decision-making staff, not just doctors: it would also need to be held where patients could most

easily access and interpret the information, with appropriate governance arrangements. We will consider these issues in discussion with the GMC, other stakeholders and the patient reference group to ensure the views of patients are listened to and incorporated.

Recommendation 9: The Government should immediately set up a task force to implement this review's recommendations. Its first task should be to set out a timeline for their implementation.

The Government have no plans to establish an independent taskforce to implement the report's recommendations. A cross-system working group has already been set up, meeting regularly, to develop the Government's detailed response to the report.

However, the Government recognise the need for effective patient engagement both to build trust, and ensure effective implementation. I am pleased to announce today that we are establishing a Patient Reference Group, which is part of Baroness Cumberlege's ninth recommendation. The Patient Reference Group will ensure that patient voices are heard as we move forward towards a full response to the report.

Conclusion

The report of the IMMDS review powerfully demonstrates the importance of hearing the patient voice in patient safety matters. The actions outlined here demonstrate the Government's commitment to learning from this report, and will support vital work already underway to hear the voice of the patient as part of the NHS Patient Safety Strategy. We currently plan to respond further to the report of the IMMDS review during 2021.

[HCWS692]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Rough Sleeping and Protection for Renters

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): Last week I announced further support to protect the most vulnerable through the national lockdown. This includes further efforts and funding to protect rough sleepers and ensure they are registered with a GP, where they are not already. I also confirmed that evictions will not be enforced by bailiffs until at least 21 February, except for in the most egregious situations. I have set out below the comprehensive set of measures the Government have put in place to protect tenants, while ensuring landlords have access to justice for the most serious cases.

Rough sleeping

Given the new variant of covid-19 that is driving infection rates and the Prime Minister's announcement of a new national lockdown, it is clear we need to redouble our efforts to ensure that people who sleep rough, who we know are vulnerable to this disease, are kept as safe as possible and that we do everything we can to protect the NHS.

As a result, I am launching an additional £10 million fund, as part of the over £700 million deployed this year, to help ensure even more rough sleepers are safely accommodated and will be asking that this opportunity is actively used to make sure all rough sleepers are registered with a GP, and are factored into local area

vaccination plans, in line with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) prioritisation for covid-19 vaccinations. In due course, those vaccination efforts will be simpler and more successful where rough sleepers are in safe accommodation.

This Government are committed to ending rough sleeping and we have taken huge steps working with local authorities and their partners to protect rough sleepers during the pandemic. This work has not stopped, and in November we had supported around 33,000 people with nearly 10,000 in emergency accommodation and over 23,000 already moved on into longer-term accommodation.

This work has had a huge impact; intelligence from local authorities indicates that numbers on the streets have fallen significantly. A recent study published by *The Lancet* showed that because of this response 266 deaths were avoided during the first wave of the pandemic among England's homeless population, as well as 21,092 infections, 1,164 hospital admissions and 338 admissions to intensive care units.

These efforts have been backed by significant Government support. We have given councils over £4.6 billion in unringsfenced grants to help them to manage the impacts of covid-19, which we have been clear includes their work to support rough sleepers.

We have also been in close contact with councils to develop plans for the coming months, supported by the £266 million Next Steps Accommodation Programme which aims to ensure that as few people as possible return to the streets. This includes bringing forward 3,300 new homes this year for rough sleepers, leaving a national legacy of this Government's support for these individuals.

In addition, to prepare for winter months, we launched a £10 million cold weather fund for all local authorities to bring forward covid-secure accommodation this winter and to keep vulnerable people safe from the cold. This is accompanied by a £2 million transformation fund for the voluntary sector, as well as comprehensive guidance on reopening night shelters more safely, where not doing so would endanger lives.

With the introduction of national restrictions in November, we asked all local authorities to update their plans for rough sleepers to make sure they had somewhere safe to go over the winter. We provided targeted support through the Protect Programme to support local authorities with higher numbers of rough sleepers to meet the specific challenges they faced. In total, we are spending over £700 million in 2020-21 on homelessness and rough sleeping.

Despite the success of ongoing interventions, we know there are some people on the streets who have not engaged with that support, or have lost accommodation provided to them, which is why I have asked local authorities to make further efforts to accommodate all rough sleepers again, even those who have previously refused help.

The Government have asked local areas to ensure that vulnerable groups will be able to access the vaccine, when they fall into one of the JCVI priority groups, and this should include people experiencing rough sleeping. Local authorities should work with their local health

partners to ensure that—when they are prioritised—individuals experiencing homelessness are able to access the vaccine by other means if mainstream provision is unsuitable. This will help ensure that the wider health needs of people who sleep rough are addressed, supporting them now and for the future.

I encourage all relevant partners and local authorities to consider how they can best use the available support to protect the most vulnerable.

Ongoing protection for renters

Since the start of the pandemic, the Government have put in place unprecedented support to protect renters. Further legislation to extend protections for renters has come into force today, continuing to prevent bailiffs from attending residential premises to enforce a writ or warrant of possession except in the most egregious circumstances. This will ensure we continue to protect public health during the new period of national lockdown restrictions, at a time when the risk of virus transmission is very high, and to avoid placing additional burdens on the NHS and local authorities.

The measure contains some exemptions for the most serious cases. These exemptions are for:

cases where the court is satisfied that the claim is against trespassers who are persons unknown;

cases where the court is satisfied that the order for possession was made wholly or partly on the grounds of antisocial behaviour, nuisance or false statements, domestic abuse in social tenancies or substantial rent arrears equivalent to six month's rent; or

where the property is unoccupied and the court is satisfied that the order for possession was made wholly or partly on the grounds of death of the tenant.

Many landlords have been compassionate and shown huge forbearance for tenants over this period. However, in order to ensure that the restrictions do not disproportionately impact landlords, some of whom rely on rental income for their livelihoods, we have amended the rent arrears exemption from the earlier regulations, to apply in cases where there are six months' rent arrears or more. Recognising the need for landlords to be able to access justice in cases such as this, the Government have amended the rent arrears exemption to apply in cases where there are six months' rent arrears or more.

This legislation will be in place for at least six weeks, when it will be reviewed and consideration taken to the latest public health data. The legislation applies to England only.

These continued restrictions on bailiff enforcement build on protections for renters announced last year, including six-month notice periods until at least the end of March for all but the most serious cases. This means that renters served notice today can stay in their homes until July 2021, with time to find alternative support or accommodation.

Courts will continue to remain open throughout the new period of national lockdown restrictions. The court rules and procedures introduced in September to respond to the pandemic remain in place and will be regularly reviewed. This includes the requirement for landlords to send the court information about the impact the pandemic

has had on their tenant. The judiciary will continue to prioritise the most serious cases, such as antisocial behaviour or fraud.

In addition, the Government are piloting a new mediation service as part of the possession action process to support landlords and tenants to resolve disputes before a formal court hearing takes place. This new service will be free to use for tenants and landlords that agree to do so. We anticipate the pilot rolling out in February for six months. It will help more tenants at an early stage of the possession process, mitigating the risk of tenants becoming homeless and helping to sustain tenancies where possible.

We have taken action to prevent people getting into financial hardship by helping businesses to pay salaries, with the job retention scheme extended to the end of April, and boosted the welfare safety net by billions. This helps to ensure that tenants are able to pay their rent, minimising the impact on landlords. We strongly encourage all tenants to pay their rent and if they are having difficulty in doing so, they should have an early conversation with their landlord.

To further support landlords with buy to let mortgages, the mortgage holiday has been extended with applications open to 31 March 2021. Borrowers impacted by coronavirus that have not yet had a mortgage payment holiday will be entitled to a six-month holiday, and those that have already started a mortgage payment holiday will be able to top up to six months without this being recorded on their credit file.

Taken together, our package of protections for renters strikes the right balance between prioritising public health and supporting renters, while ensuring landlords can access and exercise their right to justice. This, along with the measures being announced today to step up the Government's ongoing support for rough sleepers and ensure their wider health needs are addressed, will safeguard the most vulnerable people across England through the national lockdown.

[HCWS694]

Leasehold, Commonhold and Ground Rents

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): The Government are committed to promoting fairness and transparency for homeowners and ensuring that consumers are protected from abuse and poor service.

Last week I announced the most significant set of reforms to how we hold property for at least 40 years and the beginning of even more fundamental change to English property law, through the widespread introduction of the commonhold tenure.

To deliver this, we will bring forward legislation in the upcoming session to set future ground rents to zero. This will be the first part of seminal two-part legislation to implement reforms in this Parliament.

Enfranchisement valuation and lease extensions

In 2017 the Government asked the Law Commission to review the legislation on leasehold enfranchisement, with the aim of making it easier, quicker and more cost-effective for leaseholders to buy their freehold or extend their lease.

The Law Commission have now completed this work and their findings are clear. Under the current system, too many leaseholders find the process for extending their lease or buying their freehold prohibitively expensive, too complex and lacking transparency. I am addressing this, addressing historic imbalance to ensure fairness for leaseholders, whilst taking account of the legitimate rights of freeholders. I will continue to ensure we meet this objective as we bring forward reforms.

The Government will reform the process of enfranchisement valuation leaseholders must follow to calculate the cost of extending their lease or buying their freehold. Taken together these measures could save leaseholders thousands of pounds, depending on the remaining term of their lease.

The Government will abolish marriage value, cap the treatment of ground rents at 0.1% of the freehold value and prescribe rates for the calculations at market value. The Government will also introduce an online calculator, further simplifying the process for leaseholds and ensuring standardisation and fairness for all those looking to enfranchise.

Existing discounts for improvements made by the leaseholder and for security of tenure will be retained, alongside a separate valuation methodology for low-value properties known as "section 9(1)". Leaseholders will also be able to voluntarily agree to a restriction on future development of their property to avoid paying "development value".

Leaseholders of houses can currently only extend their lease once at a "modern ground rent" for 50 years, compared to leaseholders of flats who can extend as often as they wish at a zero "peppercorn" ground rent for 90 years.

I am confirming that the Government will give leaseholders of all types of property the same right to extend their lease as often as they wish, at zero ground rent, for a term of 990 years. There will continue to be redevelopment breaks during the last 12 months of the original lease or the last five years of each period of 90 years of the extension, subject to existing safeguards and compensation.

We will also enable leaseholders, where they already have a long lease, to buy out the ground rent without the need to extend the term of the lease.

Commonhold

In 2017 the Government also asked the Law Commission to recommend reforms to reinvigorate commonhold as a workable alternative to leasehold, for both existing and new homes.

Having closely reviewed their report, I am confirming I will establish a new Commonhold Council as a partnership of industry, leaseholders and Government that will prepare homeowners and the market for the widespread take-up of commonhold. I will start this work immediately, including considering legislation. I know this will take time and close working with consumers and industry, and the Commonhold Council will be the critical first step of this.

Restricting future ground rents

Finally, ahead of legislating to restrict future ground rents to zero for future leases, I am also confirming that this policy now also applies to retirement properties. Restricting future ground rents to zero is a basic matter

of fairness and including retirement properties will ensure that those who live in retirement housing benefit from the same reform as other leaseholders.

I do not see a compelling argument to exclude the elderly from this new protection, in fact, they deserve it more than most.

In recognition of the previous announcement of the ground rent exemption in June 2019, and wishing to mitigate potential impact on these developers, commencement of this provision will be deferred and come into force (for retirement properties) 12 months after Royal Assent.

This announcement is the beginning of a programme of historic leasehold and property reforms. This package is only part of Government's response to the Law Commission's reports. The Government will respond to the Law Commission's remaining recommendations on enfranchisement, commonhold and right to manage in due course. We will translate these measures into law as soon as possible, starting with legislation to set future ground rents to zero in the upcoming Session. This will be the first part of major two-part legislation to implement leasehold and commonhold reforms in this Parliament.

It is my ambition that together these fundamentally enhance the fairness of English property rights and be seen in the future as landmark reforms to the way we own homes.

[HCWS695]

TRANSPORT

International Travel

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Robert Courts): Last week the Prime Minister announced that the Government had made the difficult but necessary decision to introduce a new national lockdown.

Both globally and domestically we are seeing significant increases in levels of coronavirus, including the emergence of worrying new strains. It is therefore imperative that we ensure we are doing all we can to protect travel, reduce the risk of imported infections, including from new variants, and protect our NHS while national lockdown and vaccinations take effect.

We already have strong safeguards in place, including a requirement for mandatory 10-day self-isolation for the vast majority of arrivals, and our travel corridors system remains critical in managing the risk of imported cases from high-risk countries. We also successfully launched the test to release scheme last month which provides passengers with the option to reduce self-isolation, through isolating for five days after they have left a destination not on the travel corridors list and then taking a test. Pre-departure testing does not remove the public health need for international arrivals travelling from non-exempt countries to isolate for 10 days or opt into test to release.

However, as a result of increasing instances of covid-19 around the world, including the emergence of new variants, we are now taking additional steps to add a further layer of protection to safeguard public health.

From 4 am on 15 January we will be introducing pre-departure testing requirements for all inbound passengers to England. Passengers arriving by ship,

plane or train will have to take a test up to three days before departure and provide evidence of a negative result before they travel.

This will be an additional requirement that applies to all passengers, including those travelling from a travel corridor country, other than those on a very short list of exemptions. This extra layer of protection is in addition to existing self-isolation requirements.

We will establish the standards that tests must meet in regulations. This will include that the test must be of a diagnostic-standard test such as a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, and could in some cases include LAMP and lateral flow tests within set limits. We will provide clear guidance and advice to passengers regarding testing standards and capacity.

Guidance will be available to passengers and carriers on what to look for to assure tests and the results provided meet the standards required.

We will keep test standards and innovative testing technologies under review.

In addition, we will also set out the information passengers will need to have with them at check-in and the UK border to show they have had a qualifying negative test. This will include set data fields which test result certificates must include. All information on test requirements will be made available to passengers and transport operators through guidance on gov.uk.

The current advice for those across the UK remains that you must stay at home and not travel abroad unless it is for a permitted exempt reason. The requirements apply equally to visitors from other states and British nationals, and carriers may deny boarding if passengers are not in receipt of a qualifying negative test. British nationals that need consular assistance should contact the nearest consulate, embassy or high commission.

If British nationals test positive for covid-19 while abroad they should not travel and should follow the local relevant guidance on self-isolation.

Transport operators will be required to check that a passenger has proof of a negative test result before they board their flight, train or ferry, and may deny boarding where appropriate to reduce numbers of non-compliant individuals arriving in England. Border Force will also conduct further checks upon arrival.

If a passenger arrives in England without a pre-departure negative test result they will be fined. We will amend the international travel regulations so that fines, starting at £500, can be levied on non-compliant passengers. Operators will also be fined for transporting non-compliant passengers.

Passengers travelling to England from the common travel area (the United Kingdom, Ireland, Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey), will not be in scope of the regulations.

Children under the age of 11 will also not be required to complete pre-departure testing.

There will be a very restricted number of exemptions, including hauliers to allow the free flow of freight, and air, international rail and maritime crew.

Certain limited reasonable excuses for not undergoing testing will also be permitted, for example, lack of testing infrastructure in the departure country. This will apply to three overseas territories—St Helena, Ascension Island and the Falklands.

Arrivals from three additional countries will be considered to have a reasonable excuse not to comply due to lack of testing infrastructure. However, for these countries this will only apply for a specific, time limited window. This includes:

Antigua and Barbuda—until Thursday 21 January 04.00

St Lucia—until Thursday 21 January 04.00

Barbados—until Thursday 21 January 04.00

If passengers are arriving from one of the above three countries after the time limited window has ended, they will be required to meet all pre-departure testing requirements.

Further details on exemptions and reasonable excuses will be set out in regulations and in guidance. We will keep exemptions and reasonable excuses under regular review.

We will be making detailed guidance available to both passengers and transport operators to support the implementation of these changes.

Measures are likely to be in place until the end of the current lockdown, although a review will take place before the end of that period.

The Government recognise the continued challenges that the pandemic poses, both for individuals and for businesses.

We have worked closely with the international travel sector during the course of the pandemic and will continue to do so as we emerge from lockdown and are able to encourage people to travel again with confidence. We are also continuing to implement recommendations set out in the global travel taskforce report to support the safe recovery of international travel.

The delivery of a safe, effective vaccine is also the best way to protect the most vulnerable, save thousands of lives and support the removal of many of the restrictions and return to international travel. We are already making great progress, including having currently vaccinated more people than the rest of Europe combined.

In the immediate term our priority has to be on safeguarding public health and the NHS. With the addition of pre-departure testing requirements, our already robust system to protect against imported cases of coronavirus is further strengthened and will provide the greatest overall protection against the risk of transmission during travel to England and after arrival.

[HCWS696]

Petitions

Monday 11 January 2021

OBSERVATIONS

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Binley Woods local pharmacy

The petition of residents of the constituency of Rugby,

Declares that the local pharmacy in Binley Woods is a lifeline and hub to more than 3,000 residents; and further that it is deplorable that NHS England and NHS Improvement, midlands region, have decided to remove the local pharmaceutical services (LPS) contract from the pharmacy.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to work with NHS England and reverse this decision, and to ensure that the pharmacy can continue to provide medical, wellbeing and social care for both the young and elderly population within Binley Woods and the adjacent villages.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented by Mark Pawsey, Official Report, 2 December 2020; Vol. 685, c. 377.*]

[P002631]

Observations from The Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, (Jo Churchill):

To be able to provide NHS pharmaceutical services, a community pharmacy must either be included in the pharmaceutical list, which means a standard pharmacy contract is in place, or have been commissioned under a local pharmaceutical services (LPS) contract. Decisions, on inclusion in the pharmaceutical list or to commission LPS contracts, are a matter for NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE-I). The Department of Health and Social Care does however work in partnership with NHSE-I and local authorities to ensure that the legislation and commissioning bodies continue to ensure patient access to pharmaceutical services, as is required by the National Health Service Act 2006.

The local pharmacy in Binley Woods currently holds an LPS contract. LPS contracts are commissioned locally and designed to allow a pharmacy to deliver specific services for their local population and customers. Such contracts are often put in place where the number of prescription items that a pharmacy dispenses is not high enough to support a standard pharmacy contract, but where a specific need for the local population has been identified.

The LPS contract held by the local pharmacy in Binley Woods expired on 31 March 2020. The pharmacy was then given six months' notice to terminate. In September 2020, the pharmacy applied for an extension to the LPS contract but did not provide evidence of specific needs in the local population to provide the additional services that NHSE-I would expect to see under an LPS contract. The decision by NHSE-I not to extend the contract was not appealed by the pharmacy. Instead, the pharmacy has now applied to be included in the pharmaceutical list. NHSE-I have extended

the LPS contract until 28 February 2021 to enable the processing of the application for inclusion in the pharmaceutical list. This application, if approved, would enable the pharmacy to continue to provide community pharmacy services under a standard pharmacy contract.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Drainage works in Shiplake

The petition of residents of the constituency of Henley,

Declares that there is considerable concern about the increased impact of flooding in the village of Shiplake as a result of the actions being taken by Taylor Wimpey in relation to a development at Thames Farm; further declares that the developers are increasing the flood risk by filling in sink holes and injecting these areas with a grout-like substance to reinforce them which makes the chalk less porous; further that the developers are diverting floodwater to a brook in Flood Zone 3 in the village via a new pumping station at the north-eastern corner of the site; and notes that this petition is presented on behalf of two individuals of the village of Shiplake whose corresponding online petition has been signed by some 999 signatories.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government, in particular the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, to request South Oxfordshire District Council to ask Taylor Wimpey to submit a Material Variation Application because the change in the drainage solution is such a major departure from the original approved scheme, and to encourage public consultation as part of the approval of the drainage works, and to look at the change as a material variation in application.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented by John Howell, Official Report, 8 December 2020; Vol. 685, c. 804.*]

[P002636]

Observations from The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher):

The Government national planning policy framework (NPPF) is clear that inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development to areas at lower risk. Where development in a high-risk area is necessary, sufficient measures should be taken to make sure homes are safe, resilient and protected from flooding and do not increase flood risk elsewhere.

The appropriate place to identify flood-risk areas is in the strategic flood risk assessment which should inform the development of plan policies to manage flood risk from all sources, taking account of advice from flood risk management bodies and technical input from expert bodies such as the Environment Agency (EA), lead local flood authorities (LLFA) and water and sewerage companies.

A site-specific flood risk assessment (SSFRA) should also accompany all planning applications in flood risk areas. The assessment should identify all flood risks, to and from the development, and demonstrate how these will be managed, so that the development will be safe and not increase flood risk elsewhere.

The decision on a planning application is for the planning authority to take as the decision taker in the first instance in accordance with the development plan, having weighed up all the material planning considerations, including advice received from flood risk management bodies and any SSFRA. Local councils should notify the Environment Agency of the decision on any planning application where the agency has objected on flood risk grounds.

The Government note the petition requests the submission of a material variation application for the development in question. Local planning authorities act independently of central Government and the Government has no power to request that developers submit such an application. An application can be made under section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to vary or remove conditions associated with a planning permission. One of the uses of a section 73 application is to seek a minor material amendment, where there is a relevant condition that can be varied. There is no statutory requirement to consult on the variation of a condition, but local planning authorities have discretion in whether they choose to seek the views of interested parties on such applications.

The Government are committed to building the homes the country needs but we are clear that appropriate planning is required to ensure that new homes are sustainable, safe and resistant to flooding. We are reviewing our policy for building in areas at flood risk, this will seek to ensure that communities across the country know that future development will be safe from floods. We will assess whether current protections in the NPPF are enough and consider options for further reform, which will inform our wider ambitions for a new planning system.

Proposed housing development in Lidsing

The petition of residents of the constituency of Gillingham and Rainham,

Declares that the proposal in Maidstone Borough Council's local plan review for up to 2,000 homes at Lidsing, which borders Hempstead in the constituency of Gillingham and Rainham, would negatively impact local infrastructure and green spaces; and further that the building of this proposal would be detrimental to road capacity, school place availability and local GP services for the local residents of Hempstead and the surrounding areas.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to take into account the concerns of the petitioners and take action to ensure that the 2,000 home Lidsing proposal in Maidstone Borough Council's plan does not go ahead.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Rehman Chishti, *Official Report*, 9 December 2020; Vol. 685, c. 946.]

[P002638]

Observations from The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher):

The Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government has a quasi-judicial role in the planning system so the Government cannot comment on the detail of individual local plans for reasons of propriety.

This includes the merits or otherwise of particular proposals in a draft plan. However, I am able to inform on factual elements such as the stage a local plan is at and provide general comments.

I understand that the Maidstone local plan review was open for consultation from 1 December 2020 until 8 January 2021. According to the Council's timetable there will also be further opportunities to make representations on the plan in a Regulation 19 consultation scheduled for June 2021 prior to its submission for examination at the end of this year.

Councils can only adopt a plan that is sound, it must conform with national policy, be supported by evidence and take the views of local people into account. Each plan is subject to a public examination in front of an independent Inspector, who plays an important role in examining plans impartially to ensure that they are legally compliant and sound.

Anyone who has submitted a representation during the consultation on the draft plan may make a request to be heard by the inspector during the examination. It is for the inspector to decide who will be invited to appear at the hearing sessions.

The national planning policy framework is clear that a plan must include strategic policies to address each local planning authority's priorities for the development and use of land in its area. Strategic policies should make sufficient provision for infrastructure for transport, waste management, water supply, and community facilities such as health and education.

Having an effective, up-to-date plan in place is essential to planning for and meeting housing requirements, in ways that make good use of land and result in well-designed and attractive places to live. The Government expect local authorities to work together to plan for and deliver the housing and infrastructure our communities need.

TRANSPORT

Redirecting traffic from Cleveland Bridge

The petition of the residents of Bath,

Declares that Cleveland Bridge, a Grade II* listed structure, is unable to withstand vehicles over 18 tonnes as part of its function on the primary road network; further that interventions are now increasingly needed to preserve the structure for future generations, as the law requires; and further that the Government have set out in their road investment strategy that the A350 corridor could be used as the main north-south strategic route from the south coast to the M4.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to bring forward urgent work to adopt the A350 corridor as the main route from the south coast to the M4, and to consider redirecting east-west traffic from the A4 and Bristol, to the A420 north of the city, thereby protecting Cleveland Bridge from heavy freight traffic and enabling a reduced weight limit.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Wera Hobhouse, *Official Report*, 10 December 2020; Vol. 685, c. 1100.]

[P002637]

Observations from The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton):

The Government are taking action to invest to improve England's local highway infrastructure, of which Cleveland Bridge is part. Without this investment in local roads, delays and disruption occur for the travelling public and businesses.

Cleveland Bridge repairs have been funded with £3.56 million from the Department for Transport. Works should begin in May or June of 2021, subject to the backing of Bath and North East Somerset council members, some of who share local concerns about the impact of HGVs on routes through Bath if the 18 tonne weight restriction is removed when the bridge is repaired.

The bridge provides a link between the A46 and A36 roads that approach either side of Bath and forms part of an important through route between the Dorset coast and the M4. Any long-term solution for reducing

the impact of traffic at the bridge will need to acknowledge and respond to this sensitive and deeply-valued setting in relation to the natural, built and historic environment.

The unsatisfactory nature of the A36/A46 route passing Bath has long been acknowledged. The present dualled A4/A46 trunk road, the Batheaston bypass, was opened in 1996, but proposals to link the A4 to the A36 at Bathampton were rejected following a public inquiry.

The second road investment strategy committed Highways England to carrying out a strategic study that will review north-south connections between the M4 and the Dorset coast, including a review of the case for adopting the A350 corridor as the main strategic route in place of the A36/A46 via Bath, and will consider the case for trunking or de-trunking of key routes.

Highways England and officials in the Department for Transport will engage with a range of local stakeholders as the study develops. The Government encourage all those involved to continue working closely with the Council to ensure these important works can be undertaken.

Ministerial Correction

Monday 11 January 2021

WORK AND PENSIONS

Draft Chemicals (Health and Safety) and Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) etc. Regulations 2020

The following is an extract from the Eleventh Delegated Legislation Committee on the draft Chemicals (Health and Safety) and Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020.

Mims Davies: As for HSE finances for the 2020-21 financial year, an additional **£6.1** million was made available by the DWP, and £4.5 million was made available from

DEFRA, to prepare for the new chemicals framework. *[Official Report, 9 December 2020, Eleventh Delegated Legislation Committee, c. 8.]*

Letter of correction from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies), the hon. Member for Mid Sussex.

An error has been identified in my response to the debate.

The correct response should have been:

Mims Davies: As for HSE finances for the 2020-21 financial year, an additional **£1.6** million was made available by the DWP, and £4.5 million was made available from DEFRA, to prepare for the new chemicals framework.

ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 11 January 2021

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**not later than
Monday 18 January 2021**

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