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HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 23 February 2021

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# House of Commons

*Tuesday 23 February 2021*

*The House met at half-past Eleven 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

### HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### **Covid-19: Isolation Support**

**Kim Johnson** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the adequacy of isolation support for people who have tested positive for covid-19. [912264]

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the adequacy of isolation support for people who have tested positive for covid-19. [912272]

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the adequacy of isolation support for people who have tested positive for covid-19. [912293]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill)**: The Government have put together a range of measures to support people through the current crisis. These include Test and Trace support payments for those on low incomes, support for renters, help with utilities, the £500 million local authority hardship grant, the £170 million covid winter grant scheme and a £7.4 billion package of additional welfare support in 2021. The Government keep all elements of their covid response under review, as is right, to support people.

**Kim Johnson** [V]: I thank the Minister for providing that information, but the lack of financial support to those self-isolating has resulted in an extremely low adherence rate. Seventy per cent. of those who apply for financial support are rejected. Will the Government consider increasing funding to cash-strapped local authorities to ensure that people have the financial means to self-isolate to control the spread of the virus?

**Jo Churchill**: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. We are continuing to work across Departments and with local authorities to monitor the effectiveness of the self-isolation support provided to people who have tested positive, their close contacts and their families. She is right that we continually look at this to ensure that we have the correct information. Currently, with NHS Test and Trace, we are carrying out surveys of reported

compliance with self-isolation for people who have tested positive. The results are not published yet, but we have a clear set of parameters and the funding has been allocated to councils to assist with discretionary grants. Those are local decisions, and I have often heard it said that decisions should be local, but I ask her to wait until my right hon. Friend the Chancellor reports during the Budget next week on what additional support we will be giving.

**Imran Hussain** [V]: Last November, I wrote to the Health Secretary to raise a number of serious concerns that have been raised with me by many of my constituents who are unable to claim their self-isolation support payment because of failings with the privately run Test and Trace system. Three months later, I have still not had a response. We all know how keen the Health Secretary is to avoid scrutiny of the contracts that his Department have issued, but he cannot bury his head in the sand and pretend that these problems do not exist. Can I get an assurance from the Minister that I will get a response and that the problems that I have raised will be addressed?

**Jo Churchill**: The Health Secretary has assured me that he has seen the hon. Gentleman's letter. It is important that people understand that they need to self-isolate and they are given the right assistance. This is why the discretionary payments have been made to councils, so that we can make those decisions locally to support people.

**Mr Speaker**: Let us head up to Bolton, to Yasmin Qureshi. [Interruption.] No, we cannot, so we will go first to shadow Minister Justin Madders.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): The Government's road map yesterday said:

"While self-isolation is critically important to halting the spread of the disease, it is never easy for those affected."

We agree with that. We have been making that point for months, along with most of the expert advisers in the Government, which is why creating a scheme that only one in eight people qualify for was never going to work. Will the Minister tell us why, despite yesterday's announcement, it is still the case that only one in eight people who test positive will actually qualify for a self-isolation payment?

**Jo Churchill**: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. It is important that we have targeted support and that we support the people who need assistance, so that they can self-isolate. It is, exactly as I outlined in my first answer, what we have been doing, and as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday, we will continue to look after people through the pandemic. Our undertaking is to make sure that we protect people, whether they are self-isolating or unable to work for other reasons, such as shielding, throughout the duration of the pandemic. The hon. Gentleman will be hearing much more about that from the Chancellor next week during the Budget.

**Mr Speaker**: Let us try Yasmin Qureshi again.

**Yasmin Qureshi** [V]: Thank you, Mr Speaker. My constituent, a shop worker, has a daughter who was sent home from school to isolate. She will not get paid,

will not get sick pay and is worried about losing her job. She needs money to put food on the table for her family. Will the Minister tell the Chancellor that we cannot keep the infection rate down if people are not given adequate financial support?

**Jo Churchill:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I would also like to point out that, in her area, 93% of cases are being tracked and people are being spoken to, which highlights the great work that is being done on the ground locally in that area. We are providing support, and I would urge her constituent to reach out to the council, because it is important that we give people the support they need in order to isolate. As I say, she will be hearing more on that subject from the Chancellor during the Budget next week.

### Public Health England

**Paul Maynard** (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): What plans he has to reform the public health improvement functions of Public Health England. [912265]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill):** We are currently considering the best future arrangements for Public Health England's important health improvement functions. We have been engaging with key stakeholders throughout the process and will be setting out further details of our approach in due course. We are excited about creating the national institute for health protection to ensure additional capacity so that we have future capability and a laser-like focus on areas of health inequality.

**Paul Maynard** [V]: I very much welcome the plans to reform Public Health England's health protection functions, and I note with interest the Secretary of State's new powers of direction in some public areas, such as obesity. Blackpool has some of the most severe public health challenges in the country. Further discussions about the health promotion functions of Public Health England were promised when the NIHP was announced, so can the Minister say now how other areas of public health promotion that are not referred to in the White Paper will be addressed?

**Jo Churchill:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question, and I recognise the challenges that Blackpool faces. I read with interest the Blackpool town prospectus, which highlights the public health challenges, and I am looking forward to talking to the clinical commissioning group lead about them later this week. We remain convinced that place-based approaches will have the best results, where we can target interventions in the right way when they are needed. I think my hon. Friend is alluding to other areas such as work, housing and so on. Discussions are going on with other Departments, but those specific initiatives are for those Departments themselves. As the details of the national institute for health protection are outlined, these things will become clearer. I know my hon. Friend cares deeply about his constituents and their health, and I look forward to working with him and others in the future.

### Mental Health Legislation

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to reform mental health legislation. [912266]

**The Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health (Ms Nadine Dorries):** On 13 January, we published a White Paper on reforming the Mental Health Act 1983, setting out proposals to make the Act work better for people. We have launched a 14-week consultation, during which we are inviting views from the public, professionals, service users and carers to ensure that we get this once-in-a-generation opportunity right.

**John Howell** [V]: I am delighted that my hon. Friend is taking steps to bring mental health laws into the 21st century, not least because they are 40 years old. Can I take this opportunity to pay tribute to Sir Simon Wessely, who produced his independent review of the Mental Health Act in 2018? Can my hon. Friend confirm that the Government will be accepting many of his recommendations?

**Ms Dorries:** I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend, and I would also like to pay tribute to Sir Simon and his co-chairs for their comprehensive work. The Secretary of State said in the House last year that

“the Wessely review is one of the finest pieces of work on the treatment of mental ill health that has been done anywhere in the world.”—[*Official Report*, 23 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 1164.]

I know that the review was welcomed by hon. and right hon. Members across the House. We are taking forward the vast majority of Sir Simon's 154 recommendations, either directly or by advancing the principles put forward by the review. The White Paper document contains the Government's response to each of the recommendations.

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): The overhaul of the Mental Health Act has been long awaited. People have to be at the heart of the legislation, and that includes staff. The promises that the Secretary of State has made rely on a workforce: our fantastic frontline mental health staff, of which there are simply too few at present. I asked him last month to outline when we would get the workforce settlement and what reassurance he could give on filling the training places. We are still waiting for an answer. Would the Minister like to answer now?

**Ms Dorries:** Work is under way; Health Education England is looking at proposals, particularly for the training of mental health workers. I wish to highlight one area where we can see that happening rapidly: in the mental health support teams that are going into schools. People are coming out of universities with their degree and going through a year's training so that we can get them into schools faster to work with children and young people. The hon. Lady is right; the mental health workforce is at the heart of these reforms. I assure her that we have seen an increase in the number of people applying to be mental health nurses—and nurses across the healthcare estate—and that will have a knock-on effect on the number of people we have working on the wards with people who have severe mental illness.

### Covid-19 Vaccination Programme

**Mr Richard Holden** (North West Durham) (Con): What progress has been made on the covid-19 vaccination programme. [912267]

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock):** I am delighted that on 14 February we hit our target of vaccinating 15 million people across the UK and now more than 17.7 million people—one in three adults in the country—have been vaccinated. The NHS is delivering more than 250 vaccinations every minute, on average, and we are vaccinating at a greater weekly rate than anywhere else in Europe.

**Mr Holden:** The Government's vaccine programme, procurement and roll-out has been described as "world-beating". Those are not my words, but those of the Public Accounts Committee, which has Scottish National party, Labour and Lib Dem Members on it. Will the Secretary of State just clarify the link between the vaccine programme and the road map, because it is the return to normality, as far as is possible, that we want to see as soon as possible?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to make this link, because not only are the vaccines important to keep each individual safe—we saw wonderful data yesterday about how effective they are at reducing hospitalisations and deaths—but the vaccination programme is crucial to the road map out of this pandemic. It is only because of the success of the vaccine programme that we are able to set out the road map in this way. The vaccine is good for the individual, but it is also good for all of us, because by taking a vaccine people are helping to protect themselves and helping all of us to get out of this pandemic situation.

**Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]:** The provision of insufficient doses for care home staff to be vaccinated at the same time as elderly residents may have contributed to the fact that only two thirds have been immunised. As well as the convenience, the solidarity of being vaccinated with colleagues has helped to encourage uptake of 94% in Scotland. Will the Secretary of State ensure that staff can get vaccinated when second doses are delivered to care homes?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, when the vaccination programme goes to a care home, vaccines are offered both to residents and to staff, of course. We want to support the ability of more and more people to access the vaccine, and that includes care home staff. People who work in a care home can now go to the national vaccination site and book themselves an appointment. Alternatively, when we go to give the second dose to residents, any staff who have not yet taken up the opportunity of a vaccine will have the offer of getting going on the programme. I hope that care home staff and NHS staff across the board will listen to the words of the chief medical officer, who said that it is the "professional responsibility" of people who work in care settings to get vaccinated. It is the right thing to do.

**Dr Whitford:** More vaccine-resistant strains, such as the South African variant, could risk undermining the UK's vaccine programme. As they could come via any country, does the Secretary of State not agree that all travellers should undergo strict quarantine?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes, I do. All those who arrive in this country as passengers need to undergo quarantine, and we have both the hotel quarantine and home quarantine; all need to be tested; and all the positive test results are

sent for sequencing so that we can spot any new variants. This is a critical part of our national defences. The good news is that we can see from the data that the number of new variants in the country is falling and is much lower than it was last month. We obviously keep a very close eye on that, because making sure that we do not have a new variant that cannot be beaten by the vaccine is a critical part of the road map, as set out by the Prime Minister yesterday.

**Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab):** The Prime Minister promised that all staff in elderly care homes would be vaccinated by the end of January. Will the Secretary of State confirm that more than 30% of those staff in England have not been vaccinated, and that the proportion rises to almost half of all staff in elderly care homes in London? Will he urgently set out precisely how the Government will increase uptake and tackle lies and misinformation about the vaccine among this vital group of workers, as we have been urging the Minister for Care to do since before Christmas?

**Matt Hancock:** Yes. We are absolutely all on the same side on this issue. To be totally clear for the hon. Lady, and all those listening, the Prime Minister set out that we would offer the vaccine to all residents of care homes by the end of January and to all staff by 15 February, and we achieved that. The challenge is uptake. Rather than having a political ding-dong about it, what we all need to do is get out the positive messages about the vaccination programme. I am delighted that the Minister for Care and the Minister for Covid Vaccine Deployment have both been working incredibly hard on this issue, and we published an uptake plan last weekend. I am sure the hon. Lady will want to join the efforts to try to encourage everybody to get the jab.

#### **Covid-19: Dental Services**

**John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP):** What steps his Department is taking to support dental services during the covid-19 pandemic. [912268]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill):** We are committed to supporting all NHS dental services through the pandemic. NHS practices receive full funding for the first three quarters of the year, minus agreed deductions in England, and NHS dental contractors will continue to be supported while they meet reduced activity targets. NHS England and Public Health England continue to communicate regular updates, enabling practitioners to prioritise urgent care and reduce waiting times in what are challenging circumstances.

**John Mc Nally [V]:** The British Dental Association has raised concerns that punitive financial penalties for not meeting the Government's unrealistic activity targets are pushing NHS dentists in England to prioritise quick check-ups rather than catching up on the backlog of more time-consuming symptomatic cases. Will the Minister consider a more realistic approach to service recovery and commit to reforming the dental contract in England so as to promote preventive dental care in future?

**Jo Churchill:** As anybody will know, I have been heavily engaged with the dental profession over recent months, because I agree that a preventive approach to dentistry is certainly one that we need to be moving

towards. The activity target is expected to increase availability for patients, who are the important part of the equation. It is important that we support the profession but enable patients to have access and reduce waiting times and backlogs. The target is based on careful modelling—on data—and takes into account guidance on infection prevention and control and social distancing measures. We recognise that there may be exceptional circumstances, which is why there are exceptions to the target level. NHS commissioners have the discretion to deal with exceptions and support dental practices. I have a meeting with everyone again on Thursday.

### Health Infrastructure Plan: District Hospitals

**Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con):** What steps he is taking to ensure that improvement work on district hospitals is taken forward under the health infrastructure plan. [912269]

**The Minister for Health (Edward Argar):** Alongside our investment in 40 new hospitals, our health infrastructure plan more broadly will deliver a long-term rolling programme of investment in health infrastructure, including our vital district hospitals—I know that my hon. Friend's constituents are well served by the Hospital of St Cross. Hospitals have benefited from more than £600 million of critical infrastructure risk funding, including for district hospitals, and will shortly receive their capital allocations for the forthcoming financial year.

**Mark Pawsey [V]:** I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. As he says, it is entirely right to be investing in the new hospitals—the 40 new hospitals for our NHS. He referred to our brilliant local district hospital, St Cross. The past year has reminded us of the importance of a well-resourced local health service. How can we ensure that existing district hospitals doing great work, such as St Cross, continue to receive the investment they need?

**Edward Argar:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. May I join him in paying tribute to his local Hospital of St. Cross and the team who have done an amazing job in very challenging circumstances over the past year? I know that he is a strong champion of it and of his local NHS—I think I can recall him volunteering at the Locke House vaccine centre recently in support of his NHS. Of that critical infrastructure funding to which I referred, £2.2 million was allocated to his trust and local hospital. As I mentioned in my initial answer, we will be making further capital allocations shortly, which will benefit district hospitals, including his own.

### Long Covid

**Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to support people suffering from long covid. [912270]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill):** The Government are working hard to set up patient-focused, evidence-based and effective support for people with long covid. In October, NHS England and NHS Improvement announced a five-part package of measures, including the establishment of 69 multi-disciplinary assessment services. Last week, almost £20 million of research funding was committed

to helping identify the causes of long covid and the effective therapies to treat people who suffer from some of the chronic symptoms.

**Siobhan Baillie:** My constituent Emma Samms, the actress, has pulled together a reunion of the cast of “Dynasty” to add some glamour to fundraise for research into long covid. In Gloucestershire, we are also setting up a clinic. We clearly need to learn an awful lot more about the symptoms. Will my hon. Friend join me in praising those initiatives and continue to reassure us that we will provide full support to GPs, hospitals and patients for this awful disease?

**Jo Churchill:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question. I am delighted to join her in congratulating Emma, who I know is using her experience of having had covid to launch such an innovative fundraising idea. I already have a Dallas-style hairdo, because I have not been to the hairdressers for some months; I just need some shoulder pads. I thank her and all volunteers and fundraisers for their marvellous job in coming up with some really great ideas to support research.

### Care Homes: Family Visits

**Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab):** What steps he is taking to help enable face-to-face family visits to care homes. [912271]

**Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab):** What steps he is taking to help enable face-to-face family visits to care homes. [912285]

**The Minister for Care (Helen Whately):** Throughout the pandemic, we have had to strike a balance between protecting people from this cruel virus and social contact. Nowhere has this been harder than in care homes. That is why I am so pleased that, from 8 March, we will be enabling care homes to open up carefully to more visiting. Our guidance will set out how residents can have a named person for repeat visits, with testing and PPE so that those visits can be indoors. We look forward to enabling more visiting as soon as it is safe to do so.

**Emma Hardy [V]:** I welcome the new guidance on care home visits, but I am concerned about this phrase: “With the agreement of the care home.”

Does the Minister share my concern that that may allow some care homes to disagree with the guidance, therefore decide that the risk is too high and prevent the physical contact that residents in care homes are so desperate to have with their loved ones?

**Helen Whately:** The hon. Member makes an important point. We have been clear that we want to see care homes enabling visiting. We recognise that care homes are having to strike a balance between giving residents access to visitors and making sure that those residents are safe. Our guidance will provide further support to care homes on how they can make sure that those visits happen.

**Catherine West:** Care homes for older folk and disabled people are a basic human right. Given that care home residents—either in the care homes themselves or perhaps in hospital—account for a third of all deaths from covid, should the Government not be trying just a bit harder to provide the staffing that is often required for

those extra visits? When will the Government lay out their plan to address social care, which is so clearly lacking and has been promised for about 10 years now?

**Helen Whately:** The hon. Member is right to say that visiting at the moment involves extra staffing—for instance, staff to supervise visits and to support the testing that we will be bringing in with the new visiting guidance. We have already provided funding to the social care sector that can be used to support the cost of visiting, and there is additional funding for extra workforce costs.

### Covid-19 Vaccine Supply

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure an adequate supply of covid-19 vaccines. [912273]

**Dr Jamie Wallis** (Bridgend) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure an adequate supply of covid-19 vaccines. [912276]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Nadhim Zahawi):** The Government have secured early access to 457 million vaccine doses through agreements with eight separate vaccine developers. I assure the House that the Government are in constant contact with the vaccine manufacturers, and remain confident that we are on track to offer a vaccine to all priority cohorts by mid-April.

**Mike Wood** [V]: People like my constituent Ken in Dudley South have seen the European Commission threatening to ban vaccine exports to the UK, and are worried about whether they will be able to get their second dose. What assurances can my hon. Friend give to Ken and others like him that they will be able to get a second dose of the same vaccine within the specified time schedule?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** The vaccine taskforce—I pay tribute to Kate Bingham and Clive Dix, and to the brilliant civil servants who do the heavy lifting—has conducted a supply chain risk assessment and continues to monitor requirements across the supply chain, from supplier through to patient. We are in constant contact with the suppliers. The NHS is already reserving second doses. Last week, we began informing the frontline—primary care networks and others—of the second dose schedule. I can reassure my hon. Friend's constituents that if they have had a Pfizer first dose, they will get a Pfizer second dose within the 12 weeks; and if they have had an Oxford first dose, they will get an Oxford second dose within the 12 weeks.

**Dr Wallis** [V]: Will my hon. Friend confirm that Wales has been provided with enough supplies of vaccines to hit the targets set by the UK Government, particularly the 31 July target? Does he agree that, had we joined the EU's vaccine procurement programme, immunisations in Wales would be much further behind right now?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** We are working very closely with the Welsh Government and the other devolved Administrations to ensure that vaccines are allocated as per the Barnett formula. The Secretary of State has quite rightly reassured all the devolved Administrations that they will receive

the vaccines to be able to deliver on the targets that we have set. It is great to see that over 860,000 people have received their first dose in Wales. The pace of our vaccination programme means that we have administered more vaccines than any other European country.

### Adult Social Care Funding

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase funding for adult social care. [912274]

**The Minister for Care (Helen Whately):** During the pandemic, the Government have provided over £1.1 billion for infection control, £149 million for rapid testing costs and £120 million to boost the workforce in adult social care, and that is in addition to £4.6 billion to local authorities. For 2021-22, we are meeting our commitment to an annual uplift of £1 billion for social care and will provide councils with access to an additional £1 billion.

**Kevin Hollinrake** [V]: Does my hon. Friend agree that the best long-term funding solution for adult social care is a German-style social care premium?

**Helen Whately:** I agree that we need a sustainably funded social care system. I know that my hon. Friend is very well informed about the options. We are committed to taking forward social care reform, and will be publishing proposals later this year.

### Health Service Capital Estate

**Jo Gideon** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con): What progress his Department has made on improving the health service capital estate. [912275]

**Andrew Jones** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): What progress his Department has made on improving the health service capital estate. [912283]

**The Minister for Health (Edward Argar):** A total of £600 million has been allocated to tackle almost 1,800 urgent maintenance projects across 178 trusts, all due for completion by March 2012, while £450 million has been invested to upgrade A&E facilities, with funding awarded to over 120 trusts, and improve over 190 urgent treatment sites this winter. In addition, of course, the Prime Minister has confirmed that 40 new hospitals will be built by 2030, with an additional eight further schemes to be identified. Six of these are already under construction. With your permission, Mr Speaker, may I group this question with Question 21?

**Jo Gideon** [V]: NHS staff at Royal Stoke University Hospital in my constituency have been using the old Stoke Royal Infirmary site, which stopped delivering clinical services in 2012, for car parking. However, with the demolition of buildings on the site in readiness for the creation of many new houses, hospital staff really need the University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust's proposed plans for a multi-storey car park to come to fruition. Will the Minister ensure that the necessary investment is forthcoming for additional staff car parking facilities at Royal Stoke University Hospital to support our wonderful NHS staff and unlock this vital regeneration project for the people of Stoke-on-Trent?

**Edward Argar:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, who is a strong champion and a strong voice for Stoke and for her local hospital. The Government are committed to increasing hospital car parking capacity and supporting trusts to invest in their car parks. We will continue working with NHS England, as well as trusts such as her own, to understand the specific requirements. I understand that an emergency funding application by the Royal Stoke in this respect has been received and is currently being considered. However, I am always happy to discuss with her the specifics of the case she raises.

**Andrew Jones:** Harrogate District Hospital, which is an excellent hospital, will be reducing its carbon footprint by a quarter and making energy cost savings thanks to a £40 million Government grant, but the healthcare estate is much more than hospitals: it is also doctors' surgeries, specialised units and so on. What steps is my hon. Friend taking to ensure that the whole estate, whether large or small, is included in the decarbonisation investment programme?

**Edward Argar:** How could I have failed to remember to group my hon. Friend's question? I apologise to him. He is right to pay tribute to his local hospital in Harrogate. Zero carbon and environmental sustainability are key design criteria in our 40 hospitals programme, but it is also right, as he says, for that to flow throughout the NHS estate. The NHS's net zero report provides a detailed plan for decarbonising the whole NHS estate and services. In that context, there is already a range of action under way, including the £50 million NHS energy efficiency fund, which, as a small example, is upgrading lighting across all NHS buildings, big and small, to improve environmental sustainability.

#### **Covid-19: Health and Social Care Workforce**

**Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con):** What steps his Department is taking to support the health and social care workforce during the covid-19 outbreak. [912277]

**The Minister for Care (Helen Whately):** Our health and social care workers have been simply extraordinary during the pandemic, caring for people in the most challenging circumstances. We have done our utmost to support them every step of the way and we will continue to do so. We are recruiting extra staff and we are on track to have 50,000 more nurses in the NHS. We are funding things that help when working long hours, we are funding social care providers to provide full pay for staff who are isolating, and we have put in place a package of mental support for health and social care staff.

**Karl McCartney [V]:** I thank the Minister for that detailed answer. Ensuring that we take care of our NHS is critical, as I know here in Lincoln. Therefore, we must be at the forefront of fighting all aspects of this disease. At what stage did the Secretary of State and his officials become aware that vitamin D helped to fight covid symptoms for certain sections of our society, for how long was this information suppressed or ignored, what steps have subsequently been taken to take appropriate action, and what other drugs have also not been fully utilised so far, such as hydroxychloroquine?

**Helen Whately:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I can tell him that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence published a guideline on vitamin D for covid in December. Its expert panel supported current Government advice to take vitamin D supplements through the autumn and winter. However, there is insufficient evidence that taking vitamin D mitigates effects of covid-19. I can also say that hydroxychloroquine is not recommended or authorised for the treatment of covid outside of trials.

#### **Covid-19: Cancer Care and Treatment**

**Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on cancer care and treatment. [912278]

**Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab):** What recent assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on cancer care and treatment. [912286]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jo Churchill):** The tremendous efforts of our NHS cancer workforce are helping to ensure that those who need treatment can continue to access it without delay. The NHS has been clear, as have Ministers, since the beginning of the pandemic that continuation of urgent cancer care must be a priority. The NHS has established covid-secure cancer hubs, consolidated surgery, centralised triage to prioritise patients based on clinical need, and utilised the independent sector for capacity.

**Bambos Charalambous:** Staff at North Middlesex University Hospital have done an incredible job under difficult circumstances, delivering cancer care and treatment, but despite that the Government have acknowledged that more than 30,000 people are missing a diagnosis of cancer compared with 2019. With the cancer recovery plan due to expire at the end of March, can the Minister please set out her commitments to beat the backlog after March? How will a renewed cancer recovery plan help meet the ambitions for cancer care set out in the NHS long-term plan?

**Jo Churchill:** I am concerned, like the hon. Gentleman, about those who have not come forward and those who are not currently accessing treatment. I reassure him that once people do come forward, there is a speedy path to treatment. The numbers of those who are entering treatment, both on two weeks and on 31 days, is ahead of what it was at this time last year, and we are seeing enormous efforts by the cancer workforce. I am meeting this afternoon with the all-party parliamentary groups on radiotherapy and on cancer, and we will be discussing the recovery plan, which he is right to say goes to March. However, every single trust has been given a target to produce a plan for ongoing assessment of how it is addressing the backlog.

**Mick Whitley [V]:** Macmillan Cancer Support estimates that more than 40,000 people are missing a cancer diagnosis across England, including around 60 people in my constituency of Birkenhead. Behind each statistic is a family member and loved one whose prognosis and survival chances are being severely affected by the disruption caused by the pandemic. Can the Minister tell me what additional funding will be made available to ensure that missed cancer diagnoses are caught as soon as possible?

**Jo Churchill:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. The latest official data for December, as I say, suggests that two-week wait GP urgent referrals were 7% higher than for the same month last year, 62-day GP urgent referrals were 6.7% higher, and urgent referrals for cancer were 151% higher than in April, showing the month we were most impacted. As I say, we are straining every sinew to make sure that cancer services not only recover but go on and are better to deliver more care for patients.

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): Going into this pandemic, staff shortages were already causing increased waiting times for cancer treatment. Despite being short-handed, our wonderful NHS cancer staff have done a heroic job maintaining services while fighting this virus, but given the size of the backlog, cancer services will need to go above and beyond pre-pandemic levels for a significant period of time—straining every sinew, as the Minister says. They need extra resources to be able to do so. Next week's Budget must contain these resources. Has the Minister asked for them?

**Jo Churchill:** Cancer has been prioritised with funding throughout the pandemic. It is, as I say, a key priority. Not only have we invested in radiotherapy equipment to the tune of some £325 million but there is a £160 million initiative to provide covid-friendly cancer treatments that are safer for people. We still have the same objective in the long-term plan to diagnose more cancers early, and appropriate funding, such as the billion pounds targeted at the NHS to drive down cancer backlogs and to ensure that people can access care, is part of that strategy.

#### **Covid-19 Vaccination: Vulnerable Groups**

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): What estimate he has made of the level of covid-19 vaccination among (a) black and (b) white people in the most vulnerable groups. [912279]

**The Minister for Covid Vaccine Deployment (Nadhim Zahawi):** Overall, we are encouraged by the vaccine uptake in the most vulnerable groups, with more than 17.7 million people in the UK having now received their first vaccination. To date, black people, who account for around 3% of the population, make up 1.7% of those vaccinated, while white people, who account for 86% of the population, make up 82% of all those vaccinated in England. We appreciate that there is still work to do, and our vaccine uptake plan addresses that.

**Ms Abbott [V]:** Will the Minister speak to Public Health England and ensure that local directors of public health make this information and other information in relation to specific cohorts available at a borough level to local MPs? He will be aware that the danger is that we could be hitting our vaccination targets overall, but certain groups are left behind. Many local MPs want to have some transparency about what is happening locally.

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I am grateful for the right hon. Lady's question. She and I visited the Hatzola first responders, who did an incredible job that Saturday night of vaccinating 364 people from not only the Haredi Hasidic Jewish community but the Muslim

community as well. Our uptake plan has four key enablers: working in partnership with local government and directors of public health; removing barriers to access—in other words, access being available at the time and place that people need it; data and information, which we share with directors of public health, and we want to share it in more granular ways; and, of course, engagement, engagement, engagement.

#### **Liver Disease Treatment Pathways**

**Tracey Crouch** (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): What plans he has to improve liver disease treatment pathways. [912280]

**The Minister for Care (Helen Whately):** The NHS is working to improve care for patients with all types of liver disease. Development and improvement of clinical care is supported via NHS England's hepatobiliary clinical reference group. This clinical reference group has started work on the development of liver networks in England to enable quicker access to specialised liver services, as well as providing clinical advice on disease prevention and referral practice.

**Tracey Crouch [V]:** Liver disease has become one of the major causes of premature mortality in the UK, and covid has highlighted the susceptibility of people with liver disease to more serious cases of the virus. With that in mind, what plans does the Minister have to include improvements to liver care in the NHS recovery plan?

**Helen Whately:** Last autumn's spending review included £1 billion of funding to address backlogs, tackle long waiting lists and support up to 1 million extra checks, scans and additional operations in the NHS. As the NHS recovers, for liver care, as for other areas of treatment, we will look to not only make good the backlogs but continue to improve the care provided and help people to live healthier lives to prevent illness in the first place.

#### **Topical Questions**

[912559] **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock):** Yesterday, the Government published the road map that will put us cautiously but, we hope, irreversibly on the path towards reclaiming our freedoms once more. We are able to take these steps because of the resolve of people across the UK and the extraordinary success in vaccinating more than 17.7 million people—one in every three adults across the UK—and I would like to pay tribute to everyone who has played their part.

**Liz Twist [V]:** This coming Sunday is Rare Disease Day 2021. One in 17 people in the UK will be affected by a rare disease, and today people with PKU—phenylketonuria—are awaiting the outcome of a NICE appraisal of Kuvan, but 12 years waiting for Kuvan or other treatments is too long. Does the Secretary of State agree that our rare disease community deserves access to early diagnosis and treatment, and what will he do to make sure that this happens?

**Matt Hancock:** The hon. Lady is a long-standing and passionate campaigner for Kuvan, and I pay tribute to the work that she has done. The NICE methods review looks at the question she raises. It is important that we have a clinically led process for approval of medicines, and I know she agrees with that. The question is ensuring that the details live up to that principle. The methods review will make sure that we take advantage of advances in medical technology, which will, I hope, allow us to bring drugs and treatments to patients of rare diseases who need them more quickly than in the past.

**Jeremy Hunt** (South West Surrey) (Con) [V]: Can I add my support to the previous question about the urgent need to sort out the issue of Kuvan, because I too have constituents suffering very badly from the long wait that they have had?

I wanted to talk to the Secretary of State about support for NHS frontline staff, who have done such a magnificent job this year but worry that, even now, we are not training enough doctors and nurses for the long-term needs of the NHS, and that is the crucial way that we will reduce the pressure on them. Will he be publishing a workforce plan this year, will that have independent projections of the number of doctors and nurses the NHS will need in every specialty over the next couple of decades, and will he commit to funding the number of training places that we need to make sure that we meet those needs of the future?

**Matt Hancock:** The good news is that, thanks in part to the work that my right hon. Friend did when he was in my shoes, we now have a record number of doctors in the NHS, and he will have been as pleased as I was to see the record number of applicants to nursing places as well, because we need both more doctors and more nurses. I am delighted that, during the pandemic, we have increased numbers very substantially. We are on track to meet our manifesto commitment to 50,000 more nurses, and we have seen a significant increase—just under 10,000—in the number of doctors too, so there is significant progress. Of course there is more to be done, and of course we will need to set out the route to that, as he suggests. The time is not quite right now, because there are still very urgent needs and pressures, thanks to the pandemic—I am sure that he and the Select Committee understand that—but this is undoubtedly a question that we will return to.

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): Everybody knows—apart from the Secretary of State, it seems, from this morning's media—that there were PPE shortages. The National Audit Office reported on it, we saw nurses resorting to bin bags and curtains for makeshift PPE, hundreds of NHS staff died, and his response was to pay a pest control firm £59 million for 25 million masks that could not be used, to pay a hedge fund based in Mauritius £252 million, again for facemasks that were inadequate, and to pay a jeweller in Florida £70 million for gowns that could not be used. Will he take this opportunity to apologise, and will he commit to recovering every penny piece of taxpayers' money from those companies that provided us with duff PPE?

**Matt Hancock:** Well, I am going to start by congratulating the hon. Gentleman—the right hon. Gentleman—on his appointment to the Privy Council. I appreciate the work that he has done in support of the

Government and in support of the nation during this pandemic. Although occasionally he turns to rhetoric and narrow questions that he knows there are perfectly adequate answers to, he has generally during this pandemic, in the face of temptation—I mean this very genuinely—done the right thing and supported the right messages to people where they need to be made across party lines. So I congratulate him and thank him for that.

On the specifics of the question the right hon. Gentleman raised, of course, where a contract is not delivered against, we do not intend to pay taxpayers' money, but of course, also, we wanted to make sure that we got as much PPE as we could into the country. While of course there were individual instances that we all know about and that highlight how important it was to buy PPE, there was, as the National Audit Office has confirmed, no shortage at the national level, and that was because of the incredible work of my team and the amount of effort they put into securing the PPE and doing the right thing.

**Jonathan Ashworth:** I dare say the Secretary of State has just finished off my political career with that praise but, on the substance of the point, I think he confirmed that he will—[*Interruption.*] When did it start? [*Laughter.*] I think he was saying in that answer that he will not be trying to recover money that he has paid out for duff PPE, but can I ask him about a different issue, which again comes down to public scrutiny and accountability? In London, a week or a week and a half ago, GP services with 375,000 patients were taken over by the US health insurance corporation Centene. There was no patient consultation; there was no public scrutiny. This is arguably a stealth privatisation, with huge implications for patient care. Will he step in, halt the transfer, ensure it is fully scrutinised and prevent takeovers like this happening in the future?

**Matt Hancock:** On the right hon. Gentleman's first point, such a reasonable and sensible man is, of course, always welcome on these Benches, and I might ask, since his wife is taking the Labour party to court: why doesn't the whole Ashworth family come and join us on this side?

On the substantive point the right hon. Gentleman raises, of course what matters for patients is the quality of patient care. We have seen again and again, especially throughout the pandemic, that what matters to people is the quality of care. That is what we should look out for, and that is, I know, what doctors, nurses and other staff, in primary care and right across the board, are working so hard to deliver on.

[912560] **Robbie Moore** (Keighley) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Airedale hospital in my constituency is now over 50 years old and 83% of the building is constructed from aerated concrete, which is known for its structural deficiencies. It is great news that this Conservative Government will commit to funding eight new hospitals in addition to the 40, but may I make an urgent plea to my right hon. Friend that the Airedale hospital, given its high-risk profile, is considered as one of the final eight?

**Matt Hancock:** I think my hon. Friend has just made his heartfelt plea and it has certainly landed with me, but I am not surprised because he has made this case to me on behalf of his constituents over and over again

and he is quite right to. We are in the process of considering which hospitals will be in the eight additional, on top of the 40 that we committed to in our manifesto. I am grateful for his representations and we will certainly consider Airedale and its full needs for the local community.

[912562] **Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab) [V]: I wonder whether the Health Secretary would agree with me that coronavirus has not only changed many of the ways that we have to do our lives, but it is fundamentally going to have to change the whole structure of the NHS for the future. That means we are going to have to recruit more pathologists in this country for ourselves; we are going to have to have far more intensive care unit capacity; we are going to have to have UK manufacture not only of PPE but of vaccines if we are to be able to be self-reliant; we are going to have to have much better long-term rehabilitation for people with brain injuries; and we are going to have to have a complete review of our care homes, aren't we?

**Matt Hancock:** We will need to draw many lessons from the pandemic. For instance, my brilliant team who have done all this procurement of PPE have also built an onshore PPE manufacturing capability. With regard to almost all items of PPE, 70% of it is now made onshore in the UK, up from about 2% before the pandemic. Likewise for vaccines—we did not have large-scale vaccine manufacture and we now do—and for a host of other areas, including some of those that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

[912561] **Joy Morrissey** (Beaconsfield) (Con) [V]: With regard to the recent court ruling on the issuing of PPE contracts, will my right hon. Friend confirm that, as a result of the action taken by Health Department officials, NHS trusts did receive vital PPE, despite there being a global shortage?

**Matt Hancock:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The court ruling in question found that we were on average 17 days late with the paperwork, but it did not find against any of the individual contracts. My team worked so hard to deliver the PPE that was needed and so, as the National Audit Office has confirmed and as my hon. Friend set out, there was never a point at which there was a national shortage. There were, of course, localised challenges and we were in the situation of a huge increase in global demand, but I think that we should all thank the civil servants who did such a good job.

[912568] **Daisy Cooper** (St Albans) (LD) [V]: The Prime Minister's first test for easing restrictions is that the vaccine deployment continues successfully, yet GPs and pharmacists have been telling me for weeks and weeks and weeks in St Albans that they cannot get the vaccine supply that they desperately need. They could be vaccinating 14,000 people a week, but they are only getting the supplies for 1,000. Why is that and when will it be fixed?

**Matt Hancock:** As we have repeatedly explained, supply is the rate-limiting factor. The hon. Member will no doubt have seen that there have been international discussions on the rate of supply, and countries around the world are finding supply the rate-limiting factor.

Thankfully, thanks to the decisions that this Government took early, we have some of the best access to the supply of vaccine in the world. That is why we have one of the best vaccine delivery programmes in the world.

[912563] **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell) (Con) [V]: I congratulate my right hon. Friend again on the progress of the vaccination process. He should be proud of what he has achieved. The documents published yesterday about the road map did not appear to contain any assessment of the infection risk in individual settings, which could have demonstrated that there had been carefully informed decisions about the reasons for each individual restriction. Has that work been carried out? If so, will my right hon. Friend commit to publishing those assessments immediately?

**Matt Hancock:** Of course we assess this, but it is challenging to get to a statistical answer to the question that my right hon. Friend raises. When we have taken action to restrict access to areas where there is evidence of significant transmission, such as the hospitality industry, that confounds the statistical analysis because people cannot go into that environment and therefore the passing on of infection there is reduced. This is a matter of evidence and judgment. It is a significant challenge, but the road map is based on our best assessment of the situation, which is based on clinical advice, including the focus on the fact that we know that outdoors is safer than indoors. Hence the early steps, after schools, are focused on opening things up outdoors.

[912572] **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP) [V]: Opening up by date and not data, as described by the Prime Minister yesterday, will allow prevalence in the general population to continue, unfortunately increasing the number of people affected by long covid. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to ensure that proper financial support is available for those afflicted by long covid, including a continued £20 a week uplift of universal credit?

**Matt Hancock:** Of course long covid is an incredibly serious condition for some and is part of our considerations and deliberations, but I want to correct something the hon. Member said. The road map sets out indicative dates before which we will not move, but we will be guided by the data, hence the five-week gaps between each step to make sure we have four weeks to see the impact of the step and one week of advance notice for the go/no-go decision. That is based on clinical advice, which I know is shared across the UK.

[912564] **Duncan Baker** (North Norfolk) (Con) [V]: I am delighted that many carers are in priority group 6, given the enormous and vital role they are playing during the pandemic. Recently, I led an initiative to help my local county council identify carers—and unpaid carers—around Norfolk as many are not on official registers. Will my right hon. Friend tell me how he is working with Norfolk County Council and all local authorities to ensure that those difficult-to-find carers are not missed in the call to be vaccinated?

**Matt Hancock:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work in making sure that all carers, who are properly in priority group 6, get the opportunity to be vaccinated,

including those who may be unregistered, but nevertheless are carers. It is very important and I pay tribute to the work of Norfolk County Council. I know that my hon. Friend the Care Minister will be happy to meet my hon. Friend and the county council to discuss what further can be done.

**Mr Speaker:** Let us head to Dr Rupa Huq for our final question. I am sorry about this, but we have taken a long time to get to this stage.

[912573] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab) [V]: It is pleasing that anti-vax propagandising has been clamped down on, but long predating covid, on a daily basis, women seeking to access abortion clinics have faced anti-choicers. When they are on a 40-day running

Lent protest. Will the Secretary of State work with Ministers across Government to ensure that no woman ever feels harassed or intimidated when obtaining medical care that she is legally entitled to?

**Matt Hancock:** I am very happy to take up that proposal. Nobody should be harassed when accessing any medical treatment. There are agreed rules around abortion and people should be able to access abortion properly, according to those rules.

**Mr Speaker:** I am suspending the House to enable the necessary arrangements to be made for the next business.

12.34 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Youth Courts and Sentencing

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

12.38 pm

**Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide that persons charged with a criminal offence having been aged under 18 at the time of the alleged offence are subject to the jurisdiction of the youth court and to youth sentencing provisions; and for connected purposes.

I should declare at the outset that prior to my election I was a magistrate in both adult and youth courts, a member of the Youth Justice Board, a non-executive director of Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and a member of the Sentencing Council.

Justice delayed is justice denied. I submit that that is even more starkly so in the case of child offenders.

The UN convention on the rights of the child states:

“Child justice systems should also extend protection to children who were below the age of 18 at the time of the commission of the offence but who turn 18 during the trial or sentencing process.”

My Bill seeks to ensure that that becomes the case in England and Wales. At the moment, the justice system treats a defendant according to their age on the date they first appear in court and enter a plea. The consequence of this is that if someone commits an offence aged 15, 16 or 17, but does not get to court until after their 18th birthday, they are treated as an adult. That immediately affects both the type of court that deals with them and the range of sentences available. But the repercussions do not stop there, because there can be an impact on the chance of rehabilitation and the likelihood of getting a job, with the prospect of forever having to declare a mistake from the past. It is no exaggeration to say that the consequences can last a lifetime, because in our justice system there is a cliff edge when people reach their 18th birthday, and it is a very steep cliff.

A child defendant under the age of 18 in England and Wales will appear before a youth court, which has specially trained magistrates and judges. They know how to interpret a young person's behaviour, and they speak directly to the children in front of them, asking them why they committed the offence and ensuring they understand its consequences. Children appearing in the youth court are supported by the youth offending service—expert, multidisciplinary teams based in local authorities. Perhaps most significantly, in the youth court, young people can be sentenced to a referral order, which focuses on rehabilitation and restorative justice, and is overseen by the youth offending team. Once the referral order is completed, the offence is immediately spent, meaning that the young person does not carry a criminal record. Those procedures exist because the youth justice system has an overarching aim, set down in legislation, to prevent reoffending, and courts must therefore make that their priority. It should go without saying that reducing reoffending means there will be far fewer victims of crime, and that must surely be welcomed by all.

All that changes if a young person turns 18 even a day before their case gets to court. There is no special training for the judiciary, no dedicated support from the youth offending service, no bespoke sentence and no priority given to reducing reoffending. What is more, harsher criminal record and disclosure requirements for

adults further decrease employment prospects and risk preventing people from moving on with their lives, and yet this is something over which the young person has absolutely no control.

The main reason that children turn 18 before going to court is the delay in the system—in either the police investigation or the court listing process. Whether a particular individual youth suffers a delay is a matter of chance. Indeed, in our current system there is a postcode lottery as to whether someone is treated as a child or an adult, as different police forces and different courts can take widely varying times investigating or listing cases. Two 17-year-olds with exactly the same birthday could commit exactly the same crime, on exactly the same day, in different parts of the country, but find themselves treated entirely differently according to how quickly their case comes to court. There seems to be no logic, common sense or fairness in that.

The problem is significant. The Youth Justice Legal Centre says that approximately 20% of all the calls to its helpline are about delays to cases where young people are turning 18. Although there are no precise official figures for how many young people are caught in this trap, it has previously been suggested that 2% to 3% of proven offences are committed by children who turn 18 before their conviction. That translated into 1,400 for the year ending March 2018, and the problem has been exacerbated more recently, both by changes in police procedure and by the coronavirus pandemic.

First, the growing use by police of release under investigation has resulted in delays to charging decisions, with the average number of days between an offence and charge for youth cases increasing by 78% in the past nine years. There has also been an increase in the delay from charge to the first court listing by a further 61%. Indeed, it can easily take a year before the first court appearance, and even longer in the case of some serious offences. Secondly, covid-19 has lengthened delays throughout the whole court system. There is consequently a particularly worrying impact on the increasing number of young people who will have their 18th birthday before their first court appearance. The Select Committee on Justice, of which I am a member, highlighted this in a recent report on the impact of covid on the courts. The changes proposed in my Bill are therefore needed, and they are needed now.

Some people may ask why we should care, when we are, after all, talking about criminals. What is crucially important is the fact that people do not magically become an adult at the stroke of midnight on their 18th birthday. Indeed, it is now widely acknowledged and accepted, including by the Ministry of Justice, that young people's neurological development continues well into their 20s. Importantly, that has a substantial impact on behaviours linked to offending, such as impulse control, empathy and understanding the implications of actions. The code for Crown prosecutors already recognises that, and the National Police Chiefs' Council lead for children and young people has emphasised the importance of diversionary and preventive measures. That entirely chimes with the approach taken by the youth court and by youth offending teams, but not by the adult justice system.

The justice system needs to tackle offending behaviour according to a person's culpability, maturity and potential for rehabilitation. That is why we should care. And

[Rob Butler]

there is precedence for criminal justice consequences to flow from the date an offence is committed. Examples include the sentence of detention at Her Majesty's pleasure and certain mandatory minimum sentences under the Firearms Acts and the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006. What is more, perhaps rather ironically, the victim surcharge on an offender is applied according to the age at which they committed the offence, not the age at which they are sentenced or first appeared in court.

I should briefly set out examples of what the Bill would not mean. It would not mean that somebody who was 18 or over when sentenced would go to a custodial establishment for under-18s. Indeed, it is already the case that a young person serving a custodial sentence will be transferred to the adult estate on or soon after their 18th birthday. And it would not mean that someone who committed a crime at 17 but was only identified as the perpetrator when they were very much older, say at 30, would physically attend the youth court. There would be an upper age limit in the early 20s.

There is a very strong consensus in favour of the changes I have proposed today. On the frontline, the Association of Youth Offending Team Managers wants to see exactly those measures introduced. The Magistrates Association last year passed a motion in support of keeping such cases in the youth court, with 96% in favour. The Alliance for Youth Justice, which brings together more than 70 organisations, believes that the measures in the Bill would allow for fairer, more equitable and age-appropriate justice. The Bill is supported by T2A, Transition to Adulthood. My proposals are also endorsed by academic and legal experts, including the National Association for Youth Justice, Justice for Kids Law, and the Youth Justice Legal Centre. The Justice Committee has called for such changes, and the Youth Justice Board itself backs these measures. The YJB's chair, Keith Fraser, is a former police superintendent, who was himself assaulted by a teenager when he was a serving officer, but he believes it is wrong that someone who commits an offence as a child then gets treated as an adult by the system. The Children's Commissioner wants to see these changes. Finally, my Bill has cross-party support in this House, for which I am very grateful.

If my Bill succeeds, a young person who commits an offence before their 18th birthday will be subject to the youth court and to youth sentencing provisions. That would be a relatively simple change to make in legislation. In many respects, it does no more than correct an anomaly, but for those affected its impact would be profound. It would enable young people to put their mistakes behind them and make a constructive contribution to society. It would put more emphasis on preventing reoffending. It would mean a fairer system; it would mean a more just system.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Rob Butler, Sir Robert Neill, Maria Eagle, Jeremy Wright, Edward Timpson, Andrew Selous, Crispin Blunt, Dan Jarvis, Sarah Champion, Danny Kruger and Sally-Ann Hart present the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 260).*

## Opposition Day

[17TH ALLOTTED DAY]

### Government's Management of the Economy

12.48 pm

**Anneliese Dodds** (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the last decade of UK economic policy weakened the foundations of this country's economy and society, leaving the UK particularly vulnerable when the coronavirus crisis hit; further believes that many Government choices and actions during the coronavirus pandemic have exacerbated the problems that pandemic has caused, leading to the UK suffering the worst economic crisis of any major economy; calls on the Government, as the UK emerges out of the pandemic, to address the deep inequalities and injustices in this country and take the UK forward to a stronger, more prosperous future through a new partnership between an active state and enterprising business; further calls on the Government to protect family finances by reversing the planned £20 cut in Universal Credit, reversing the key worker pay freeze and providing councils with the funding they need to prevent huge rises in council tax; and calls on the Government to introduce a new British Recovery Bond to allow people who have accumulated savings during the pandemic to have a proper stake in Britain's future and to back a new generation of British entrepreneurs by providing start-up loans for 100,000 new businesses.

Next Wednesday is a pivotal moment in this country's response to the coronavirus pandemic and our emergence from this crisis. When the Chancellor stands up to deliver his Budget, he faces a choice: he could take us back to the short-termist, irresponsible policies that left our economy and our country so dangerously exposed before the crisis hit, or he could learn from the mistakes made over the past 10 years and move forward, to a stronger, more prosperous future. Our economic recovery is at stake and the Chancellor cannot afford to get it wrong. He cannot continue to duck the big decisions, nor to go missing when he is most needed, and he must make the responsible choices that have been so frequently lacking over the past year.

We cannot get away from the fact that our country has been hit harder than most during this crisis, and much harder than it needed to be. That is despite the herculean efforts of our NHS and social care, and other key workers; the incredible national commitment we have seen from those who have volunteered up and down our country; the ingenuity of our scientists; and the hard work and commitment of businesses and workers up and down the land. The UK was not fated to have the highest death toll from covid in Europe, nor to suffer the worst economic crisis of any major economy.

Such grim statistics relate to decisions taken or not taken during the crisis, but also to 10 years when the foundations of our economy and our public services were weakened. The UK entered 2020 as one of the most unequal countries in Europe. Wages had flatlined for 10 long years—the worst decade for pay growth in generations. Yet as pay stagnated, childcare costs spiralled for families across the country. Household finances took such a hit that one in four families had less than £100 of savings in the bank when the crisis hit. At the same time, the public services we all rely on had been stripped back and stockpiles of vital equipment had been run down, providing a worryingly low level of resilience.

All this happened because the party opposite was not willing to take the responsible decisions required to set our country on stronger foundations. Instead, after the global financial crisis, Conservative-led Governments hammered family finances and withdrew funding for public services, in moves that have now been widely criticised not just by Labour, but by the likes of the International Monetary Fund and the OECD.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Some of us think that this allegedly Conservative Government are already spending far too much and regulating too much. Will the hon. Lady make the commitment that Mr Blair and Mr Brown made when the Labour party was last in opposition: that whatever happens, a future Labour Government would not spend a greater proportion of national income on the public sector?

**Anneliese Dodds**: I certainly would not spend public funds in the way this Government often have. I will come on to that in a moment. For me, the question is not the quantum of spend; the question is whether spending has been appropriately directed, whether it has been appropriately managed and whether there has been strong financial control. Sadly, in many aspects of this crisis, those values have not been held to, as I will go on to explain in the rest of my remarks.

The agenda we saw over the past 10 years of cuts in order—in theory—to deliver speedy fiscal consolidation did not even achieve its primary objective. The British people were told they had to tighten their belts so that we could all do our bit to pay down the national debt, yet that debt rose from £1 trillion to £1.8 trillion under Conservative-led Governments before the crisis hit. Ten years of failing to address the structural weaknesses in our economy meant that when covid-19 arrived on our shores, we were dangerously unprepared.

Yet the hits to our health and our economy still did not need to be as severe as they have been. Recent decisions have all too often exacerbated the problems we have faced. The Chancellor has failed repeatedly to understand that the health crisis and the economic crisis are not separable—they cannot be traded off, one against the other. If economic support does not go hand in hand with the imposition of necessary public health restrictions, we cannot get a grip on the virus, nor will economic activity return to normal. If infections are not reduced, not only will restrictions be in place for longer, but people will lack the confidence that is needed to get out and start spending again.

Time and again throughout this crisis, the Chancellor has sought to pull back economic support with the virus still raging. He sought to wrap up the furlough scheme at the earliest possible moment, in the face of all the available evidence and calls from businesses, trade unions and the Labour party alike. As the costs of that approach became clear, there was a last-minute scramble to come up with a replacement scheme that saw four versions of a winter economic plan in the space of six weeks before winter had even begun. And then quite literally at the eleventh hour, he extended furlough in any case.

The same was true of business support to areas under local restrictions. Local leaders were forced to conduct a series of sham negotiations, only to emerge with the same £20 per head payment each for their local area, with no sense of how long that needed to last and no

connection to local business need. That pattern is in evidence again. As we stand here today, businesses face yet more looming cliff edges: business rate payments falling due in just over a month's time, VAT spiking for our hard-hit hospitality sector, and furlough due to end on 30 April.

The Prime Minister said yesterday that we should be driven by the data, not by dates, but instead of having acted weeks ago to provide the certainty that businesses crave, the Chancellor is determined to wait until the theatre of his Budget next week to make any announcements. That is not driven by the data on business confidence and economic impact. Indeed, today we learned of the 1.7 million people now in unemployment and the prospect of 1 million more losing their jobs in the months to come. Instead, that is an approach driven by politics.

This has combined with a situation where public funds have time and again been wasted and mismanaged. Hundreds of millions have been spent on contracts that have simply not delivered, and funding has often not been targeted where it is needed most, despite the Welsh Labour Government showing how effective targeting funds at small businesses in particular can be. Coronavirus may have closed much of our economy, but this Government's approach is crashing it. Next Wednesday is a chance to change course, to learn from the mistakes of not just the last 11 months but the last 11 years, and to put us on the path to a more secure and prosperous economy.

In the midst of a jobs crisis, we need urgent action to support people back into work, especially our young people, for whom time out of work can scar future prospects permanently, yet the Government's much vaunted kickstart scheme is only helping one in every 100 eligible young people, and their restart scheme has not in fact started at all. Instead, the Government must learn the lessons of successful schemes, such as the future jobs fund, which built on the strengths of existing local institutions to deliver sustainable employment.

We need action, not rhetoric, to support the creation of new jobs. There is a tremendous opportunity here to align job creation with our net zero ambitions. Labour has called for the acceleration of £30 billion of green investment in the next 18 months. We have demonstrated how that could support the creation of 400,000 new green jobs. Incredibly, the Chancellor cut £300 million from the planned capital budget in November. His shambolic green homes grant has been so badly delivered that it is actually costing jobs. We urgently need a change of course, so that we can support business to build the new jobs of the future.

We need to stop ordinary families carrying the can for these mistakes. Showing that he has totally failed to heed the warnings of the International Monetary Fund and others, the Chancellor is ploughing ahead with plans for a triple hammer blow to family finances, forcing local authorities to hike council tax, cutting social security by more than £1,000 a year, and freezing pay for key workers. That is not just poor reward for those who have sacrificed so much over the last year; it is economically illiterate, sucking demand out of our economy at a time when we need it most. The Chancellor is instead heavily reliant on spending by those who have been able to build up some savings during the crisis. Not only have more people in our country lost income

[Anneliese Dodds]

during this crisis than have been able to save, but in addition the Bank of England has shown that the vast majority of these savings are likely to be retained and not spent.

Instead, we need a different approach—one in which we stop leaving people, businesses and whole areas of our country behind. We need to harness the potential of Government working with businesses and trade unions to build a better, more secure future. We must take the strategic decisions that would restore the foundations of our economy and prepare us for the challenges and opportunities of the decade ahead.

First, we need to support families across the UK by scrapping the planned cut to universal credit, reversing the key worker pay freeze and backing councils so that they do not need to impose inflation-busting tax hikes. That will build confidence and build our local economies. We must harness the spirit of unity and solidarity that has defined the British people's response to this crisis, by allowing those who have been able to save to invest in British recovery bonds, thereby keeping their money safe while taking a stake in our country's future.

We need to lift the burden of debt from our small businesses by enabling them to pay back covid-related bounce back loans once they are making profits again, rather than continued debt preventing them from investing and taking on new staff. We have to expand the start-up loan scheme to support 100,000 new British businesses over the next five years, backing the entrepreneurial spirit that we need for economic growth.

The economic approach of the Conservative party has been severely tested over the course of a decade and been found seriously wanting. Indeed, over the past year it has been tested to destruction. We cannot afford a repeat of those mistakes—a return to policies that have been so weak and provided so little resilience. We need a new approach: a Government who are on people's side, who understand the value of public services, and who give families and businesses the security that they need in the tough times and offer them hope in the years to come. Next Wednesday is a fork in the road. I urge the Chancellor take the right path to a better, more secure economic future.

1.1 pm

**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Steve Barclay):** I thank the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) for securing this debate, which is an important opportunity to take stock ahead of next week's Budget. With the leave of the House, Mr Speaker, I shall also close the debate for the Government later.

The hon. Lady, and Members from all parties, will appreciate that I cannot discuss any of the specifics of next week's Budget, but I can say that although we may not always agree on the way ahead, I believe that we in this House all want the same outcome: a vibrant and prosperous economy that gives people everywhere the opportunities that they deserve.

In responding to the motion, I intend to do three things. First, I shall briefly remind the House of the economic and fiscal situation that we inherited in 2010. [HON. MEMBERS: "Good idea!"] It is a welcome motion for enabling that. Secondly, I shall examine the state of the economy a decade later, noting the difference, for

which the credit goes to previous Treasury Ministers—not current Conservative Treasury Ministers—who took difficult decisions in the national interest. Finally, I shall say a little about the Government's ambitions now, with the obvious caveat that a Budget is imminent.

As Members will recall, the outlook in 2010 was not good. The financial crisis had torn a hole in our country's future, the economy was shrinking and the deficit was ballooning. As George Osborne said at the time of his speech in the Queen's Speech: Economy debate in 2010:

"Getting over the worst economic inheritance any modern government has been bequeathed by its predecessor is not so easy."

He also noted that the British economy had become "deeply unbalanced...Unbalanced between different parts of the country...Unbalanced between different sections of society...Unbalanced between different parts of our economy".

As set out by the most recent Labour Chief Secretary, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne)—I accept that it was a light-hearted note and that much of the criticism he has received has probably been unfair, but the substance remains—there was no money left.

The coalition Government took power in 2010, at a moment when one thing mattered more than anything else: strong leadership prepared to make the right decision in the national interest. As hon. and right hon. Members will recall, in the years that followed the Government took steps to put this country back on a stable financial footing, because we need a strong economy to fund strong public services. The economy expanded in every year of the decade that followed. In fact, between 2010 and 2019, it grew by a total of 19.2%, which was faster than France, faster than Italy and faster than Japan—a reality not reflected at all in today's motion. Achieving that success was about many things, not just fiscal discipline. In 2010, for instance, the Government created the Office for Budget Responsibility, which introduced independence, greater transparency and credibility to the economic and fiscal forecasts on which fiscal policy is based. Indeed, 10 years on, the OBR is considered by many of its peers to be the gold standard of independent fiscal institutions.

Just as now, a key focus for the Government throughout that period was protecting, supporting and creating jobs; here, too, the numbers are impressive. Participation in the labour market reached a record high of 79.8% in the three months to February 2020—three percentage points higher than in 2010. In the same year, the UK had a higher employment rate and a lower unemployment rate than both the OECD and G7 averages. Between the 2010 election and the end of 2019, we saw over 3.8 million more people in employment—equivalent to an average of nearly 1,000 extra people in work every single day—and 85% of that growth was in high-skilled occupations. Importantly, that growth was across the board. The employment rate increased for all regions in the country, as well as for women, for young people and for poorer households. Indeed, prior to the pandemic, the employment rate among women was at a record high of 72.7%, and youth unemployment was down almost half on 2010.

If hon. Members remember just one key statistic, perhaps it should be this: real household disposable income per head—the Treasury's preferred measure of living standards—was 11.4% higher in 2019 than at the start of 2010, and incomes grew most strongly for

households on lower and middle incomes. Remember that this was also the decade when we made significant personal tax cuts and introduced the national living wage, which we have increased every year. Taken together, changes to the national living wage, personal allowance and national insurance contributions mean that an employee working full-time on the national living wage is more than £5,200 better off than in April 2010. This is a track record of which any Government of any political persuasion should be proud.

It was not just households across the country that understood the benefits; the world recognised them too. In 2018, the UK topped the Forbes list of best countries for business for the second year running. A year later, the World Economic Forum acknowledged our strengths in innovation capability, business dynamism, institutions and market size. Businesspeople everywhere felt the same. The UK has the third highest foreign direct investment stock in the world after the US and Hong Kong, and more foreign investment than Germany and France combined. None of this reflects today's motion; indeed, it reflects strong leadership, fiscal responsibility and a Government prepared to act in the national interest.

Coronavirus has been a great challenge that we, as a country, have had to face together. Every country has had to reckon with the virus's economic impact, but because of the decisions made by successive Chancellors over the past 10 years, our economy and public services were strong when the pandemic hit. The markets understood that we were a Government who could plan for the future and make decisions when they mattered. As a result, we have been able to respond in the way in which we have. This House has heard about that response numerous times. It is one of the largest and most comprehensive responses in the world, totalling more than £280 billion since March 2020. Millions of jobs and livelihoods have been supported through the furlough scheme and the self-employment income support scheme. We have allocated billions of pounds in loans and grants to businesses across the UK. It is a response that the IMF singled out as

“one of the best examples of coordinated action globally”.

It called the response “aggressive” and “unprecedented”—that is a frequently used word, but I do not apologise for using it again. Indeed, the Resolution Foundation has said that the response

“prevented an unprecedented collapse in GDP from turning into a living standards disaster.”

The fact that we had rebuilt the public finances in recent years, combined with the UK's strong institutional framework, gave us the wherewithal to borrow to provide the significant economic support that was required. Our decade of economic success made all of that possible.

I know that the Opposition wish to keep talking about the past, which is surprising given that many of those years were spent supporting the economic policies of the previous Leader of the Opposition. I am always more than happy to speak about our record over the past 10 years—I welcome today's motion as providing an opportunity to do so—but I, like this Government, want to look forward to the future.

Last year's spending review tells us everything we need to know about this Government and this Chancellor's direction of travel. There was significant additional

funding to help our public services in their continuing fight against the pandemic—we are making record investments in public services, including an historic settlement for the NHS, which provides a cash increase of £33.9 billion a year by 2023-24; we are providing better lifelong learning, such as through the £375 million to deliver the Prime Minister's lifetime skills guarantee; we are recruiting more police officers to make our streets safer, with more than 6,600 already recruited towards our 20,000 target; we are implementing our 10-point plan to tackle climate change, mobilising £12 billion of Government investment, which will in turn create hundreds of thousands of green jobs across the country, including in carbon capture and storage, electric vehicles and renewable energy; we are investing in technology, innovation and the digital economy, as part of our goal to make the UK a science superpower—this Government are increasing investment in research and development at the fastest speed and greatest scale since records began; and we are investing in the UK's economic recovery, with more than £100 billion of capital investment next year to spread opportunity, create jobs and drive economic growth.

The motion states that the last decade “weakened the foundations” of the economy, yet we saw nine years of continuous growth, while we reduced the deficit from 10% to below 2%. The motion says that the UK was “particularly vulnerable”, yet we have consistently protected our NHS, with the 2018 NHS settlement being the biggest cash increase in public services since the second world war. The motion says that our actions during the pandemic have “exacerbated the problems”, yet we have vaccinated more than one in three adults, which is far more than any other European country. The motion says that the UK has suffered

“the worst economic crisis of any major economy”,

yet independent bodies such as the IMF have praised the UK's response, which in turn was possible only because of the economic decisions of the last decade. The motion talks of “inequalities”, yet distributional analysis of the Government's interventions shows that we protected the poorest working households the most, through schemes such as the furlough. It is because of our economic record that we have been able to place the protection of jobs at the heart of our covid response, with the furlough and the other business support measures.

As the Chancellor said last month:

“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.”—*[Official Report, 11 January 2021; Vol. 687, c. 23.]*

He was right, and jobs will remain at the heart of his economic plan, as we work together to build back better and level up the whole of the UK.

**Mr Speaker:** Before we head up to Scotland, I remind Members that there will be a three-minute limit after the SNP spokesperson, Alison Thewliss.

1.14 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP) [V]: I thank the Opposition for bringing this motion to the House. I very much agree with the assertion that, this time last year, the UK was not in the best situation to handle the devastation that coronavirus would wreak on our economy. Let me quote this to the Chamber:

[Alison Thewliss]

“The UK’s resilience has been weakened under sustained Tory cuts. Wages have barely grown in the last decade. The welfare state safety nets have been torn to shreds. Public services have struggled through chronic underinvestment and asset stripping, and some parts of the UK that have still not fully recovered from the 2008 financial crisis are ill-equipped to cope with a further recession. Coronavirus has the potential to have a lasting impact.”—*[Official Report, 12 March 2020; Vol. 673, c. 486.]*

If the words sound a wee bit familiar, it is because I have said them before—in response to the Chancellor’s Budget plans almost a year ago. I congratulate those on the Labour Benches for finally catching up with what the people in Scotland have long known: we have had 10 years of damaging austerity and five years of Brexit uncertainty crushing investment, and it is likely that the UK would have fallen into recession in 2020 anyway, even before the pandemic began to take hold. Even in the face of the most harmful economic crisis that our generation has seen, the Tories have pressed ahead with a Brexit deal that has delivered near-fatal blows to our export sectors and has cost countless jobs.

The labour market statistics of the Office for National Statistics make grim reading. They state that, in January 2021, 726,000 fewer people were in payroll employment when compared with February 2020, of whom 425,000—58.5%—were under 25. This is both symptom and cause of the precarious and damaging employment practices that have been allowed to run rampant under this UK Tory Government. The Government have not dealt with zero-hours contracts. They have trapped young people in discriminatory and exploitative rates of the minimum wage—a minimum wage I should point out, not the pretend living wage as the UK Government like to badge it—and they have failed to act on fire and rehire, despite being given options by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands). Young people deserve better than this. The UK Government must now devolve all powers over employment law to the Scottish Government. We do not forget that Labour blocked devolution of those powers as part of the Smith commission, preferring to leave Scotland at the mercy of the Tories rather than letting the Scottish Government progress a fair work agenda for our people.

I agree with the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) that withdrawing furlough in April is too early. Realistically, if we are to prevent a cliff edge of unemployment when the job retention scheme ends, businesses will require the furlough scheme for at least two months after the current lockdown measures come to an end and perhaps longer if the course of the virus does not go as we all dearly hope—we have been here before. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development has called for an extension until the end of June and for much greater certainty from the Chancellor to allow businesses to plan properly. Many people lost their jobs unnecessarily due to the previous insistence from the UK Government that the scheme would end in October, which was followed, of course, by a last-gasp U-turn, by which time it was too late for too many.

The CIPD also points out that there is a clear imperative for a lower limit to the furlough scheme so that the incomes of those on the lowest rates do not fall below the national minimum wage. People have been struggling to make ends meet, and 80% of what was

already a very low wage is not enough to live on. We on the SNP Benches have long argued that Scotland should have the powers to provide its own furlough scheme as well as the borrowing powers that would be necessary to save jobs.

Labour’s policy of recovery bonds are all well and good, but it is not exactly groundbreaking. The Resolution Foundation has described it as unnecessarily complicated, but not actually harmful. I am afraid that that is probably the best that can be said about it. Let us not pretend that it will have a huge impact on recovery. Money could be much spent on a further uplift to universal credit and legacy benefits, which would put money directly into the pockets of those who need it most. It could be spent on ending the benefit cap, which the Child Poverty Action Group has reported will already affect 35,000 households in the new year, 77% of which are households with children, followed by the capping of a further 41,000 households after the first few months of 2021 as their grace period expires from January through to March. The money could go towards scrapping the appalling two-child limit, which the British Pregnancy Advisory Service has found recently is driving up the numbers of women opting for an abortion rather than bringing a child into the world. This Government should be ashamed of those statistics and they must end the two-child limit now.

Unemployment is expected to peak later this year, so keeping and extending the £20 uplift would help to alleviate some of the uncertainty that families are facing at this difficult time. The UK Government’s plans to scrap this support will take the basic level of support to its lowest level since 1991. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research figures out this week also demonstrate that destitution levels have risen from 0.7% of all UK households to 1.5% in the space of a year under this Tory Government. So even with an uplift, families are struggling to make ends meet. The UK Government know this, and it would be utterly despicable of them to go ahead and remove that vital support, knowing what we all know.

Research by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre has shown that the single most effective policy in alleviating child poverty would be a generous increase in universal credit, and the Scottish Government are doing their bit through the Scottish child payments. The relationship here is very simple: the more money paid in benefits, the fewer children in poverty. It is time—it is beyond time—for this Government to scrap the two-child limit and bring payments in to line with the OECD average.

The Opposition are tinkering around the edges of existing policy here, and it is really not good enough. The Labour motion seems stuck in the past by failing to acknowledge that the active state does not have to stop at the end of Whitehall. Holyrood currently has only very limited borrowing powers, leaving us always at the mercy of Tory decisions. Scotland needs bold, ambitious plans to fund large-scale investment and to stimulate the economy. An overwhelming majority of voters in Scotland now believe that Scotland should have the power to borrow on its own terms, but the Opposition have failed to share in that simple ambition.

The Scottish Government are already delivering policies such as the youth guarantee, which will ensure that everyone aged between 16 and 24 has the opportunity of work, education or training. We are putting money

into growing the economy while tackling the deep-seated inequalities we have seen highlighted by the covid-19 pandemic, but without the powers of a normal country, Scotland still cannot do things like extending the furlough scheme. We cannot deliver our own tailor-made support schemes for those who have been excluded from the UK's support, such as self-employed people and certain women on maternity leave.

The Scottish Government are delivering on capital investment through the Scottish National Investment Bank, the single biggest economic development in the history of the Scottish Parliament and the UK's first development bank. The bank will provide finance and catalyse private investment to grow the economy through innovation and accelerating the move to net zero emissions and a high-tech, connected, globally competitive and inclusive economy. However, it is hampered by a rule that does not allow the Scottish Government or the investment bank to allocate funds between years. The Treasury must stop standing in the way when Scotland wants to get on with the job.

Scotland has bold ambitions for the future, but the hard reality is that we need more powers to deliver a bigger-scale fiscal stimulus to future-proof our economy. This lack of powers is going to have real-life consequences for the tens of thousands of Scots whose jobs are on the line. Reading the Labour motion, we can see clearly how little the Union has to offer to the people of Scotland. It is little wonder that more and more Scots—now in 21 consecutive polls—are waking up to the reality that only an independent Scotland can provide the fair, just economy that we all need.

1.22 pm

**Mr Andrew Mitchell** (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Member's Financial Interests.

The background to today's debate is that no other Government in the western world have given such trenchant taxpayer support to their citizens. I read, as I am sure my colleagues did, the relaunch speech by the Leader of the Opposition, but it seemed to me that his guiding theme merely followed the defining levelling-up agenda of this Conservative Government.

I have no doubt that many speakers today will look at the last five years of this Government, but I would like to look at the first five years referred to in the motion, from 2010. When the coalition assembled in 2010, one in every three pounds of public expenditure was borrowed, and as a result of that difficult and dangerous financial position, tough decisions were taken about reductions in expenditure. Incidentally, the same fiscal tightening took place in Britain as took place in Obama's America. As a result of those courageous decisions, six things happened, many of which were down to the skilful stewardship of George Osborne.

First, the UK had the strongest recovery among the G7 countries. More British jobs were created than under any other Government in history. By 2015, we had the fastest income growth among the lowest-paid 20% in the country. We had the most sustained and consistent fall in our deficit among the G7, and we introduced the national living wage. Meanwhile, the NHS performed more operations than ever before and crime fell in every year. The UK was the No. 1 recipient of inward investment in the G20.

Like many of us, but especially me, I am incredibly proud to have served in a Government who, in spite of the economic difficulties, refused to balance the books on the backs of the poorest people in the world and implemented our 0.7% promise on international development. I am proud it was a Conservative Government who finally implemented the promise to the world's poorest to spend 0.7% of our gross national income on international development. I know that the Government are considering breaking this promise, a manifesto commitment that all of us entered into just over a year ago, but I urge them not to do so. We would be the only G7 country to take this action, while America is increasing its development spending by \$15 billion. Although it is £4 billion, which is a great deal of money, it is just 1% of what we have borrowed in the last year. It will result in hundreds of thousands of avoidable deaths, mainly among children, and it will destroy a key and respected aspect of post-Brexit global Britain. I urge the Government, on this point, to think again.

1.25 pm

**Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: The UK Government's flawed economic model stands in stark contrast with the Welsh Government's. More than a decade of Tory austerity has left the UK completely unprepared to deal with the global pandemic. Despite UK Government cuts and austerity across Wales, our wonderful NHS staff, council workers, emergency services and many more work tirelessly to keep us safe and keep Wales running.

The Welsh Labour Government have provided extra support for local authorities: £500 million to deliver key services such as social care and test, trace, protect; and to make sure that businesses receive vital support grants. In Wales, nine out of 10 people who test positive for coronavirus provide details of their close contacts, and almost 90% are successfully contacted and advised. The Welsh system is working because it is a public service run locally. The Welsh Labour Government have made a special £500 payment to more than 67,000 social care staff working in people's houses and in care homes, including for domestic and personal assistance. They continued their commitment to free school meals when Wales became the first UK nation to guarantee provision throughout school holidays, and they have now extended this to Easter 2022, feeding over 105,000 children in Wales. At the beginning of the pandemic, the Welsh Labour Government helped homeless people into accommodation, and more than 3,200 people are now in temporary accommodation.

Businesses in Wales have had access to the most generous support package in the UK. The £2 billion economic resilience fund alone has secured 141,000 jobs. At the 2016 Senedd elections, the Welsh Labour manifesto set out six key pledges, and it has delivered on every pledge: an additional £100 million for schools; 100,000 all-age apprenticeships; a cut to business rates for local businesses; a new £80 million treatment fund; doubling the capital limit for older people going into residential care; and 30 hours' free childcare for 48 weeks for parents of three and four-year-olds. Today, the Welsh Labour Government have announced their strategy to rebuild the post-pandemic Welsh economy, taking the opportunity to look to the future, with a long-term

[Christina Rees]

focus on wellbeing, dignity and fairness for people, and supporting workers, businesses and communities to succeed and prosper.

1.28 pm

**Gareth Davies** (Grantham and Stamford) (Con) [V]: It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate about the Conservative economic track record over the last decade. I would like to focus on just one aspect of that record—jobs. I am very proud that, before covid-19, we had achieved the lowest level of unemployment since the 1970s, helping 1,000 people, on average, into work every single day. We have known for so long that the surest way to tackle poverty in our country is to offer people the opportunity of work, and for the past decade we have done that. Employment does not just grow our national prosperity; it gives people the dignity of work and of providing for themselves and their families. It is why the Conservatives sought to make sure that work pays by consistently raising the minimum wage and the national living wage.

To create jobs growth and bring people up the earnings ladder, we have to put in place an environment that is conducive to productive economic activity. That means appreciating the power of our businesses and the tax revenues that they generate to pay for our public services; taking tough—often, unpopular—decisions to reduce the deficit in good times, so that we are stronger in bad times; and providing a fiscal environment that encourages enterprise, innovation and ambition.

Put simply, those are the foundations of economic success that have enabled the Conservative Government to boost jobs, grow our economy over nine consecutive years and reduce inequality. That is why when crisis struck, the Chancellor sought and acted to protect 12 million jobs with unprecedented financial support.

All of which, of course, contrasts with the fact that every recent Labour Government have left office with a higher unemployment rate than when they started. It turns out that Labour really didn't work. That is why the electorate have consistently rejected Labour's hostility to enterprise, unchecked spiralling debt and obsession with tax hikes and nationalisation.

Labour is busy looking backwards for answers in yesterday, so cannot see that, while this crisis has been awful, Britain's greatest days are ahead of us—with the ingenuity of our scientists, the precision of our engineers, the might of our financial services and the belief that when we talk up our country, push new boundaries and work together, we can, and we will, recover, rebuild and resume our economic growth once again.

1.31 pm

**Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab) [V]: I would say that it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Gareth Davies), but I am not sure he has fully grasped the reality facing my constituents in Gower and undoubtedly many of his constituents as well. My office has been inundated with queries from people who are very worried about making ends meet, about the security of their homes and about losing their businesses—

people who have worked hard for their families, who have worked hard during this crisis and who have worked hard to keep people safe.

Eleven years of ideologically driven Tory austerity has financially crippled so many people. It has driven them further and further into debt and has fuelled a rise in precarious employment. That is where we are. To truly build back better, we need to tackle the huge inequalities facing the country.

As this crisis has shown, it is always those just getting by who are most affected. Women, black, Asian and ethnic minority communities and single parents have been squeezed, many to breaking point. A new research report, "The Single Parent Debt Trap", published by Gingerbread and StepChange, the UK's leading debt charity, reveals that single parents are more likely to be living with problem debt, and shows that the covid-19 pandemic has acted as an accelerant for problem debt, exposing more single parents to poverty. They disproportionately experienced debt problems even prior to the covid-19 outbreak. Clearly, the £20 uplift has been vital, but single parents are facing particular difficulty with aspects of universal credit, such as payment of childcare in arrears and unaffordable benefit reductions.

There were more than 50 recommendations in a recent report from the all-party parliamentary group on universal credit, which was produced for Parliament. Have the Government actually considered the report? Do they have any intention of reforming universal credit, so that it is fit for purpose in a post-pandemic Britain? The report draws out how single parents are having to turn to credit, often high-cost credit, for example at the start of the school year, or at other high-cost times, such as Christmas—as a single mother, I remember it well.

What are the Government doing to strengthen the financial resilience of families and to give single parents better credit options, such as affordable credit, no-interest loans and a fairer credit scoring system, so that they can go to work and not turn to loan sharks and high-interest payday loans? There are a lot of fears about what happens to single parents and other groups. What are the Government doing to make sure that the unwinding of protections does not turn out badly, not just for single parents stuck in debt, but for the wider economy?

1.34 pm

**Paul Maynard** (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con) [V]: Let us be clear about this debate: it was Labour who failed to fix the roof while the sun was shining, so that when the financial crisis struck, we lacked the resilience we needed as a nation to do what was necessary. Labour spent a decade pretending that it never happened—that it was a global crisis that did not affect us here and was nothing to do with them. But there was no money left, as that famous letter said. Despite having spent the last few weeks campaigning to regulate the "Buy now, pay later" sector, it is clear that Gordon Brown was the founder of the Klarna approach: he spent now and bought now, expecting the British people to be the ones to pay later.

After 2010, the Conservatives did fix the roof, and we now have the financial resilience we need to do what we have had to do to protect jobs and livelihoods as the coronavirus wave broke across our shores. Labour harp

on about those they claim have not benefited from a Conservative Government, both before and during the pandemic. However, it would be remiss of me, representing a constituency with so much deprivation, not to observe that it is this Conservative Government who cut income tax by around £1,200 for the average basic rate taxpayer, by lifting the income tax threshold to £12,500. Labour's approach, of course, was to abolish the 10p rate of income tax. Income inequality, however we measure it, is lower than it was in 2009-10, and a third fewer children live in a workless household. Although there is more to do to tackle in-work poverty, I find it hard to credit that some see this reduction still as a bad thing.

We introduced a national living wage, which raised incomes in areas of low average incomes such as my constituency, and universal credit to address the challenges of seasonal unemployment, which were such a scourge in seaside resorts, and let us not forget that the top 1% in this country pay a greater share of income tax than they did when Labour was in power.

To be fair to the shadow Chancellor, who I believe is that rare thing, a thoughtful politician, I do not think she would deliberately seek to drive the economy over the cliff. However, I fear that she would be too busy rummaging in the glove box for a Labour road map to see what was fast approaching. In her Mais lecture in January, she quoted Gordon Richardson's 1978 Mais lecture, in which he said:

"We are now at an historical juncture when the conventional methods of economic policy are being tested."

In trying to apply that to now, she seemed to miss the irony that it was a criticism of precisely the statist solutions that Labour offered in the 1970s and is reheating now.

Like every Opposition day debate so far in this Parliament, this debate has had an air of unreality about it. It is only thanks to Conservative policies that we are in the position we are in to deal with the crisis we face now.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** We now go to Nadia Whittome. Nadia, can you hear me? We will go to the next speaker and come back.

1.37 pm

**Mr Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con) [V]: The motion before the House today is not one to trouble serious observers. Over the 10 years that followed the crash of 2007 to 2009, this Conservative Government rebuilt our broken economy. Before the appalling shock of covid, we enjoyed effectively full employment. Public spending was back within our means and the UK ranked eighth in the World Economic Forum's ease of doing business ranking for 2020. The widespread understanding that the Conservatives are the party who will look after people's family, home and job is among the most important reasons why we have won four successive general elections, and it will underpin, I am sure, our success in a fifth.

This Government have a clear, bold plan to build back better. Our £280 billion to the crisis was deliverable only because of the tough choices that Conservative Chancellors made in the last decade to fix the roof while the sun was shining. We have made decisive interventions that have preserved much of the muscle power of the British economy during this period of

suspended animation, and as my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said in his opening remarks, we have been praised by the IMF for the nature of the interventions that we have made.

Even before next week's Budget, we have the Chancellor's £30 billion plan for jobs, the £12 billion green industrial revolution and £8.6 billion of accelerated infrastructure spending. This stimulus is hugely exciting areas such as the Tees valley, which had the chance to leverage great amounts of private sector investment off the back of Government commitments of this nature.

Not all the decisions that lie ahead will be easy; there is no point in sugaring the pill. Our public finances are gravely damaged. Some of the damage will of course be repaired when the free market is allowed to operate normally again. However, we need to be realistic. Nothing we said during the course of the 2010s about the danger of running unsustainable levels of public debt has changed. The fact that borrowing costs are historically low is to be welcomed, but we should regard it as a stroke of great good fortune that it coincides with our hour of need, rather than an ongoing inevitability. I challenge anyone in the Chamber to tell me with certainty what the world will look like in the 2030s or 2040s, or what borrowing costs will be.

I believe it would be nothing short of immoral to mortgage our children's and grandchildren's futures to chance. For debt to exceed 100% of GDP for the first time since 1963 is simply not sustainable, so I would support and indeed urge some measures of fiscal consolidation in next week's Budget. These should be targeted at hard-pressed families, and key drivers of employer behaviour such as national insurance should be protected, but I can well see the sense of looking at other options to raise revenue in the medium term, including increasing corporation tax.

Companies are realistic about the economic landscape. They care more about policy certainty and the general prosperity of the economy than about a moderate rise in corporation tax. I hope the Chancellor will be prudent as well as bold and emphasise the need for discipline and sound money next week as part of our recovery.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** We hope to get back to Nadia Whittome before the end of the debate, and sooner rather than later. We now go by video-link to Paula Barker.

1.41 pm

**Paula Barker** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab) [V]: The story of the Conservative party approach to economic management over the last 10 years has been a tale of two rather unequal halves. For the many it has been a story of a brutal squeeze on living standards and the rise in precarious living, at home and in the workplace, and for this vast majority it has been about the desecration of our public services and a dramatic decline in the municipal offer to our citizens. For the few, the last decade represented business as usual, the distant memory of the global financial crash a momentary blip for the capital as it ploughed on, unfazed by the destruction it wreaked upon us all.

The machine that was assembled to discredit all that was good about the last Labour Government's domestic agenda was slick and well oiled, and the opposition to this machine, on the contrary, tired and beleaguered. There existed a space for the great lie that was to come:

[Paula Barker]

that public spending was the problem and it was public spending that had to be brought back under control, not those in the City who had gambled with our futures. As soon as Fred Goodwin had become public enemy No. 1, this machine had moved on to Gordon Brown, because that was required to sell austerity to the population as a political necessity rather than the political choice it represented.

What do we have to show for this lost decade of political choices? For starters, there is the spectre of underemployment, low wages, low productivity and an economy imbalanced industrially and geographically on a scale never seen before. The indignity faced not just by those on welfare but by those in work at the hands of unscrupulous bosses with immoral methods of employment has been a testament to this. Yes, the Government have always boasted of low unemployment figures, but those who work in of real economy, not the City, know their stories are not told by the figures. I say "lost decade" because it has been the human cost of austerity that has come to define it. I fear that when the taps at the Treasury are turned off, and they will be, the worst for our people, beyond the current public health emergency, is still yet to come. Austerity has by every measure left our economy and workers grossly exposed to the economic chaos caused by the pandemic and our public services less resilient to respond to a crisis of such gravity.

The demands of our people are simple: to live well, to be happy, to be secure. These are not luxuries, but fundamental rights and so should be afforded to all people in all their diversity across every region and nation. That is what we should build our economic strategy around. If the last decade is anything to go by, our people could be waiting some time.

1.44 pm

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): My constituents have not forgotten what befell the UK economy the last time Labour was in power. The party which has left unemployment higher than it found it every single time it has been in office, and which left a note joking about the fact that there was no money left, might have approached this subject with a degree of humility.

The motion before the House invites us to reflect on the last 10 years of Conservative-led economic management. We should start with the situation that the Conservatives inherited in 2010 after 13 unlucky years of Labour misrule. The deficit was higher than at any time since records began in 1948, £1 in every £4 that Labour spent in its last year in power was borrowed, and unemployment was up by nearly half a million. Labour Members now say that it was all because of the global financial crisis, for which they should not be blamed, but that ignores two key facts. The first is that Britain suffered one of the worst banking crises in the world as a direct consequence of the spectacular failure of Labour's system of financial as regulation. Secondly, the UK entered that crisis running a deficit. We were borrowing too much even before that crisis hit.

Restoring order to the national finances was the defining economic mission of the decade leading up to the covid crisis. By the time that covid hit, the deficit had been reduced by over 80%, putting our public

finances back on a sustainable path. The unemployment rate was halved and employment reached record highs. Conservatives doubled the personal allowance and have taken 1.75 million people out of income tax. The lowest paid have received a £4,000 pay rise through the national living wage. Income inequality is lower now than it was in 2010. The highest earners are now paying a greater share of tax than at any time during the last Labour Government. All this meant that we entered the pandemic in a position of strength. This shows how vital it is to take the difficult decisions when times are relatively normal, so that we are able to take extraordinary measures when times get hard.

Labour has spent 11 years opposing every single one of the steps that we have taken to fix its mess. In 2019, having learned nothing from its mistakes, it suffered its worst defeat in a generation. The counterfactual, had Labour succeeded in that election, hardly bears thinking about. Labour's last shadow Chancellor was actively preparing for a run on the pound if he ever got into office. His goal was to "overthrow capitalism". That was the economic agenda that the Leader of the Opposition and the present shadow Chancellor both urged the British people to vote for. As we enter what I hope to be the countdown to the permanent reopening of our country, we should learn the real economic lessons of covid—that we have to take the difficult, responsible decisions to be ready for when the storm rolls in, and that we will all do better to be united and weathering storms such as covid together.

1.47 pm

**Feryal Clark** (Enfield North) (Lab) [V]: Covid has invaded every aspect of our lives. It has taken loved ones before their time, separated communities from one another and placed our NHS under unimaginable stresses. On 5 March, we will reach the one-year anniversary of the first Briton to die from the virus. It is only human for us to reflect on this sombre milestone and to ask, "What could we have done better, and how can we stop these failures happening again?"

This is the landscape in which we find this debate. The UK has suffered much and needs a compassionate, competent Government to act as its lodestar to a more secure future, but we find instead a Government who have presided over 10 years of economic mismanagement, which is typified by the approach to local government funding. Despite the Chancellor having served as local government Minister, he seems to have a complete blind spot when it comes to local government. Local authorities will play a vital role in supporting social and economic recovery as we emerge from the pandemic, yet they continue to face ongoing funding pressures under this Government.

Enfield, my local council, has done its utmost to protect frontline services and its communities during the pandemic, but it has had to do that with one hand tied behind its back. The Government have imposed cuts of over £170 million on Enfield over the past 10 years, making a tough job of protecting our communities even harder. Local authorities are the bedrock of our public services and they will be essential in supporting a green recovery, helping local people to regain skills, getting them into jobs and supporting our hardest-hit families.

That is why the Government's council tax bombshell will blow apart families' finances and undermine the long-term sustainability of the services that we will all rely on. This is a regressive tax increase, as it will hurt most those with the least. It will see areas with the lowest tax bases struggle to recoup lost Government central funding. Once again, we do not see a levelling-up agenda, but a "decay down" programme. In Enfield, many will see a tax hike of £100 thanks to this Government—that is £100 that can no longer be spent in local businesses to protect our local employees through this horrific time. It is short-termism writ large. The Budget in the coming weeks needs to be forward-looking, but I fear we will see yet more of the same old story of Tories abandoning communities in their greatest need.

1.50 pm

**Lee Anderson** (Ashfield) (Con) [V]: Another Opposition day debate, and another chance to remind the Labour party exactly why it is in opposition. The British people do not trust them on the economy. They do not trust them on the NHS, immigration, defence, Brexit and law and order, and the last four general elections have proved that.

We have an incredible record since 2010, with record employment before covid, the national minimum wage reaching new highs, and income tax payers £1,200 a year better off. There are fewer children in workless households and fewer families in poverty. The list goes on and on.

Locally, for residents in Ashfield and Eastwood, it gets better. Since being elected, I have managed to secure £6.2 million through the future high streets fund and another £1.5 million from the accelerated towns fund. We now have funding to get us through to the second round of the Restoring Your Railway fund, which could see train passenger services return to Selston for the first time since the 1960s. On top of that, I am currently working on a multimillion pound bid with Broxtowe Borough Council to ensure that the forgotten town of Eastwood finally gets its fair share of investment.

That is in sharp contrast to Labour's record in Ashfield, and I will tell the House why. In 2005, King's Mill Hospital in Ashfield was given away by the then Labour Government on a disastrous PFI deal. The hospital was rebuilt and should have cost about £300 million, but thanks to the financial incompetence of the Labour Government, the PFI now costs £1 million a week and the total cost of the hospital could be £2.5 billion. You do not need a degree in hindsight to know that was a bad deal from the start, but if the shadow Chancellor can guarantee that Labour's British recovery bonds will provide a £2.5 billion return on a £300 million investment, let me know, as I am sure my residents will snap them up.

Labour's incompetence is staggering, and I half-expect to see the shadow Chancellor and other shadow Front Benchers go to market one day and return with five magic beans, because their economic policies are like fairy tales. They make great bedtime reading for anyone under five, but no one else believes them.

Three years ago, while still a Labour councillor, I was asked in a Labour group meeting if I had read up on the economics of Karl Marx. I said, "No." I was then told to join the Tory party. I took their advice, and now I am their MP. That'll teach them.

Finally, socialism is a nice idea, but it is just like Labour's Front Bench: it has never worked, it never will, and no one takes it seriously.

1.53 pm

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab) [V]: I am afraid I am worried that the Minister showed in his opening remarks that he is living in some parallel universe with no understanding of what millions of people are going through. However, in the run-up to next week's Budget, I put on record not just the moral imperative to protect our citizens from poverty and destitution through our security system, but the health and economic imperatives, too.

Yesterday, the all-party parliamentary group on health in all policies published our report investigating the health effects of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. Even before covid, there was a poverty crisis driven by savage social security cuts spanning nearly a decade. Our children—the very children the Government are now saying we need to protect—have been disproportionately affected, as have our disabled people.

The overwhelming evidence shows that the immediate consequence of this epidemic is epidemic levels of mental ill health. For our children, we know that for every 1% increase in child poverty, an extra six babies out of 100,000 will not see their first birthdays. For those children who survive this poverty, their educational attainment and even their behaviour and future longevity will have been affected. Longer term, as Professor Sir Michael Marmot spelt out last year, we will see the UK's already flatlining life expectancy, which is declining in our poorest areas, decline even further—one of the worst in any advanced economies.

As Professor Marmot also said, the UK's high and unequal covid death toll can be related to the poverty and inequality across the UK driven by 10 years of severe austerity, including cuts to social security. Since 2010, £34 billion has been taken out of social security support for working-age people. Even with the £20 a week universal credit uplift, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that the UK has the least generous out-of-work support in the OECD. The welfare budget may have made savings, but that has resulted in our NHS, schools and local councils having to pick up the pieces as a result of the devastating health impacts and human costs.

I reiterate that the health impacts of this social security-mediated poverty were covid-driven. This week's National Institute of Economic and Social Research report shows the doubling of households living in destitution to nearly half a million and emphasises the inadequacy of social security support. It adds to the call that many of us have been making: we need a new social contract with the British people fit for the 21st century—a new Beveridge.

1.56 pm

**Virginia Crosbie** (Ynys Môn) (Con) [V]: Employment in the UK has always been a critical barometer of success, and I am proud that between 2010 and 2019, under a Conservative Government, an additional 3.8 million people have been employed. That equates to an additional 1,000 employed each day. And then the pandemic hit. Over the past 12 months, the world has experienced its largest economic shock in decades. The critical question for the Chancellor was how to minimise the impact on our economy, and he stepped up.

[Virginia Crosbie]

My constituency of Ynys Môn is beautiful, and, as a result, it has become a tourist paradise. In the past 20 years, under a Welsh Labour Government, we have experienced under-investment and the loss of major local employers, and we have become increasingly dependent on tourism. Tourism is not just about our hotels and B&Bs, like the Valley Hotel. It is not just about our caravan parks and static sites, like Pant y Saer. It is part of the fabric of our economy, from eateries like the Pilot House Café in Penmon and craft shops like Oriel Amlwch to our suppliers. Businesses like ET Jones Sons and Daughter—a family-run craft butcher in Bodedern—and Seapig, whose owner Cara White crafts beautiful jewellery from sea glass, all rely on tourists visiting the island to keep them afloat.

Our tourist season should have started at around the time the whole country went into lockdown last year. Suddenly, there were no tourists. Business forecasts lay in tatters. The island was staring into the jaws of disaster. The Chancellor's innovative schemes to support the whole UK economy offered a lifeline to thousands of people across Ynys Môn, with more than £7 million in coronavirus business interruption loan scheme loans, just under £37 million in bounce back loans, 3,400 employees furloughed, 2,000 claims made under the self-employment income support scheme, and nearly £1 million claimed on the eat out to help out scheme.

This Government are focused on supporting business and the economy. Their swift and decisive practical support has kept the UK going over the past year—not handouts as compensation for jobs lost, but hands up to help businesses ride the storm and come out the other side still intact. That is why the UK needs this Conservative Government—because when the going gets tough, we step up.

1.58 pm

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate on the Government's management of the economy and Conservative economic failure over the past decade. Ten years on from the rose garden press conference, I took another look at the coalition agreement—the ultimate Faustian pact—and I noticed this in the small print:

“The deficit reduction programme takes precedence over any of the other measures in this agreement”.

It is there in black and white—the Conservative Government had one goal and one goal only: to cut public spending.

The Chancellor told us at the time that it was to reduce the deficit, but we see now that it was to reduce the size of the state for ideological reasons. We have seen cuts to police numbers, roads, libraries, youth clubs, courts, housing, schools and council budgets, including in Slough. And who suffered most under austerity? The poorest and the most vulnerable—those most in need of a helping hand. If you seek a monument to those 10 years of Tory economics, visit a food bank. In Slough alone, 6,500 food packages were given to those in crisis—a 37% increase on the year before.

Then came the coronavirus. The pandemic has revealed something brilliant about our character. We volunteered, donated and looked out for our neighbours. We did not need David Cameron's big society to be telling us what

to do; it already existed. It is in our neighbourhoods, our community groups, our churches, mosques, gurdwaras, mandirs, synagogues and temples, in our trade unions and in our families. But the pandemic has also revealed something rotten within our system. It has revealed the fragility of our public services after years of neglect. It has revealed stark inequalities. It has shown Britain to be a country divided by class, race and wealth. Many millions are confined to small flats or overcrowded houses, seeing their incomes disappear, running up debts, defaulting on rents, and turning to food banks with no Government help.

The greatest lesson from the pandemic is that we need a fresh start—the kind of fresh start outlined by my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition just last week. When we beat the virus we must win the recovery, not simply return to the same old policies that weakened our economy in the first place. The past 10 years were a disaster for millions of people, and people cannot afford for the next 10 years to be even worse. Yes, we must build back better, but we must build back fairer too.

2.1 pm

**Chris Clarkson** (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): I was going to describe today's topic as mind-bending, but after listening to some of the drivel from Labour Members, I think the correct word is probably “psychotropic”. The only way that this could be any more surreal is if they get the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) to close with a lecture on fiscal discipline.

As we have a short time to speak, I will focus on recent events. Last week, the Leader of the Opposition gave a speech that was trailed as being the equivalent of the 1945 Beveridge report, so imagine everybody's disappointment when he rocked up to the podium with Sir Keir's new clothes—pound shop knockoffs of Government policies that he had been deriding the week before that somehow managed to be both dear and nasty. We can imagine the essay crisis moments at Labour HQ as he tried to concoct this diet Beveridge only to have the shadow Chancellor slip him a copy of the Treasury spending plans and say, “Change a few words and no one will notice.” The brass neck of it is absolutely gobsmacking. But of course people in the real world know exactly what is going on. We only needed to watch the response on ITV when the right hon. and learned Gentleman gave his Oscar-worthy performance and see the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (James Grundy) give their judgment on his performance with a look so pained it would have made Torquemada wince.

People in the real world get that this is a Government who are actually making some tough decisions. They understand that paying down 80% of Labour's £150 billion deficit enabled us to pay 80% of people's wages. They understand that this is a Government who lifted 1.74 million people out of income tax altogether. While Labour eliminated the 10p tax rate, we increased employment and the living wage, whereas no Labour Government have left power with more people in work than when they came to power. The simple fact of the matter is that Opposition Front Benchers are so feckless and overcome by torpor that they have no creative response to this crisis except to throw rocks at the Government as they try to deal with an emerging national crisis. They

are like the French intellectual sitting in a coffee shop watching the revolutionary crowds go by and saying to one another, "We must find out where our people are going so we can lead them." Well, let me tell them: they are not going in your direction.

2.4 pm

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab) [V]: I wonder who is really living in a surreal world when I hear some of the contributions from the Government Benches. Perhaps Conservative Members should have a look at the levels of national debt and some of the dreadfully incompetent decisions that are making matters worse, and walk a mile—or a short distance—in the steps of ordinary people and have a dose of reality.

Covid-19 has highlighted the fundamental weaknesses in the UK economy. Clearly, we have suffered one of the worst death rates in the world, coupled with a fall in economic activity suffered by no other major developed economy. Those weaknesses in our economy have been created over the last decade. Compounding the problem is the fact that the governing party has systematically undermined our vital public services.

I am well aware, because I served on the Bill Committee, that the NHS went through a costly and unnecessary reorganisation that has squandered billions of pounds and opened up our health service to privatisation. The problems are so acute that now, after only eight years, the Government have published a White Paper for a new health and social care Bill. I find it difficult to understand when I see the Prime Minister and his Ministers applauding our key workers—surely it is reasonable to ask where they have been during the last decade of public sector pay freezes. On the eve of the pandemic, falling real-terms wages in the NHS contributed to a workforce crisis. Year on year, taking account of inflation, wages have fallen for 10 years.

Nowhere has been more hard-pressed in the last decade than local government. We now have the Government's council tax bombshell, which is only weeks away. Instead of helping hard-pressed families in areas like mine, a succession of Governments led by the Conservatives have passed on the financial burden for maintaining local services to local taxpayers through higher council tax. At a time when local authorities such as Durham have had £260 million cut from their budgets, we should applaud them and congratulate them on their work with their public health teams to reduce covid transmission.

We should look at the realities of universal credit and what happens, year on year, when Ministers quietly cut the strings of our social security safety net. Sadly and unnecessarily, the Prime Minister maligned my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) yesterday during the statement for his trade union affiliations. Like my hon. Friend, I am proud of my trade union affiliations and the role trade unions have played in defending the living standards of working people.

2.7 pm

**Julie Marson** (Hertford and Stortford) (Con) [V]: A decade is a long time. Memories fade—or they do for Members on the Labour Front Bench who would like to rewrite history. My memory is very clear. I clearly remember the desperate state in which the Labour

Government left our national finances, and that they told us exactly what they had done at the time. In their own jaunty words:

"I'm afraid there is no money."

When the Labour party took office in 1997, the deficit stood at around £13 billion. When it left, it was £153 billion. It took the Conservative-led Government almost 10 years to reduce that deficit by 80%, while growing the economy, creating millions of jobs, cutting taxes for 32 million people, increasing the living wage and improving the lives and life chances of millions of people throughout our country. Labour opposed every effort to do that.

Thank goodness we cleaned up Labour's economic mess. Think of the mess we would be in now if our public finances had been in the hands of the Labour party for the past decade. Think of the mess if current Labour Front Benchers had had their way and the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) was in charge, alongside his overturning-capitalism, little-red-book-waving shadow Chancellor.

That we have had, and have now, a Conservative Government means that we have had the resources to support the NHS through the pandemic and the economic resilience to provide more than £280 billion of economic support for lives and livelihoods and to invest billions of pounds in sustainable public services—our schools, our police and our infrastructure.

The Chancellor will set out new measures in the Budget to support our country and its post-pandemic growth, but many of the foundations are already in place, including a world-beating business start-up ecosystem and a vision to build back better. What has the Labour party offered as its vision for the future? Two policies: one a Conservative policy from 2012 and the other pinched from the centre-right think-tank the Centre for Policy Studies.

My mum grew up in Limehouse. Her MP was Clement Attlee. The Leader of the Opposition is no Clement Attlee, and his party has nothing to offer this country but the same record of economic failure that it had over a decade ago. Attlee himself said:

"In a life-and-death struggle we cannot afford to have our destinies in the hands of failures"—[*Official Report*, 7 May 1940; Vol. 360, c. 1094.]

I agree with him. We cannot afford to leave our destinies in the hands of those with such a dismal record of economic failure: the Labour party.

2.9 pm

**Claire Hanna** (Belfast South) (SDLP) [V]: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) for bringing about this debate and giving us an opportunity to reflect on what has not been working in economic management, on the erosion of public services and on the unsustainable damage that we have been causing to the environment over the last decade, and to find new social democratic approaches that transform the economy for the benefit of everybody. The last 12 months have shown us that the state has to be one that protects what is important; the market cannot do that. This time has also shown us what it is possible to achieve when the will exists to do so.

Members have set out how threadbare public services had become, and how close to the financial edge many people had been living—through the gig economy, and

[*Claire Hanna*]

through the punitive and pointless gouging at the welfare state. Existing inequalities have been exposed. Generational injustices have been exposed, with students facing tens of thousands of pounds of debt for Zoom degrees. Caring burdens have fallen to women, and we will see that working through into workplace equality over the months and years to come.

Similar divergences in fortune are happening in parallel before our eyes in business. Small businesses and the self-employed—the red blood cells of our economy—are facing unimaginable challenges, cash and debt crises, while online organisations and other monoliths are posting massive, eye-watering profits that are largely untaxed. I repeat the SDLP's view that one-off windfall taxes should be applied to those businesses that have benefited so much from the pandemic.

Solutions exist, but we cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past. We cannot wander back into the distorted thinking of short-term management of sovereign debt over absolutely every other policy outcome. This Government have to learn—and I fear, from previous contributions, that they have not—the lessons of the 2008 crisis and of every other recession of the last 100 years. Sharp spending falls will choke the ability of families to spend, and that will have knock-on effects on businesses, jobs, growth and tax revenue for public services.

A real living wage is overdue. The rhetoric does not match the reality; work is no longer a way out of poverty. The universal credit uplift should be maintained. Short-term savings in public spending will be dwarfed by the long-term costs of managing intergenerational poverty. Even before covid, in economic terms Northern Ireland was at the top of all the bad economic charts and at the bottom of all the good ones, and the parties at home absolutely have to come together to create political stability and support the economy at home.

The last 12 months have shown that people can come together with solidarity, passion and innovation. This is our generation's rethink opportunity. We need to build an economy that works for more people that is based on wellbeing, not just on GDP.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** We are able to go back to Nadia Whittome.

2.13 pm

**Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab) [V]: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and many apologies for the tech troubles earlier.

This pandemic has revealed the impact of a decade of cuts and deepening inequality. It is not just Government failures this year that have left us with the worst death toll and worst economic recession in Europe. The last 10 years of Tory austerity have paved the way to disaster. It was because of austerity that we went into the pandemic with insufficient hospital beds; it was because of austerity that care workers across the country—I sounded the alarm on this last year—were left without adequate personal protective equipment; and it was because of austerity that the social security net that had been built over many years was destroyed.

After covid, we cannot go back to life as it was before. We cannot go back to an exploited workforce, to families hardly surviving on universal credit or to tenants being evicted at the whim of their landlords. From the rubble of war, the 1945 Labour Government built a new settlement; we built the NHS and the welfare state.

Just as the national health service was built from ruins, our society today is crying out for a national care service. We need the green new deal to bring hundreds of thousands of well-paid green jobs to every city, region and town in our country; tenants need a long-term ban on evictions; and the key workers whom Ministers applauded last year deserve nothing less than a pay rise.

If this is not the time to demand courage and ambition, when is? People who lived through the war and rebuilt this country afterwards deserve better than to die alone. My generation deserves better than to be robbed of secure housing, secure jobs and proper mental health support. Austerity was never necessary. People who did nothing to bring about the financial crash were made to pay for it. Our Prime Minister promised no return to austerity and we have to hold him to it.

2.15 pm

**Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con) [V]: It is a bit rich of Labour Members to talk of economic failure ascribed to anyone but themselves. To them, it is never their fault—they never did wrong. They think that voters just did not get it quite right, but for most, the reality of the decade of Labour economic incompetence before this decade of Conservative economic repair is plain to see.

Nowhere is that more true than in Stoke-on-Trent, where the decade of Conservative competence has seen a renaissance of our local economy. Prior to covid, Stoke-on-Trent was one of the fastest growing economies nationally. After decades of Labour's neglect and failed representation, Royal Doulton, Spode, Tams, Sadler, Beswick and Kiln Craft—the list goes on—were all victims of Labour's tax and waste policies. Our communities were left dependent, with no hope of a better future or of ever getting out of the downward spiral. Thankfully, things are now very different. We are starting to see our city prosper again, with people aspiring to achieve more. Duchess China 1888, for example, has been rescued and revived, thanks to Heraldic Pottery, enabled by a decade of Conservative policies.

It was Gordon Brown who clobbered the ceramics industry with the climate change levy. Thankfully, George Osborne reformed that levy. It was Conservative competence that restored our international financial credibility, so that even this extraordinary covid crisis can be carefully navigated. Thank goodness we have this competent Conservative Government and not the Front Benchers opposite, let alone the Marxist leadership they wanted in Downing Street just over a year ago.

In the Conservative decade pre-covid, UK manufacturing as a percentage of total gross value added increased for the first time since Major's Government. In Labour's 13 years of incompetence, it nearly halved. In the last decade of Conservative Government, since 2010, we have seen the longest unbroken run of manufacturing growth for over 50 years.

I am passionate about the manufacturing renaissance in my home city, which is supporting the prosperity of people in Stoke-on-Trent and growing opportunities

and new industries such as advanced manufacturing, digital and green technologies. That is vital. This Government are focused on levelling up opportunities across the whole country to ensure we build back better and emerge stronger from the pandemic. We must keep going with policies that deliver more prosperity, increase skilled employment and pay better wages. Stoke-on-Trent is finally on the up, and not even covid will be able to keep us down for much longer. Only the Labour party would keep us down. We must not go back to where it left us.

2.18 pm

**Dame Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab) [V]: Since 2010, successive Tory Governments have run a failed experiment with market fundamentalist economic dogma in the UK. They cynically blamed the global financial crisis in 2008 on the last Labour Government's spending on health and education, and used it as an excuse to shrink the size and capacity of the state. They made an absurd fetish of the deficit, which they elevated above all other considerations as the only imbalance that had to be eliminated.

Oddly, since the Conservatives borrowed an eye-watering £400 billion last year to finance the response to covid-19, they seem to have stopped worrying about the deficit. All of a sudden, they now argue that the country can carry such debt burdens, when to do so was apparently utterly ruinous only 12 years ago. Their decision to introduce huge cuts in spending since 2010 is now exposed for what it really was: a cynical, ideological choice, not an economic necessity.

The Conservative party took office with a programme of cuts that hit the poorest and most vulnerable hardest, at the same time as it introduced huge tax cuts for top earners. We can now see that cutting the size and effectiveness of the state was folly, causing poverty and destitution to soar. It was a social catastrophe; it weakened this country and left us woefully ill-prepared for the challenges that we are now facing; and it made us far more vulnerable than we need have been.

As this country grapples with a global health pandemic and the effects of Brexit combined, the extent of the damage that the Conservatives' ideological obsessions have caused is plain to see. They have delivered a terrible double whammy: the worst economic crisis in any developed economy and one of the highest per capita death rates in the world.

Local authority funding has been halved in the past decade, with a higher percentage of resource taken from poorer areas. That has hampered our response to the pandemic, not least because of the huge cuts that the Government made to public health budgets. They weakened the NHS by ruinous reorganisation, fragmentation and enforced competition. Staff shortages and cuts to intensive care unit beds made our death rate worse. Public services have been hollowed out to make way for expensive outsourcing to cronies and Tory donors. The lack of adequate sick pay is setting back the fight against the virus and causing more avoidable transmission and deaths.

Lives have been needlessly lost, life chances are being squandered and people are suffering, so we must make a different choice. We must choose not the smallest state but an active and empowering state; we must renew our public services, not starve them of resources; and as we

seek to recover from this crisis, the state must work in partnership with business to lay the foundations of our future success and prosperity.

2.21 pm

**Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland) (Con) [V]: The last 10 years did not weaken the foundations of the economy; they did the exact opposite. We took the painful decisions to repair public finances during a decade in which the Government also managed to provide uninterrupted economic growth.

I am not the first person in this debate to mention the fact that the Government fixed the roof of public finances. They reduced Labour's deficit by more than 80%. Why? So that we would be able to respond with hugely increased funding in a real crisis. Labour never fixes the roof. It is because of the responsible decisions of Conservative Governments that the UK has the financial firepower to support the whole economy—the economy in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England—throughout the pandemic, by spending more than £280 billion, and counting.

Conservatives fix the roof of public finances while at the same time reducing inequality in our society. Labour's claims to the contrary are wrong. All measures of inequality, whether they measure original, gross or disposable income, have narrowed under the Conservative stewardship of the economy. Labour talk the talk, but the Conservative party has delivered for the low-paid. In fact, the Conservative stewardship of the economy has led to the lowest-paid people being up to £5,200 better off, in real terms, than they were in 2010—and that came after 13 years of Labour Government.

The approach to fairness that I have outlined needs to continue. The motion calls for a further pay rise for public sector workers—the heartland of Labour's union bosses—and we would all love to be in a position to deliver that, but we need to recognise that as a result of the pandemic, private sector wages have fallen by almost 1%, while at the same time last year public sector wages rose by almost 4%. Unlike the private sector, wherein people have lost jobs, been furloughed and had insecure employment and reduced working hours, the public sector has been largely protected.

In the circumstances, is it fair to tax the private sector even more to pay for further public sector pay increases? It might be popular, but it would not be fair or in the long-term interests of the country. Let us get the economy growing, with private sector pay increasing, so that we can afford to pay the public sector more as well. The Conservative Government can be trusted to steward the economy for the long term; Labour simply cannot.

2.24 pm

**Florence Eshalomi** (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: The last decade has seen huge changes to our economy and the way we work, most notably the advent of the gig economy, characterised by short-term contracts or freelance work instead of permanent jobs. It is a workforce dominated by women and workers from black and minority communities. That type of economy works well for people who can choose where, when and how they work, but it does not work for everyone—those who have no choice but to take whatever low-paid, insecure work they can get.

[*Florence Eshalomi*]

This pandemic has revealed and exacerbated deep structural inequalities in Britain today, and it has also created winners and losers. Public Health England found that black and minority ethnic communities were more likely to live in overcrowded houses in deprived areas and have jobs that exposed them to high risks of contracting the virus—a cocktail of conditions that had left them more vulnerable to unemployment and the risk of death.

We must take the opportunity to reflect on the lessons of the pandemic. Time and time again the Government have promised to reform the gig economy, but their flagship employment Bill is nowhere to be seen. We need to ensure that that Bill enshrines strong protections for gig economy workers, so that as we start to recover and rebuild the foundations of our economy and Britain, we build a Britain that will benefit everybody.

2.26 pm

**Lee Rowley** (North East Derbyshire) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute today.

I start by scratching my head, as I often do when looking at the motions for Opposition day debates. They always have a limited and distant relationship with the truth and what is happening on the ground, but this one is a particularly telling example of that problem. Let us look at the words in the first sentence of the motion—

“that the last decade of UK economic policy”

undermined

“the foundations”

of our country. Even having that discussion is almost ridiculous. But we seem to have to have that debate, because those in the Labour party consistently fail to understand the repair that has gone on since the challenges and the problems that they left us in 2010. I have noted, over the last 10 years, both as a Member of Parliament since 2017 and, before that, as somebody who was interested in politics, the lack of alternative policies and programmes of any credibility or coherence; so the suggestion that there is now some kind of brilliant answer on the other side of the debate is the epitome of chutzpah, and I do not find it credible in the slightest.

Colleagues have spoken of many of the things that have been achieved over the last 10 years, in extremely difficult circumstances—the highest rate of employment for many decades; a consistently growing economy, whose growth was at the higher end of that of some of our western neighbours; a massive reduction in the deficit caused by the bad decisions taken in 2008, 2009 and before; tax cuts to both business and people; and, for the first time, before the coronavirus pandemic hit, a debt-to-GDP ratio that was starting to come down—the fact that we do not leave more debt to our children and grandchildren.

The most interesting part of the debate so far came in the intervention by the hon. Member for Oxford East (**Anneliese Dodds**), who I have the greatest of respect and time for, on my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (**Sir Edward Leigh**). He asked the Labour party to consider some basic tenets of fiscal responsibility and credibility, for the first time in a decade and a half. The hon. Lady said—I had to go back to check it on Parliamentlive—“the quantum is not important. How

much we spend is not important”—in the same way as the deficits are not important, or the debt, or fiscal restraint, or paying our own way?

**Anneliese Dodds** *rose*—

**Lee Rowley**: I am sorry; the hon. Lady had many minutes to explain that, but I do not have the time she did.

The only thing that is important for the Labour party is spending—spending more, whatever the type, whatever the situation, whatever the issue. Be it in times of economic surplus, like under Blair and Brown, spend more—a £15 billion to £25 billion deficit. In times of economic hardship, like in 2008, 2009, spend more. In times of economic recovery in 2010, like in Ed Balls' Bloomberg speech, fiscal stimulus, spend more. Then the, quite frankly, Lilliputian Corbynite economics of spend, spend, spend. This is the problem with the Labour party: they fail to understand the basic tenets of the economic problems and opportunities that we have. For that, they will be on those Benches, calling Opposition debates, for much longer.

2.29 pm

**Suzanne Webb** (Stourbridge) (Con) [V]: The charge today is that the concerted economic failure of the past decade has “weakened the foundations” of our economy, leading to the country

“suffering the worst economic crisis of any major economy”.

The simple truth—I talk as someone who walks the steps of an ordinary person—is that, under successive Conservative Governments, we have seen nine consecutive years of economic growth. We have seen tax cuts for families, tax cuts for businesses, a reduction in inequality and a record low proportion of low-paying jobs. We have been helping people to keep more of what they earn and driving up median household income. The conclusive evidence for all of that is that we have seen record numbers of people in work—an additional 3.4 million up until 2019. Thanks to the decisions taken by Conservative Governments over the last 10 years, we have been able to withstand the blow that this pandemic has inflicted on our economy.

We have seen an unprecedented set of economic measures and financial support at a time of national crisis. We have delivered one of the most comprehensive economic responses in the world to support jobs, businesses and livelihoods during this time. This is a Government who have not been blown off course by the pandemic—who have helped those most in need at a time of crisis, while paving the way for an even more prosperous future. This is a Government who are focused on building back better and levelling up, and who have a key eye on jobs, focusing on reskilling and retraining at a scale and pace probably only seen following the second world war, ensuring people can get the education and training they need to get great jobs—creating that firm and solid link and pipeline of opportunity for those seeking work—with a keen eye on trade and all that it can do to boost our productivity and improve our international competitiveness, and, of course, not forgetting their ambitious investment in research and innovation.

It makes no sense to talk of 10 years ago, but if we want to, let us talk about the fact that every Labour Government have left unemployment higher than when they started. By 2019, we cut unemployment to the

lowest level since 1974. It is thanks to the Conservatives that we reduced the deficit by more than 80%. When we handed over the deficit to Labour, it was £13.1 billion. Under Labour, it did not triple or quadruple—it went up more than 10 times, to £153 billion, by 2009.

It is thanks to the sound financial management of this Government that we could afford the unprecedented support we have put in place to protect people's livelihoods. That is why we can build back better out of this pandemic on solid foundations. We can see that already with the speed and pace of the vaccine roll-out—a vaccine that is accessible due to the incredible foresight in the procurement by this Government. We probably have one of the first robust and defined road maps out of this pandemic because of this—

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order.

2.33 pm

**Dave Doogan** (Angus) (SNP) [V]: Tory economic incompetence is a rich seam to mine, and it is a challenge to do justice to the millions of marginalised workers and families up and down these islands who pay the price of Tory policies. The Chancellor borrowed £55.2 billion in May 2020, nine times more than in the previous May, and the highest monthly borrowing since records began. Indeed, we need to go back 50 years to find UK gross borrowing exceeding the size of the whole UK economy as it now does—and this is a Government who are trying to tell us that they have this under control? National debt of £2.1 trillion might not worry the millionaires in the Tory Cabinet, but the rest of us are horrified.

The Chancellor said last June that the best way to restore public finances is to open the economy and get people back to work. Well, we now know what an ill-fated risk calculation that was, to the UK's great public health and economic cost, brought to bear on the population by a Chancellor seemingly more invested in his personal brand than judicious ministerial responsibility.

The Labour party will need to be careful with its criticisms, though. It inherited falling debt and a surplus in '97, and took only two years to change that back into rising debt. The current tenant of No. 11 Downing Street is the latest in a long line from both UK parties seemingly more chancer than Chancellor. And let us not forget that, in 2010, Labour was planning devastating austerity cuts that it was very clear were going to be tougher and deeper than Margaret Thatcher's in the 1980s. In this, UK politics is revealed as the worst ever Hobson's choice.

Today's Chancellor, mirroring Alistair Darling when he shored up the banks, presents himself as something of a benevolent genius for wheeling out the furlough scheme, conveniently forgetting that it represents a very standard fiscal intervention by any Government in a developed economy in times of crisis, and of course it is future generations, not he, who will be paying down the bill. The UK Chancellor, like most before him in my 48 years, is neither genius nor generous, and there are 3 million excluded who will testify to that, not to mention our pensioners, who, by 2016 figures, endure the worst state pensions in the developed world.

We must then consider the shameful UK economic growth of 2% over the last 10 years of this Government, which compares with figures of 6% in the US, 9% in the

EU and Japan, and 7% in the G7. We see clearly the chickens of historical UK underinvestment in science, engineering and manufacturing coming home to roost—the legacy of Thatcher alive and well—and that is before the long-term negative effects of Brexit flow through. Since devolution, the UK's growth in output languishes at 23.8%, while Scotland's has risen by 33.7%, outpacing the outmoded UK and doing so despite the dead hand of the UK Treasury holding us back. It will not do so for much longer, for at independence, Scotland will retake our place on the international global stage and forge ahead with our independent, progressive and inclusive economic future.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Before I call Ben Everitt, may I just ask the remaining MPs participating remotely to look at the clock on the left or right hand side of their monitors, wherever it may be? If they cannot see that, please could they use an alternative device, because they will be cut off after three minutes.

2.36 pm

**Ben Everitt** (Milton Keynes North) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Angus (Dave Doogan), because he gave us SNP bingo, with “Brexit”, “Thatcher” and of course ending with “independence”. However, that is not quite why I rise to speak, as flabbergasted as I am.

I am very, very flabbergasted: flabber, gasted, gone! The title of this debate demonstrates an astounding lack of political self-awareness on the Opposition Benches. I have never seen anything so lacking in political awareness since the Leader of the Opposition relaunched his opposition last week by announcing his favourite Government policies. But the Opposition ask us to reminisce and look into history, so let us do so. I assure you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that I was not old enough to vote in 1997, but I was politically aware enough to see what was going on. Labour came into power off the back of many things, not least by promising to follow Conservative fiscal policies for the first three years of their term. The records show that, because they followed those tax and spend policies, the economy did indeed grow, but then it all went wrong. We should have seen it coming, not least when the then Chancellor, who later became the Prime Minister, sold off the gold, after announcing to the markets that he was about to sell off all the gold—well not all the gold, but most of it.

Then let us come to the Labour party's record on the private finance initiative: £3 trillion-worth of debt saddling our public sector—our hospitals and schools. The very public sector that is getting us out of the mess we are in now was saddled with huge debts taking up all of its money. I mentioned that the Opposition lacked self-awareness, but in 2010 there was a glimpse of political awareness of what they had done, because they left a note saying “there is no money” left.

What happened in that decade after Labour destroyed our economy? We had nine years, under Conservatives, of consecutive economic growth. We got the deficit down from 10% to 2%, and we had record employment and historically low unemployment. The contrast could not be greater. Labour took their eye off the ball and we had a banking crisis, whereas the Conservatives rebuilt the economy, giving jobs for working people and hard-working families.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I was elected in 1992. Mr Everitt, you have made me feel very old.

2.39 pm

**Mr Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab) [V]: It is telling that the Chancellor has chosen not to respond to this economic debate about the last 10 years and the response required as we emerge from coronavirus. I suspect that that is not because he is publicity shy—everything we have seen of him suggests that that is not the case. I suspect he does not want to be associated with the Tory policies of the past.

It is important that we understand and learn the lessons of history, and it is important, in order to do that, that we get the history right. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury said in his opening speech that the coalition Government in 2010 inherited an economy that was “shrinking” and a deficit that was “ballooning”—that is false. In fact, the UK economy grew by 1.7% in the first two quarters of 2010, and was on target to grow at over 3.5% in that year before George Osborne’s austerity Budget took demand out of the economy and set us on a path that meant it would be 2013, almost three years later, before we got two quarters of growth as large again.

That decision to choke off the recovery—to scrap the school and college building programmes, NHS spending and council care services spending—was not only economically insane, and I suspect will not be repeated, but was done entirely for political reasons. George Osborne wanted to be able to lay the blame for the cuts that followed at the door of the previous Government, and was willing to sacrifice months off the recovery in order to do so.

As we hear the Tories in this debate talking about the deficits they inherited, we might think that we do not have a deficit now, but of course we have the biggest deficit the country has ever had. I support the fact that the Government have not attempted to prevent us from having a deficit. While we are addressing the pandemic, it would have been ludicrous to do so, just as it would be ludicrous to pretend that what was done during the economic crisis of 2008 could be done without a deficit being inherited. Of course, if we had a general election now, this Government would be handing over a monumental deficit, but the Conservatives inherited a country that had had a global event but was already on the path to recovery.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury also said that the Government inherited a country that was “unbalanced” as between different parts of the country. What on earth have we seen since? There have been hugely disproportionate cuts to local government spending in more deprived areas, and the scrapping of Sure Start, which was so important in working-class communities. Let us remember that all these decisions were taken at the same time that they were handing huge tax cuts, in corporation tax and higher-rate income tax, to the very wealthiest in our country. We certainly were not all in it together. That is the economic context of the past 10 years. This Government have to make sure that they do not repeat the failings and mistakes of the past.

2.42 pm

**Jacob Young** (Redcar) (Con): I draw the House’s attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

Today we have seen once again Opposition Members playing the blame game: trying to point the finger at the Government for everything and anything, including for a crisis that has come to us from well beyond our shores. I did find it odd when I read the subject of today’s Opposition day debate, given the legacy of the previous Labour Government. Our record in office has been tested by the electorate three times in the past 10 years, and each time the public have chosen to elect a Conservative Government over Labour’s woeful opposition. The reason I believe the Conservatives have been the public’s choice in each of those elections is that we chose to offer hope and aspiration. That is still true today, with an optimistic Government speaking about the immense challenges we still face, but ones that the British people will rise to, versus an Opposition who are focused on doing down our efforts to protect the economy and save as many jobs as we can.

We can see the same thing playing out locally in Teesside in our upcoming mayoral elections. In 2015, Redcar lost its steelworks with the closure of SSI, but rather than accepting our fate as a once great region that built the world, we rose to the challenge of transforming the site, taking public control of 4,500 acres, beginning our regeneration of it and being backed by more than £200 million of Government investment so far. This regeneration is being spearheaded by our Conservative Mayor, Ben Houchen, with ambitious plans for the Teeswork site to build a new greener Teesside that champions carbon capture and storage, wind power and hydrogen. Key to all of this is our goal of a freeport in Teesside, with an ambitious plan to bring in more than 18,000 jobs over the next five years. Meanwhile, Labour locally offers only negativity, doing down the opportunity presented to us and talking down Teesside and the plans that we have.

Let me speak directly to today’s motion. I thank the Labour party for this opportunity to remind ourselves how grateful we are to successive Conservative Governments who have fixed the roof while the sun was shining. Never could we have been in a better position to deal with a crisis of this magnitude—if, of course, it is at all possible to be prepared for such a crisis. Since 2010, after nine years of consecutive growth, our economy has grown by 19%, which is faster than those of Italy, France and Japan. That is an entire decade of uninterrupted growth. We had to turn this country around from where Labour had left it, with no money in the Treasury and a deficit running out of control. The Conservative management of the economy has meant that we were able not only to rebalance the books, but to create record high employment across the country to support the public services on which we so heavily rely at this time.

The reality is that those very successes were built on the strong foundations on which we relied when the pandemic hit. Without solid finances, we would not have been able to put in place some of the most generous support schemes in the world, including for businesses and the self-employed, and millions would have suffered unnecessarily. I am proud to stand behind this Government’s record of fixing the roof while the sun was shining.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. The wind-ups will begin no later than 3.40 pm.

2.46 pm

**Olivia Blake** (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): The aftermath of the 2008 crisis saw not only weak levels of growth, but a fundamental shift in the character of our labour market. As the economy contracted and people lost their jobs, we saw low-pay zero-hours contracts in sectors where workers had far weaker trade union representation. Labour borrowing or spending did not cause the international crisis and the economic crash. No, the only organisations that could achieve that were the big banks that took huge risks in an unregulated global banking market. They did not think about the impact that such risks would have on our communities; they just thought about their profits and bonuses.

This false rhetoric about what happened has damaged towns, cities and many communities, leaving councillors with impossible decisions on what services to cut. I find it a bit insulting when I hear Members say, as some have done today, that those in the public sector have been protected from job losses. After 10 years of harsh service cuts, huge workloads and many vacancies—in nursing, for example, there are 40,000 current vacancies—a huge strain has been imposed on the hard-working public sector who do deserve a pay rise. It is no surprise that the gap between the super-rich and the poorest continues to grow.

Things are certainly not all rosy in the private sector. In 2008, 143,000 people were on zero-hours contracts. By 2016, that figure had reached nearly 1 million, and it has stayed at about that level ever since. Not only did the 2008 crisis force down wages, but the insecure working conditions that it created made it harder to negotiate higher pay. Now, 13 years after the last economic crisis, total pay, adjusted for inflation, has finally returned to 2008 levels.

Today, some of the people most likely not to have been furloughed are those on low pay, or on zero-hours contracts. I was shocked to read in the latest Office for National Statistics labour market report that the net impact on recent job losses could see an increase in average pay of 1.5%. That is purely because the people on the lowest wages are the ones most likely to lose their jobs. When they do not lose their jobs, many are afraid to go off sick for fear that they will not have their hours renewed, or because statutory sick pay simply will not cover their rent and bills, or because they will not be entitled to statutory sick pay. Low pay and insecurity in our economy has created a perfect storm for transmitting the virus and the Government are failing to learn the lessons. There is a real human price to their ideology—whether it be children in poverty, food bank queues or homelessness.

2.48 pm

**Christian Wakeford** (Bury South) (Con): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake) if only to highlight how she is wrong about 10 years of Conservative management of the economy. There has been much talk about how the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) left that infamous note that said how sorry he was that there was no money left. Not content with doing that damage to the Treasury, he is now wanting to do that to the west midlands, too.

What we see from the Labour party and definitely from its Front Bench is a collective amnesia. Let us not forget that, in 2010 and in 2015, Labour, too, was

campaigning on a platform of tackling the deficit and delivering its own austerity, so I guess that all cuts are bad unless they are Labour cuts. We have seen the shadow Chancellor today again inadvertently mislead by confusing the deficit with the debt. The deficit, which we campaigned on and have spoken about for over 10 years, has come down massively; that is what we campaigned on, not tackling the debt issue.

After nine years of economic growth, pre-covid we saw the highest level of recorded employment, an increase in the national insurance threshold giving 41 million people a tax cut, and an income tax cut for 32 million. When that is combined with the national insurance threshold change, it means that a typical basic rate taxpayer is now over £1,200 a year better off, which in turn means more money into the local economy. The number of workless households is down by a third, income inequality is down, there are 1.5 million more businesses in the economy, and there is the pension triple lock.

I know you are thinking, Mr Deputy Speaker, that these are the greatest hits of the last decade. However, that is not the case: this is just the first album, with the second album still to come. So what do we have? We have £14 billion extra for schools in the next three years, hundreds of billions of pounds being put into infrastructure investment, over £30 billion extra for the NHS, £1 billion for the future high streets fund, £3.6 billion for the towns fund, and £4 billion for the levelling-up fund.

Thanks to the long-term economic plan of former Chancellors we have been able to repair the roof while the sun was shining, which means we have been in a stronger position to deal with this crisis and have been able to swiftly put into action measures for our recovery. We have been able to invest in the furlough scheme, invest in business support grants, and put more money into the NHS.

The hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), on the Opposition Front Bench, spoke about the limits on council tax, but no one is forcing anyone to put council tax bills up. If councils do not want to do that—and I urge my own local council to take heed—we are not forcing them to do so. So I say to the hard-working families of Radcliffe, Whitefield and Prestwich that if their council tax bills go up, they have only one party to blame, and that is their local Labour council.

There are many things we should be proud of; instead we have an Opposition who, after 10 years of collective amnesia—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. I call Liz Saville Roberts.

2.52 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC) [V]: I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Opposition for arranging today's debate, but it is clear that, while we agree that the Conservative track record is poor from the Welsh perspective, the Labour party is also culpable of economic mismanagement. In fact, Wales's situation demonstrates that the issue lies not necessarily with which party is in power in Westminster, but with the structural failures and systemic inequalities that define this disunited and unequal Union.

[Liz Saville Roberts]

The UK is the most geographically unequal of the OECD nations, and while Unionists bemoan the financial challenges of independence, for the Celtic nations, they should remember that only three out of the UK's 12 economic regions are net contributors to the UK budget, and needless to say we all know where those three regions of England are.

The Conservatives certainly bear a weight of responsibility: their chronic austerity programme hampered our economy and public finances, meaning that in Wales our budget only recovered to pre-austerity levels this year, although the day-to-day budget per person remains below pre-austerity levels. Meanwhile, while Plaid Cymru cautiously welcomes the Conservatives' levelling-up rhetoric, we have learned that, in reality, it means little more than the UK Government throwing taxpayers' money sporadically at new Conservative constituencies, rather than a coherent vision reflecting local labour and industrial market dynamics—a coherent vision we so desperately need.

Yet Labour, in power in Wales for over 20 years, cannot pretend in Westminster that it is really any different or any better, especially given its lacklustre record in Wales. We must not forget that Labour voted with the Conservative Westminster Government to impose austerity, that Labour worked with the Conservatives to reject Plaid Cymru's calls for a full Barnett consequential from HS2, meaning that Wales is losing out on £5 billion of funding from a railway that runs through England, and that Labour supported a shoddy Tory Brexit deal, which has suffocated trade for sectors including the shellfish industry in the community where I live, undermined our ports and imposed burdens on businesses.

Next week, Plaid Cymru wants to work constructively with the UK Government to deliver a real levelling-up agenda and a green recovery that deals effectively with the productivity crisis. That is why I urge the Chancellor not to depress demand and hamper our economic recovery with premature tax rises. Instead, I hope that next week will bring measures incentivising business investment, extensions of support to businesses and workers and support to address long-term unemployment. For our recovery to be truly sustainable, and given Westminster's poor record of delivery, only more powers for Wales, including the removal of the borrowing cap on the Welsh Government, will allow Wales to realise our economic potential, overcome the UK's divisions and deliver a flourishing economic recovery.

2.55 pm

**Peter Gibson** (Darlington) (Con) [V]: Today's debate is a great opportunity to shine a spotlight on how it is only through the Conservatives' careful stewarding of our public finances that we have been in a position to deliver phenomenal levels of support to people during the pandemic. As a former business owner and an employer, I know only too well the need for economic certainty, economic stability and the right level of taxation to encourage investment. We should never forget that it is businesses that grow our economy and create jobs, and it is thanks to a Conservative Government that I was able to do that.

In December 2019, just over 14 months ago, the people of Darlington and, indeed, the UK rejected Labour's economic mismanagement in favour of a

Conservative Government with ambitious plans to level up places like Darlington across the north. Since I was elected in 2019, this Conservative Government have provided phenomenal investment in Darlington, including £105 million for the redevelopment of Bank Top station, £23.3 million from the towns fund, £9.7 million for County Durham police, £4 million for main line improvements, £3.6 million to get Darlington building, £629,000 of funding for Darlington College, and millions of pounds in covid support schemes and relief funds for Darlington Borough Council.

This debate is another lacklustre attempt by Labour to create headlines and weave a fantasy that it is the party of sound economic management. The truth is that I have seen at first hand how the Conservative Government over the last 10 years have delivered economic security for thousands, reduced the cost of living and created a fairer and more equal society. Over the last decade, successive Conservative Governments have overseen a period of economic stability that has seen the deficit reduced by 80%, an additional 3.4 million people in regular employment, a rise in the national living wage by 2.2%, an increase in the national insurance threshold, an income tax cut for 32 million people and a reduction in the number of children living in workless households by a third.

This Conservative Government have ambitious plans for record investment in our NHS, railways, roads, education system and left-behind communities. In the Tees Valley, we are hopeful that building back even better and levelling up will include a freeport and Treasury jobs being relocated to our region. The last year has shown that when push comes to shove, it is the Conservatives who provide the support when we are down and the incentives to grow when it is time to get back up.

2.58 pm

**Stephen Kinnoch** (Aberavon) (Lab) [V]: During this pandemic, we have seen the way in which business and the state are utterly interdependent, and yet for a decade the Conservatives have failed to recognise the potential and the desperate need for the Government and enterprise to work in partnership to drive growth, create jobs and wealth and foster the more long-termist, resilient and inclusive economy that our country so badly needs.

Take research and development. Our Government are failing to match the OECD average of investing 2% of GDP in R&D and are nowhere near their own target of investing 3%. In relative terms, the Governments of Germany and Japan invest twice as much in R&D, and in so doing, they unlock double the amount of private investment.

Take also the abject failure of the Government to buy British. Consecutive Governments have hidden disingenuously behind EU state aid and procurement rules, while other EU countries have got ahead. Today, the Leader of the Opposition has rightly called on the UK Government to buy more of the food they purchase from British farmers. Likewise, in my Aberavon constituency, we wonder why Whitehall Departments are still buying millions of pounds-worth of steel from other countries.

Recently, we have witnessed the results of a decade of Conservative failure. UK manufacturing has dropped below 9% of GDP, compared with around 30% in the

1970s. This is hurting communities and making us even more reliant on imports during the pandemic, not least on expensive PPE import deals, in some cases brokered by Conservative cronies who utterly failed to deliver. Our economy has become less resilient and less secure, which has had an adverse effect on national security and health. We have 57 critical national infrastructure supply chains that depend on China. The short-termist nature of our economy has meant that we have become the European capital for hostile foreign takeovers, which are rarely in the national interest, or in the interests of local communities.

The Government should welcome the shadow Chancellor's excellent proposals for 100,000 new start-up loans for SMEs, to incentivise young businesses. We need to spread growth beyond London and the south-east. We need to incentivise long-term investment in business and workers over a get-rich-quick mentality, and we must recognise the key role that trade unions play in driving up productivity. We need to give everyone a chance to have a stake in our economy. It is time for the state, employers and workers to join forces as partners for a new kind of growth and to build a United Kingdom of purpose, patriotism and resilience.

3.1 pm

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD) [V]: It is a pleasure to speak today and to follow the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock). When I look around me, I see that the Government's handling of the pandemic has left us with the worst economic recession of the G7 and that their botched trade deal with the EU has caused unnecessary avoidable damage.

I am slightly disappointed with this debate. At a time when this country faces an enormous challenge to its future, when my constituents are crying out for an economic plan that will save their jobs or allow the company that they have invested years and their family's future in to survive, and when taxi drivers, hairdressers and florists who have not been able to earn for most of the past year are desperate for some hope that the Government will help them, I am disappointed that the Labour party wants to talk about the past. It is a past that we cannot change. Surely Labour Members must appreciate that when they look back to the times when their own economic policies were less than universally successful. So please let us park the political tribalism and avoid point scoring. Let us look at where the country is and what it needs.

The economy has shrunk 10% in the past year. Unemployment this morning is at 5.1%, and half of those who have joined that massive figure from paid employment are less than 25 years old. Our young people do not know if the future they have worked and planned for is now going to be possible. The future is uncertain for so many. Of course we should learn from what has gone before, but we should be talking about and planning for what is ahead of us, because this is about recovery. Our experiences may differ, but surely we have all felt the pain of the past year and more, through the people we serve. Many have felt it more acutely than others, and that is the point. We have to keep people in work and businesses afloat, so that they are as strong as they can be as we slowly come through to the other side of this. Some will have to rebuild, and it is our responsibility to give them the tools to be able

to do that. That is why the country is holding its breath, hoping to hear some hope from the Chancellor next week.

We need to innovate our way out of this crisis and to put the environment back at the heart of the UK's agenda. We need to tackle mass unemployment and establish ourselves as the country of the green industrial revolution. We need to bring under Government support the countless self-employed people who have been excluded from all help, and we need a long-term extension to the furlough. We need a bold green recovery plan, an increased carers allowance, access to free school meals and better mental health services, and maybe the time has come to recognise that universal credit has gone wrong. We need to investigate a universal basic income, and listen to the voices from our cross-party parliamentary groups, the devolved Administrations, the Mayors and the public bodies up and down the country—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order. Time's up.

3.4 pm

**Imran Ahmad Khan** (Wakefield) (Con) [V]: To the uncorrected myopic, today's Opposition day debate could appear as a chance for Labour to claim an advantage, by criticising the Conservatives' economic record. This view is a mirage. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for choosing this subject. He has given us a wonderful opportunity to showcase the Conservatives, who time and again repair the damage and clean up the mess that Labour leaves.

Labour's economic mismanagement and failure remain the only constants that characterise the end of every period of Labour Government in our history. As day follows night, the Conservative party steadfastly toils to build back better a stronger and fairer economy. In 2010, the outgoing Labour Chief Secretary to the Treasury left a note to his successor saying:

"I'm afraid there is no money."

Labour's deficit, which we inherited, was a stunning £153.1 billion. Only through Conservative policies, which reduced Government spending and unleashed the power of the market economy, were we able to enjoy nine years of uninterrupted economic growth.

When we examine the immediate effect of Conservative economic policies in 2010, we see clearly that they were the right policies. There was no prolonged or double-dip recession; rather, our recovery outstripped that of all other G7 economies in terms of growth. Conservative management of the economy has meant that 3.4 million more people have entered employment since Labour left office. All measures of inequality fell between 2010 and 2019, and more people were filled with the confidence to set up their own businesses. Since 2012, 75,000 entrepreneurs have been supported through our start-up loans programme, worth more than £623 million. Without these Conservative policies, the Government would not be in the position to provide the support that they have to businesses and individuals affected by the covid pandemic.

Opposition Members might herald our response to the pandemic as a turn towards more Government intervention and a command structure economy, but this is yet another mirage. Conservatives see clearly that the state is the only entity that possesses the necessary heft and resources to respond to national emergencies and, crucially, recognise that such responses are, and

[*Imran Ahmad Khan*]

must be, only temporary. Labour Members would do well to look at their own track record before trying to lambast the Conservatives and to see how the policies they advocate fail the people in socialist states. It is clear that Conservative policies of less state intervention and unleashing the power of business—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** Order.

3.7 pm

**Kate Osborne** (Jarrow) (Lab) [V]: If the coronavirus pandemic has shown us anything, it is that the Conservative austerity programme just does not work. A decade of Conservative spending cuts has left our economy weak and unable to deal effectively with the crisis when it hit. This, coupled with the Government's irresponsible decision making, is why we have had the worst economic crisis of any major economy. This economic crisis has hit individuals, families and businesses hard, many being robbed of their livelihoods.

So many of those who have had a drop in their income have had to turn to our social security system for support. This is why we need to invest in an ethical social security system that people can rely on and why the £20 a week uplift to universal credit must remain permanently, as well as be extended to all those on legacy benefits. The uplift has simply been a lifeline to so many. It might not seem a lot to some of us in this place, but to some it is the difference between having heating in their home or food on their table. Figures released today show that, in January, 7.3% of the adult working population in my constituency of Jarrow were in receipt of jobseeker's allowance or universal credit. That compares with 4.8% when the pandemic began. Those figures serve as a reminder that the journey to economic recovery will be long.

We must ensure that the coronavirus job retention scheme, which is set to end in April, is extended and that the decision is made now, not in four weeks' time. If the scheme is removed or the Chancellor waits until the last minute to make an announcement, as he has done on previous occasions, many businesses will have to make the difficult decision to make employees redundant, causing increased unemployment and meaning that more people claim universal credit.

The Government must also bring in an amendment to existing employment legislation to outlaw fire and rehire practices that are being used by employers to force workers to sign up to wage cuts and inferior terms and conditions under the threat of dismissal. The coronavirus crisis should not be used by employers or the Government as a way to weaken workers' rights. Instead, those should be enhanced and workers in the UK should be treated with decency. Our trade union movement is doing a fantastic job in pushing back these disgraceful practices, but the Government must step up. I urge the Government and Members across the House to act now and back this motion to protect the finances of not just my constituents, but theirs. Waiting until the Budget will only cause many families even more uncertainty at a time when certainty is needed.

3.10 pm

**Mary Kelly Foy** (City of Durham) (Lab) [V]: There is no doubt that the coronavirus has hit us very hard and that we are undergoing the worst economic crisis of any

major economy. While some of that impact would have happened anyway, much of it is due to two things. First, there is the Government's chaotic handling of the crisis, with failures and shortcuts being followed by U-turns, causing a great deal of confusion and damaging public health messaging. Secondly, the coronavirus crisis arrived on the back of 10 years of austerity, public sector cuts and privatisation. There are deep roots to this crisis.

The north-east has been badly let down, but all over the country, the impact of austerity has left working-class communities vulnerable to the pandemic and to lockdown. On Friday, the Health Foundation highlighted the legacy of poor health and inequalities, which has left much of the population more vulnerable to coronavirus. We know that mortality from the virus has been higher for those with pre-existing health conditions. Since 2011, for areas such as the north-east and some deprived groups, life expectancy has declined. In addition, many families were ill-prepared for the economic impact of the virus. Action for Children has shown that going into the crisis, 51% of children in the UK were living in families with no savings at all.

This underlying vulnerability has been made worse by social conditions that allowed the virus to spread: overcrowded housing, poverty and insecure work, making it hard for people to self-isolate. That is why it is so important that economic support goes hand in hand with restrictions, so that people can stay safe in reality, rather than just in theory. That means an immediate extension to the furlough scheme to give certainty to workers and businesses and a pay rise for key workers, so that they can live with some security and confidence.

Of course, it is not all gloom and doom. The coronavirus has taught us a lot about work, our communities and our society. If the Government had any ambition, they would look beyond sticking-plaster solutions towards a new type of economy, aimed at reducing the inequalities between regions in health, housing, work and opportunities. They might also imagine a green future for our economy, based in areas such as the north-east that have been neglected. Years ago, we talked about 1 million climate jobs. That should be part of the transition to a net-zero future. This is an opportunity to rebuild the economy on different foundations, if those in power could only see it.

3.13 pm

**Robbie Moore** (Keighley) (Con): I suspect that we all expected the Leader of the Opposition's speech last Thursday to be bold, with a strong economic vision for the future. The speech was billed as "A New Chapter for Britain" and we were told to expect fresh new ideas from the Labour party. It was therefore a great disappointment that the speech contained nothing of any substance—no charisma, no passion, no vision for our economic prosperity as a country. Instead, we were treated to the same old Labour arguments about the economy—the same arguments, I add, that the British people rejected only 14 months ago. The Leader of the Opposition talked about economic legacies, yet the only legacy of the last Labour Government was summed up effectively by one note, which read:

"I'm afraid there is no money left."

The Labour party said that the Government were not prepared for the challenges and events of the pandemic, but this is an unprecedented time, the like of which we

have not seen for more than a century. Labour said that 10 years under the Conservatives has left us unable to support the economy through this time; looking at the evidence, I suggest the opposite is true. After years of the deficit rising under Labour, the Conservatives made the difficult but important decisions necessary to get it to a sustainable level.

It is because the Conservatives worked to reverse the dire economic consequences of the last Labour Government that we have been able to provide world-beating support for our businesses over the past year. The Government have already spent £280 billion to protect livelihoods during the pandemic, helping to fund our hospitals, schools and local governments. The furlough scheme, which has helped more than 13,000 people in Keighley and Ilkley, has been vital to the protection of jobs in the hardest-hit industries, including the hospitality and tourism sectors. Cash grants, deferred VAT payments and the bounce back loan scheme are examples of the way the Government have assisted businesses throughout this crisis. All those vital measures were possible because we entered this pandemic with the public finances under control.

Yes, the months ahead may be tough, but Britain's economy and the British people have bounced back before and we will do so again. The Labour party's response to the pandemic is certainly being delivered by Captain Hindsight, but when it comes to Labour's economic vision for the country, it would seem that Captain No Foresight is in charge.

3.16 pm

**Zarah Sultana** (Coventry South) (Lab) [V]: I had been an MP for only a few months when the pandemic hit, and hearing about its impact on my constituents has been harrowing. We have seen demand at Coventry food bank skyrocket. The number of people on universal credit has doubled. Thousands have lost their jobs. Now, more than 2.5 million children go to bed hungry. But what I find most difficult—what makes me shake with anger—is knowing that while the vast majority of people have suffered hardship, a wealthy few have cashed in.

Last week, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care was found to have acted unlawfully in his handling of covid contracts. Having broken transparency rules designed to safeguard against corruption, his Department now stands accused of awarding fortunes to Tory friends and donors. For example, a friend of the Secretary of State whose partner just so happens to be a donor to the Secretary of State was awarded a £14 million contract for PPE. A staggering £881 million has been handed to just eight big Tory donors. These people do not give their money just because they are generous; they give it because they want a Government who work for them, not our constituents.

If we look at the economy before the pandemic hit, we see that this is what these people got. While median earnings are down nearly 5% in the past decade, the wealth of the richest 1,000 people has more than doubled. While the working-class have had a decade of services cut, the super-rich have had their taxes cut. This economy is not broken; it is rigged. It does not work for the majority, but it works perfectly well for the wealthy few. This rigged economy has meant that the virus has hit so much harder than it had to. It thrives on poverty and inequality and exposes brutal cuts to public services.

The pandemic is not the only crisis we face: we have a crisis of poverty, a crisis of inequality and a climate crisis that overshadows it all. This is not a time for tinkering around the edges; it is 40 years of neoliberalism that got us here in the first place and we cannot go back to that. So let this be our 1945 moment. Then, from the rubble of war, we saw people refusing to go back to the society of old—an unfair society. They created the NHS and built the welfare state and millions of council homes.

Let us have the same level of ambition today, with a people's green new deal—a programme of economic transformation that combats social injustice and the climate emergency by investing in green technology, infrastructure and services and creating more than a million well-paid jobs. Let us give key workers a pay rise and make the super-rich pay their fair share. Instead of returning to the rigged economy of the past, with a people's green new deal let us build a fairer future.

3.19 pm

**Aaron Bell** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con) [V]: To continue the fairy tale theme so brilliantly evoked by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson), this debate has truly been a "Through the Looking-Glass" experience—"Anneliese in Wonderland", if you will, with due apologies to the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds).

We have heard no acknowledgement from Labour Members today of the awful fiscal inheritance the Conservative coalition Government of 2010 received—the worst inheritance of any incoming Government. We had to clean up the mess Labour left behind. The contrast with the golden legacy the Blair Government received from the last Conservative Government in 1997 is stark.

There is also no acknowledgement from Labour Members today that the British people have already had their say about this three times. In 2015, 2017 and 2019 they rejected the arguments Labour Members have continued to make today. Clearly, the Labour party still does not believe in any compromise with the electorate. The British people are far more sensible than they are given credit for. They know they cannot get something for nothing. They know we have to live within our means. They know we have to pay our way. They know that free broadband is nothing of the sort—there is always a price to be paid. They saw through the ludicrous Corbynite manifesto. "Manifesto" is perhaps too strong a word; it was a wish list that even Santa would have struggled with. The hard-working, working-class, patriotic voters of the red wall—seats like mine of Newcastle-under-Lyme—saw through that manifesto even more than most.

There has been no compromise with the electorate from the Labour party, but frankly there is no compromise with reality either. The only reason we were able to respond as we did when covid struck was that we had taken those difficult decisions over the past decade to reduce our deficit by 80%. That provided the fiscal space—the headroom—that allowed the Chancellor to make the dramatic manoeuvres he made to support the economy through furlough and business grants. Those were difficult decisions that Gordon Brown ducked when he was Prime Minister and that the Labour party opposed when the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) was Leader of the Opposition.

[Aaron Bell]

Briefly, in the time I have left, I will focus on some of the economic successes of the past decade, which those decisions made possible. There is more investment in towns like Newcastle-under-Lyme. We have secured £11 million through the future high streets fund, and hopefully £25 million more is on the way through our towns fund bid. We have more jobs across the nation, with a record level of employment in February 2020. Obviously the coronavirus crisis has had an impact on unemployment, but we will get those people back to work.

We have reduced inequality by all measures across the last decade. We have far fewer children living in workless households than in 2010. The income tax cuts have been directed at the lowest-paid, who now keep more of what they earn through the improvements we have made to the personal allowance. Finally, all the savings and difficult decisions we have made have enabled us to provide the biggest cash boost in the history of the NHS and to guarantee that in law.

A decade ago, the Labour party said that there was no money left. Listening to Labour Members today, I feel that they have no arguments left.

3.22 pm

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I am left bemused by some of the contributions today. Perhaps some Conservative Members are auditioning for roles on university campuses as champions of free, if not historically accurate, speech.

I will start with a few facts. The 2008 crisis was a global financial crash. Thank goodness we had some adults leading the country at the time, with Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling working in concert with Angela Merkel and Barack Obama to avert more serious disaster. They acted, while David Cameron and George Osborne suggested that markets be allowed to run their course. When there was a run on banks such as Northern Rock—we remember the scenes well—they said, “Let them go to the wall.” That is easy to say when one’s savings are in the Cayman Islands, as was the case according to the Panama papers.

The coalition Government claimed they were a roofing contractor—probably one hired as a mate of the Health Secretary—but they and the Conservative Government that followed simply undermined the foundations of our economy, our communities and our health and social care services. That is why the UK was the G7 country least prepared to face the pandemic—that and the Government’s failure to prepare or to act. Listening to John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron, one realises what a blundering, blagging Government we have.

This is the Prime Minister’s failure. He missed five Cobra meetings a year ago that could have set us on a different course. He had two weeks more to prepare than France, Spain or Germany, yet here we are with the worst economic performance for 300 years. Gross domestic product is down 10% compared with 2019. Compare that to Germany on minus 5%, France on minus 8%, Italy on minus 9% and the US on minus 3.5%. I repeat: the Conservative Government managed to cause a drop in growth three times that of the US and twice that of Germany. That is some crash in prosperity.

Let me put that into some tangible, understandable stats. In my question to the Prime Minister in December, I used car sales as a proxy, as they are the bellwether of our economy. Car sales were down 29% in the UK, down 25% in France and down 19% in Germany; that is a loss of 180,000 car sales versus Germany. That is the reality behind the Government’s mishandling of the crisis and the economy.

There are many other indicators. For example, the premier league reopened a full month after Germany’s Bundesliga. Why? There is the damage to and the underlying challenges for our hospitality sector, including the penalty of business rates. For 11 years, the Government have failed to address the desperate need for fundamental change to those unfair and disproportionate taxes. No wonder the UK high streets are looking so terrible.

There is one positive; the Government did listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) and introduce the furlough scheme, but the statistics are crystal clear: this Government have failed the economy, they are failing our communities and they are failing our people. Sadly, it is the people who will end up paying for the Government’s mistakes.

3.25 pm

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con) [V]: I find this a somewhat surprising choice for an Opposition day debate, in that the Opposition—by anybody’s judgment, really—have a terrible record on the economy, and the shadow Chancellor gave no indication as to why it would be different this time. The motion says that

“the last decade of UK economic policy weakened the foundations of this country’s economy”.

That just makes no sense. Labour Members seem to point to the global financial crisis as the reason for the disastrous end to their management of the economy, yet that is a rewriting of history.

The reality is that in 1997 the then Chancellor, Ken Clarke, passed on a Goldilocks economy to Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. The Labour Government, to get elected, had said that they would continue with our spending plans, and they did—for four years. After that, of course, they reverted to type and started to spend. For seven years, there was a growing deficit. It was a much bigger deficit than we had last year with the rise of this crisis; that was in the good times. Huge issues—not all caused by the Labour Government—then left a £153 billion annual deficit.

The shadow Chancellor said that she was somewhat surprised that the debt had grown over the last decade. Well, what did she expect and what alternatives might she have put forward? It takes time to get that kind of deficit down, unless the Government hugely cut spending or massively put up taxes; yet she offered no solutions, just criticism. Anybody can stand on the sidelines and criticise. What I expected to hear from the shadow Chancellor was some indication of what a Labour Government would actually do, how they would manage these problems, and how they would manage future tax or spending policy. The only indication we have is a recent article in the *New Statesman*, which says that the shadow Chancellor’s fiscal approach will be “strikingly similar” to that of her predecessor, the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). Not many people will be reassured by that.

The reality is that even pre-covid, this country was facing some huge problems. Owing to our demographics—our ageing population and the smaller number of children per household—the debt is going to fall on fewer and fewer people. The debt is going to grow if we do not change our tax policy to—would you believe it—314% of GDP by 2060. We need an honest conversation about taxation, and we need to do things differently. We need to look differently at the funding of things such as social care, healthcare and pensions. I particularly recommend looking at an adult social care premium to pay for social care. We need sensible, honest economics.

3.29 pm

**Rachel Hopkins** (Luton South) (Lab) [V]: The covid-19 pandemic has exposed the roots of a broken economic system that fails to serve the public. Our frail economic system did not emerge overnight; it is a result of the Conservative party's economic dogma, which sees the state purely as a market fixer and rejects a role for an active state in shaping the market's direction. It is committed to outsourcing the state's capacity and services to private companies. That failure of the Government's industrial strategy has led to the UK's labour market having an over-reliance on the insecure, low-paid gig economy, where people struggle to make ends meet, while at the same time allowing huge, reckless levels of corporate debt due to dividend payments, share buy-backs and growing executive pay, leaving businesses with little in reserve to weather the crisis.

In 10 years as a local councillor, I have seen how the Government's austerity programme, rather than driving growth and productivity through an innovative industrial strategy, has caused the slowest economic recovery since the 1930s. It has devastated living standards and meant that more children in my constituency of Luton South live in poverty.

We have seen £138 million stripped from our local council's budget. The public health grant for 2020-21 is £600,000 lower than it was four years ago. NHS hospitals, mental health services and community providers have a shortage of around 84,000 staff; 38,000 of them nurses. Bedfordshire fire and rescue service's budget has been cut by 19% since 2016-17. Everyone has seen homelessness increase at the same time as the housing crisis has worsened. Food bank use in the east has risen by 74% since 2015-16 and there has been substantial wage stagnation. Throughout the pandemic, the Government's "whatever it takes" rhetoric has rung hollow as for the past decade they have downgraded the public sector's ability to respond to a crisis.

The past shows us that the market is incapable of finding solutions to climate change, to widening inequality and to the continuation of the public health emergency. We need an empowered public sector at the wheel, driving a green economic recovery that redistributes economic prosperity and creates well-paid, secure, unionised jobs. To help with the economic recovery, the Government should value our local councils, which are on the frontline, supporting our communities, and scrap the council tax hike that is being forced on them.

3.32 pm

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD) [V]: I want to make two points, neither of which will come as a surprise. Madam Deputy Speaker, if I were to take you north, on a journey through the

highlands, we would drive from Lairg to Kinlochbervie and Durness in north-west Sutherland and when we came to a place called Laxford Bridge, we would shortly find a sign with stars in a circle that said: "This improved stretch of road was paid for with help from the EC"—from the European Union. Those signs are found throughout the highlands.

It may seem that I am making a classic remainder speech. I merely want to make the point that all over the highlands, the European Union invested in harbours, airports, roads and bridges, and that made a great difference to all our lives. It was about levelling up a poorer part of Europe to some sort of equality with the richer parts of the UK and Europe. That sort of development helped arrest that great curse of the highlands: depopulation.

My first point for the Chancellor next week is therefore that we are looking forward with hope and anticipation to the shared prosperity fund. It is essential that the Chancellor and the Government roll it out in a way that equals, if not betters, what went before, now that we are out of the European Union. All of us in the highlands wait with bated breath for that, and it will be hugely important to our country.

My second point is very simple—you have heard me make it many times before, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is good news for the Government. I am extremely grateful, as are my constituents, for the Government's proposal to site the first vertical space port centre in Sutherland in my constituency. It could mean a great deal to my constituents through providing quality employment in future, but, more important, by giving young people the hope that they will have jobs and homes in years to come in the places where they come from. It will literally keep the lights on in some of our most remote straths and glens.

My second point therefore is to ask the Chancellor and the Government to say—possibly in next week's Budget, but at any rate, as part of a steady stream of good funding announcements—"Yes, we back the space port in Sutherland and we will do everything in our power to make sure it becomes a reality." That reality will not only keep employment vibrant in my constituency, but earn a great deal of income for the United Kingdom.

3.34 pm

**Kim Johnson** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab) [V]: I think Conservative Members must be living in some kind of alternative universe, because this Government have presided over the highest death toll in Europe and the worst economic recession of any G7 country. This was not an accident. It was not inevitable, and it did not need to happen this way. The 10 richest men in the world have seen their wealth increase by £400 billion during this pandemic—enough, says Oxfam, to prevent the world from falling into poverty because of the virus and to pay for vaccines for all. However, instead, the vast majority of us have been forced by this Government to pay the price, with a £20 cut in universal credit, a hike in council tax, and a pay freeze for our key workers. At the same time, billions have been squandered on private firms that have failed to provide a functioning test and trace system and have made a profit out of poverty. This Government have spent nearly £2 billion on crony contracts, taking public money away from local authorities that are more capable of delivering the vital services we

[Kim Johnson]

need during the pandemic and instead giving it to their mates, who have inevitably failed to deliver. This is proof that the Government are the party of the bosses and the billionaires, not the workers, as they keep telling us.

We are now staring down the barrel of the worst recession for 300 years—and why is that? Let us not forget that it was the Tories who dragged our country through over 10 years of ideologically driven austerity that undermined our economy, society and the public sector, and left us vulnerable to this crisis. The numbers in precarious work and on zero-hours contracts have gone through the roof, and the obscene practice of fire and rehire is now being increasingly used by unscrupulous employers to force their staff into low wages, worse terms and conditions, and longer hours, essentially doing more for less.

I would like to take this opportunity to tell you about Kevin, a striker in the British Gas dispute and one of my constituents, who has kindly agreed to share his story. Kevin is a British Gas engineer who has spent the last few months standing on a picket line. I send my full support and solidarity to him and all the British Gas strikers who have just finished their latest round of industrial action, and urge Chris O'Shea to get around the negotiating table and treat these workers with the respect and dignity they deserve. They went back into work and put themselves at risk of covid to ensure that homes had heat and power. Kevin tells me that he is proud to have done this work because that is what engineers do—"It's what we do."

As British Gas is successful in forcing through these cuts to terms and conditions, we risk a domino effect putting hundreds of thousands more jobs at risk of having their terms and conditions undercut. This would further weaken our economy and our society, continuing an economic policy agenda that left our country and economy so vulnerable to the virus in the first place. We need to take decisive action to address the deep inequalities and injustices in this country. I call on Members to support this motion so that we can begin to reverse the damage done by the last decade of draconian economic policies—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. I have to ask the hon. Lady to finish because we have one more Back-Bench speaker—Jim Shannon.

3.37 pm

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** Can I first put on record my thanks to Government for their regional strategy?

Before covid-19 came, the unemployment rate in my constituency of Strangford was at its lowest. This was not all because of the Government here but because of the partnership that they had with the Northern Ireland Assembly and with the Deputy First Minister when my party held that portfolio. It is very clear to me that that strategy was successful, but covid-19 came, and with it came a whole change in where we are. The Government stepped up to the plate and made sure that the moneys were made available. The deficit is now expected to be £384 billion—£339 billion higher than had been anticipated before public health restrictions were first imposed back in March. I would ask the Minister, and hopefully this response will be forthcoming, to recognise that we need

to see continued investment in our workforce as the only way out of this. By having that investment, we have the taxes, and then we have an economic boost and we do better.

It is very important that we have a plan that also looks at the repayment of the moneys over this period of time. We cannot just leave it as a problem for our grandchildren, and indeed our great-grandchildren. For 2020, the Office for Budget Responsibility expects economic output to be 11% lower than it was in 2019—the biggest annual contraction in over 300 years. We must support small businesses, in particular. In Northern Ireland, in my constituency of Strangford and across the whole of the Province, we have the largest number of small businesses and those who are self-employed, equal only to that in the south-east of England. We need to have support for the self-employed and for small businesses, and to make sure that that happens for the future as well.

The third point I want to make is one that has been relevant in the press today. The headline story in my provincial press back home and also in the national press here is the problem for those who have cancer. I know that cancer becomes a topic in this Chamber on every occasion, but as the health spokesman for my party, I put it on record that the media confirmed that 100,000 people with cancer in the UK are struggling to pay for basic essentials, such as food, bills, rent or their mortgage. More than two in three of those people with cancer—70%—who are struggling with basic living costs have experienced stress, anxiety or depression as a result of covid-19. I ask that the Government make provision for those with cancer.

3.40 pm

**James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op) [V]:** Across this country, we have all felt the pain of missing our family and friends, and we have all longed to go about our lives as we could before, but we have also seen the pain of this crisis fall unevenly, with some people facing greater difficulties and hardship than others. The virus has exposed weakness and unfairness in the foundations of our economy, and what unites so many people now is a determination to learn from what covid has exposed and make the UK a fairer place to live.

Going into this crisis, as the shadow Chancellor, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) pointed out, one in four UK households had less than £100 in the bank, while 3.6 million people were trapped in insecure work. A decade ago, the Conservative Chancellor stopped investing in new social housing, and now we see families told to stay at home in overcrowded flats.

Social care workers, delivery drivers, shop workers and others have all been on the frontline, but many are on such low incomes that if they are asked to self-isolate, they have a choice they should never be forced to make: doing the right thing or putting food on the table. We were on shaky foundations going into the crisis, and once it hit, the Government have been too slow to give people the support they need, with millions falling through the gaps altogether. Business closures are up by more than a third, yet the self-employed are left in the dark over what help might be on offer from one month to the next. Parents are struggling with the difficult job of home schooling, yet the Treasury refuses to heed our call to give working parents the legal right to request paid flexible furlough.

As many of my hon. Friends have set out today, the UK Government have left people exposed throughout this crisis. My hon. Friends the Members for Jarrow (Kate Osborne), for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy) and for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) set out how the Government's choices over the past 10 years left us ill-prepared. My hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) spoke of the struggle that so many people face making ends meet, while my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana) spoke about children going hungry and having to rely on food banks. My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees) set out the different, fairer choices that the Welsh Government have made.

The truth is that the state of the economy we had coming into covid, and the Chancellor's irresponsible choices throughout the crisis—both to wind down support and to lift restrictions too soon—have undermined efforts to protect people's health and left us suffering the worst economic crisis of any major economy. Time and again, businesses, workers and the self-employed have anxiously faced the looming end of support schemes, only for new grants to be introduced in a last-minute scramble as the public pressure to avoid the next cliff edge becomes overwhelming. People might have forgiven this early on in the outbreak, as the Government adjusted to the new challenge we all faced, but a year later that argument holds no water. What we have seen instead is a pattern of the Chancellor's behaviour, and we should continue to question his judgment as our thoughts turn to what comes next. Ten years of the Conservatives has undermined the foundations of our economy and hollowed out our public services. We must not let the country suffer the same mistakes again.

We heard from many of my hon. Friends today about the damage to our economy and our public services over the past decade. My hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Wavertree (Paula Barker), for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi) and for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake) spoke about the rise of insecure working while wages have been falling. My hon. Friends the Members for Enfield North (Feryal Clark) and for Easington (Grahame Morris) spoke about the impact of cuts on local government, while my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) spoke of cuts to social security.

My hon. Friends the Members for Slough (Mr Dhesi), for Wallasey (Dame Angela Eagle), for Luton South (Rachel Hopkins) and for Liverpool, Riverside (Kim Johnson) all reminded us of the ideological drive and dogma—not economic necessity—behind the cuts of the past 10 years, while my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) spoke of the importance of an active state working in partnership with enterprise and business. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome) spoke of the need to rebuild our country with secure housing and secure jobs at its heart.

My hon. Friends are not alone in warning the Government to take a different path. In fact, the IMF's head of fiscal policy has said that Governments should now use fiscal policy to not just beat the virus but stimulate the economy by reducing unemployment and restoring economic growth. As the shadow Chancellor set out, the path the Government should take is one that puts jobs and investment at the heart of rebuilding our economy. That is why we want to see start-up loans

for 100,000 new businesses employing people across the country. It is why our approach would view public finances over the next 20 years, so that we can finally get on top of the long-term challenges our country faces. People are tired of the Government ducking big decisions, from social care to the housing crisis to climate change, and they want to see a fair, modern, robust approach to the future. Our responsible approach to the public finances—an approach in line with the IMF's and OECD's recommendations—would make sure that we could always protect people and businesses during a crisis and make crucial investments in our future.

We know that the impact of this crisis has played out very differently for people in different situations. Many families have had to take on worrying levels of debt, while other households have been able to work from home and save. That will result in highly concentrated household savings, forecast to reach £250 billion by the end of June, and what happens with those savings will have a big impact on the economic recovery. The Chancellor is betting everything on people spending those savings, but the Bank of England evidence suggests that only around 5% of the money will be used in that way. The rest will remain in bank accounts or be invested in assets, which we know, among other things, will push up house prices. That is why we are proposing a new British recovery bond, which would give millions of people security for their savings while raising billions to invest in businesses, jobs and infrastructure for the future. That approach would bring people together, united around a common determination for us all to feel more secure and to live in a fairer country.

Today we have heard a string of tired claims from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that the record simply does not reflect. He said that the economy was not growing when Labour left office, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins) made clear, the truth is that it was. Government Members make claims about unemployment when Labour is in power, but if they looked at the last 40 years of unemployment data, they would find that unemployment was lower on average in the years when we were in power compared with those when they were.

Over the coming months, we may well hear the Chancellor repeat his flawed economic ideology around the need to cut people's livelihoods, to cut support for businesses and to cut investment in the public services and infrastructure that we need. Will we hear him apologise for mismanaging hundreds of millions of pounds throughout the crisis and outsourcing projects that should have been delivered by public servants? Will we hear him explain how people with no income or savings can spend money in the economy or how a country with businesses closing, public services run down and infrastructure lacking is expected to grow? I doubt it. If he will not listen to us, he should listen to the fears of people in the country. He should use this Budget to reverse the planned £20 cut in universal credit, to reverse the key worker pay freeze and to provide councils with the funding they need to prevent huge increases in council tax. Then, he has the chance to listen to economic institutions around the world and follow their urging of him to invest in jobs and growth.

After a decade of the Conservatives, our economy was already weak when covid hit, and their irresponsible decisions since then have weakened it further. That is why we have had the worst economic crisis of any major

[James Murray]

economy. It does not have to be this way. We should come out of this crisis determined not to go back but to build an economy with fairer, more secure foundations. We should focus relentlessly on jobs and growth across the UK and on the long-term investment we need to meet the challenges we face. We need to change our economy for the better, and this is a chance to do so.

3.48 pm

**Steve Barclay:** With the leave of the House, I will close the debate for the Government. I thank hon. and right hon. Members for their participation in the debate. We have heard a wide variety of arguments and many helpful and insightful contributions. It is clear that the House is united in its desire to build a stronger economy, although we may not always agree on how to achieve it.

Today's motion asks us to reflect on the past decade. As the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) pointed out, the Labour party seems to particularly want to talk about the past, so let me once more remind the House what the coalition Government inherited: unsustainable public finances, an economy in deep malaise and a fundamental lack of public trust in the financial system. Over the years that followed, we worked to bring the national finances back to strength and to inspire confidence in the UK economy, and those efforts paid off. Before coronavirus hit, the economy had expanded every year since 2010, growing faster than France, Italy and Japan. We had succeeded in reducing the Budget deficit, and by the end of 2019 over 3.8 million more people were in work compared with 2010, with 85% of that growth being in high-skilled occupations and youth unemployment nearly halving.

Over the course of the debate, we have had a number of excellent contributions. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), who correctly identified how the Leader of the Opposition, in so many areas, is simply following the Government in our agenda on levelling up. He rightly reminded the House that the last Labour Government were borrowing £1 in every £4 they spent. My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Gareth Davies) spoke about how the Conservative Government had delivered, before covid, the lowest levels of unemployment since the 1970s, and about the benefit of reducing the deficit in good times to be stronger in the bad times.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) noted that the financial resilience now is due to the difficult decisions taken over the last decade, and also the fact that, from a progressive perspective, the top 1% pay a greater share of tax than under the previous Labour Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) emphasised our bold plans to build back better, and the opportunity this offers for areas such as Teesside. My hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) highlighted how the deficit has been reduced over the last decade, ahead of the pandemic, enabling us to enter that from a position of strength—all steps that were opposed by those on the Benches opposite.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) talked about the practical difference that this Government are making in constituencies such as his, such as the

£6.2 million funding from the future high streets fund or the £1.5 million from the towns fund, in contrast to the waste on schemes such as PFI that he had seen in areas like Ashfield. My hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) spoke about the covid support in her constituency and what a material difference that has made. My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) highlighted the gap between the briefing last week for the speech from the Leader of the Opposition, with language akin to Beveridge reports and the lacklustre content contained therein.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Julie Marson) correctly identified the resilience from decisions over the last decade that has enabled the package of covid support, praised by the IMF and others, that the Chancellor has been able to deliver. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) spoke about the increased prosperity in constituencies such as his, and his pride in what the Government are delivering. My hon. Friend the Member for Broadland (Jerome Mayhew) identified the importance of the reduction in the deficit by more than 80% since Labour was last in power, and how that enabled the package of support announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. That is particularly important to the levelling up agenda, on which he spoke so powerfully.

My hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) highlighted how, over the last decade, the economy has been turned around from that inherited from the previous Labour Government and the fixation of those on the Benches opposite on simply spending more. My hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Suzanne Webb) spoke about the unprecedented economic response, particularly the importance of supporting jobs and the work in her constituency to that effect, with the Chancellor's £30 billion plan for jobs being a key component of that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford) spoke about the nine years of economic growth and the practical support through tax cuts that have been delivered, as well as schemes such as the national living wage introduced by those on these Benches. He contrasted that with the poor delivery of Labour local authorities. My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) spoke about how the Government support has helped businesses in his constituency, and indeed how it helped him over the last decade in his own experience of business, as well as about how important that is to the levelling-up agenda on which he secured election, as did many of my colleagues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Imran Ahmad Khan) highlighted the economic legacy that was left by the Labour party after its time in government and contrasted that with the growth in the economy and the repairing of public finances that we have seen over the previous decade.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) highlighted the flaws in the policy proposals of the Labour party and how little substance there is in the proposals brought forward in the debate.

A range of contributions have made clear the importance of the resilience that comes from reducing the deficit from more than 10% when Labour was in power to less than 2% and how that has made possible the package of measures that the Chancellor has been able to bring forward. It is the actions of the Government over the

past decade to restore the public finances that have enabled the Government to respond with more than £280 billion of economic support—one of the largest and most comprehensive support packages in the world. Schemes such as the furlough scheme and the self-employed income support scheme, the increase in the universal credit offer, the guaranteed loans for businesses, the grants, the tax breaks and the support to businesses on cash flow are a consequence of difficult decisions taken over the preceding decade.

I would also remind the House, and the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), that this Government's proud record of public spending long before this crisis has enabled our public services to weather the storm of the pandemic. We have made a legally binding commitment to put an extra £34 billion into the NHS by 2023-24, with the core health budget growing by £6.3 billion next year, allowing us to deliver 50,000 more nurses and 50 million more GP appointments.

We have said that we will provide up to £15.8 billion to the police over the next financial year. That is £636 million more than in 2021 and includes more than £400 million to continue our commitment to recruit 20,000 extra police officers, on which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has made such excellent progress.

We are increasing the schools budget next year by £2.2 billion and are on our way to delivering an extra £7.1 billion by 2022-23. We are investing in providing lifelong learning as well.

The motion suggests that Labour wants to focus on the past. Let us look at what past policies it wants to focus on. During his leadership, the Leader of the Opposition has said that he wants to renationalise huge swathes of the economy. He has been clear that he wants to remove the 50% turnout measure for industrial ballots, allowing disruption of workplaces with minimum support. He has described the economic policies of the previous Labour leader as

“the only platform going forward”,

which is slightly at odds with his message that the Opposition are under new management.

This is a Government with a record of real economic achievement. We have succeeded in providing better public services and supporting millions of people on low incomes, while significantly reducing the deficit in the pre-covid years. We are succeeding at safeguarding the UK economy, while protecting public health, when faced with the greatest challenge since the second world war. We will succeed in securing the UK's recovery from coronavirus and in creating an even stronger, greener, more equal economy, which this country and its people so richly deserve.

*Question put.*

*The House divided: Ayes 253, Noes 0.*

**Division No. 231]**

**[3.59 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Abrahams, Debbie	Bardell, Hannah
Ali, Rushanara	Barker, Paula
Ali, Tahir	Beckett, rh Margaret
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Begum, Apsana
Amesbury, Mike	Benn, rh Hilary
Anderson, Fleur	Betts, Mr Clive
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Black, Mhairi

Blackford, rh Ian	Furniss, Gill
Blackman, Kirsty	Gardiner, Barry
Blake, Olivia	Gibson, Patricia
Blomfield, Paul	Gill, Preet Kaur
Bonnar, Steven	Glindon, Mary
Brabin, Tracy	Grady, Patrick
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Grant, Peter
Brennan, Kevin	Gray, Neil
Brock, Deidre	Green, Kate
Brown, Alan	Greenwood, Lilian
Brown, Ms Lyn	Greenwood, Margaret
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Griffith, Nia
Bryant, Chris	Gwynne, Andrew
Buck, Ms Karen	Haigh, Louise
Burgon, Richard	Hamilton, Fabian
Butler, Dawn	Hanna, Claire
Byrne, Ian	Hanvey, Neale
Byrne, rh Liam	Hardy, Emma
Cadbury, Ruth	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Callaghan, Amy	Harris, Carolyn
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Hayes, Helen
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Healey, rh John
Carden, Dan	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Champion, Sarah	Hendry, Drew
Chapman, Douglas	Hill, Mike
Cherry, Joanna	Hillier, Meg
Clark, Feryal	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Cooper, Rosie	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Cooper, rh Yvette	Hollern, Kate
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Hopkins, Rachel
Cowan, Ronnie	Hosie, rh Stewart
Coyle, Neil	Howarth, rh Sir George
Crawley, Angela	Huq, Dr Rupa
Creasy, Stella	Hussain, Imran
Cruddas, Jon	Jarvis, Dan
Cryer, John	Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Cummins, Judith	Johnson, Kim
Cunningham, Alex	Jones, Darren
Daby, Janet	Jones, Gerald
David, Wayne	Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Davies, Geraint	Jones, Ruth
Davies-Jones, Alex	Jones, Sarah
Day, Martyn	Kane, Mike
De Cordova, Marsha	Keeley, Barbara
Debbonaire, Thangam	Kendall, Liz
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Khan, Afzal
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Kinnock, Stephen
Dodds, Anneliese	Kyle, Peter
Doogan, Dave	Lake, Ben
Dorans, Allan	Lammy, rh Mr David
Doughty, Stephen	Lavery, Ian
Dowd, Peter	Law, Chris
Dromey, Jack	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Duffield, Rosie	Lewis, Clive
Eagle, Dame Angela	Linden, David
Eagle, Maria	Lloyd, Tony
Eastwood, Colum	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Edwards, Jonathan	Lucas, Caroline
Efford, Clive	Lynch, Holly
Elliott, Julie	MacAskill, Kenny
Elmore, Chris	MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Eshalomi, Florence	Madders, Justin
Esterson, Bill	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Evans, Chris	Mahmood, Shabana
Farry, Stephen	Malhotra, Seema
Fellows, Marion	Maskell, Rachael
Ferrier, Margaret	Matheson, Christian
Fletcher, Colleen	Mc Nally, John
Flynn, Stephen	McCabe, Steve
Fovargue, Yvonne	McCarthy, Kerry
Foxcroft, Vicky	McDonagh, Siobhain
Foy, Mary Kelly	McDonald, Andy

McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McLaughlin, Anne  
 McMahan, Jim  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Mishra, Navendu  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Murray, James  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Nicolson, John  
 Norris, Alex  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Oppong-Asare, Abena  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Oswald, Kirsten  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Owen, Sarah  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Qureshi, Yasmin

Rayner, rh Angela  
 Reed, Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Rimmer, Ms Marie  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smith, Alyn  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Starmer, rh Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tarry, Sam  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thompson, Owen  
 Thomson, Richard  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek

Twist, Liz  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Webbe, Claudia  
 West, Catherine  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Whitley, Mick  
 Whittome, Nadia

Williams, Hywel  
 Winter, Beth  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**John Spellar and**  
**Bambos Charalambous**

#### NOES

**Tellers for the Noes:**

**Matt Western and**  
**Jeff Smith**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.*

*Resolved,*

That this House believes that the last decade of UK economic policy weakened the foundations of this country's economy and society, leaving the UK particularly vulnerable when the coronavirus crisis hit; further believes that many Government choices and actions during the coronavirus pandemic have exacerbated the problems that pandemic has caused, leading to the UK suffering the worst economic crisis of any major economy; calls on the Government, as the UK emerges out of the pandemic, to address the deep inequalities and injustices in this country and take the UK forward to a stronger, more prosperous future through a new partnership between an active state and enterprising business; further calls on the Government to protect family finances by reversing the planned £20 cut in Universal Credit, reversing the key worker pay freeze and providing councils with the funding they need to prevent huge rises in council tax; and calls on the Government to introduce a new British Recovery Bond to allow people who have accumulated savings during the pandemic to have a proper stake in Britain's future and to back a new generation of British entrepreneurs by providing start-up loans for 100,000 new businesses.

## Coronavirus: Supporting Businesses and Individuals

4.9 pm

**Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House calls on the Government to support businesses and individuals still struggling as a result of the coronavirus crisis in the forthcoming budget by extending business rates relief for at least another six months, extending the temporary 5 per cent reduced rate of VAT for three months after restrictions are lifted or for another six months, whichever is later, helping British businesses struggling under the burden of Government-guaranteed debt by ensuring that small businesses can defer paying loans back until they are growing again, extending and reforming the furlough scheme so that it lasts whilst restrictions are in place and demand is significantly reduced, immediately confirming that the fourth Self-Employment Income Support Scheme grant will be set at 80 per cent of pre-coronavirus crisis profits and extending eligibility to that scheme to include anyone with a 2019-20 tax return and fixing the gaps in coronavirus support schemes to support those who have been excluded from the beginning of the crisis; and further calls on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make a monthly oral statement to Parliament updating the House on these matters.

Today's debate takes place almost a year after the first introduction of national lockdown restrictions due to the pandemic. We all know how trying events since then have been for families and businesses up and down our country, and now, thanks to the vaccine and the incredible work of NHS staff and volunteers, there is real hope that before long we can return to some semblance of normality. While there are grounds for optimism, however, we on the Labour Benches know that there are still deep worries among many businesses and working people about whether their firms and jobs will still be viable when the restrictions are lifted. So many people are concerned about whether they will have a job to return to, and millions of people who have gone for almost a year without support are questioning how they will manage to get by until our economy reopens.

What people want and need right now is clarity. They need a sign that the Government get it, and that they understand and can respond to the needs of businesses and workers who have been placed under such incredible pressure through no fault of their own. The Prime Minister's road map provides tentative suggestions about when businesses may be able to reopen, but we did not hear how the Government will be able to help to tide them over until that time. As with almost every major announcement throughout this crisis, we have had an update on the restrictions but no update on the economic support. It is not even clear whether the Chancellor believes that there is a relationship between restrictions and additional support, or whether he believes that businesses and workers should simply be grateful for what they have got. He may not be here today—it is becoming clear that accountability is very much not part of his brand—but we should be in no doubt about the harm that this approach has caused. Our country has endured the worst economic crisis of any major economy. Throughout the crisis, Ministers have made the same mistakes time and again and been forced to play catch-up at every turn, long after the problems with support have become apparent.

Whether the Chancellor is being careless or negligent, his approach is the opposite of what businesses need, which is the provision of certainty and assurance so that they can plan ahead. Where issues exist, they expect Government action to address them; they do not expect problems to be dumped in the “too difficult” box. There are few more egregious examples of that than the Chancellor's persistent failure to help the excluded—the people who fall into the gaps between Government schemes. These are people who have taken risks by starting their own businesses, or perhaps they were changing jobs, but through no fault of their own they have been denied support since the start of the pandemic.

For many months, Labour has called on the Government to fix these problems. At first, Ministers said that it was not practical to do so, and of course we accept that in those fast-moving few weeks right at the start, that was fair enough, but now, almost a year on since the start of restrictions, how can this possibly be justified when the solutions are in plain sight? I repeat my call to the Minister today: when are the Government going to do what is right and fix the gaps in their support schemes? Labour recognises the value that self-employed workers bring to our economy. We want to see people taking risks, becoming entrepreneurs and helping to build the fairest possible recovery and a dynamic economy. That is why we would help those who are excluded from support by extending eligibility for the self-employment income support scheme to anyone with a 2019-20 tax return, and it is why we are asking the Government today to confirm that the fourth self-employment income support scheme grant will be paid at 80% of pre-crisis profits.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Bridget Phillipson:** I will give way briefly. I am reluctant to give way much, because of the pressure on time.

**Jim Shannon:** Is the shadow Minister aware that those who are self-employed make up some 15% of our workforce? A survey that came out in September 2020 found that 64% of those self-employed people said that they were less likely to be, or unsure whether they wanted to be, self-employed or freelance workers in the future. Does that not tell us that we will be in deep trouble if we do not sort this out right now?

**Bridget Phillipson:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. As we start to emerge from the crisis phase of the pandemic, we want to encourage people to take that risk and start up their own business. The self-employed and people starting small businesses were central to driving the recovery post-2008, and we want them to be part of the answer right now, but that requires Government action to ensure that people can get through the difficult weeks and months that still lie ahead.

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Bridget Phillipson:** I will give way one final time. I appreciate that we are pressed for time.

**James Cartledge:** The hon. Lady is very kind. She said that she would extend self-employment support. Would that be to anybody, regardless of their earnings?

**Bridget Phillipson:** We would work within the parameters of the scheme that has been set out, with the extension around 2019-20. We understand that, at the start of the pandemic, when it was not possible to draw upon those tax returns, there was an argument, but the position has now changed and we are calling on Ministers to reflect and to reconsider their position in the interest of fairness, and also to ensure that self-employed people can keep their businesses going through this very difficult time for our economy.

**James Cartledge** *rose*—

**Bridget Phillipson:** It does rather disadvantage Members who are not here if I take further interventions, I am afraid.

It is not just the self-employed who need greater clarity at this time, but workers and businesses, large and small, right across our country. That is why what Labour is calling for is grounded in the concerns that we hear from them. I heard such concerns myself last week, when I met small business owners from Teesside in Cumbria, echoing those I have heard time and again from businesses right across our country. From the future of the furlough scheme to the considerable debt that many have accumulated since the start of the pandemic, there is huge worry about the decisions they will have to make over the coming months, and Government inaction is making those pressures worse. It is why the Labour party has set out the constructive steps that we would take to support businesses—steps like extending the scheme. We know that 4.6 million workers are still on furlough. Every day that passes without the Chancellor explaining how long it will last puts more of those jobs at risk, and that is why he should commit now to extending the scheme in line with the health restrictions remaining in place.

More than that: the Chancellor should undertake the common-sense reforms that we have called for, with new training to help furloughed workers improve their skills, alongside tough conditions on employers to stop abuse. We also want to see far more done to give businesses breathing space, by temporarily extending reduced VAT rates and also extending business rates relief for at least another six months.

The Government could do much worse than to learn from the example of the Labour-run Welsh Government. They have consistently offered more generous support for businesses through a more targeted and responsible approach, capping rates to free up extra money to support those who need it the most. It is a reminder of the values of Labour in government: prepared to take difficult but responsible decisions to support businesses properly throughout this crisis. Those values could not be further from the approach taken by this Government, who only next month will demand that businesses start paying back covid loans. These economically illiterate plans risk crushing British business and our recovery under a mountain of debt. Not only do hundreds of thousands of businesses risk going bust, but the taxpayer will have to pick up the tab if billions are lost in defaulted loans. The Government should heed our calls to ensure that smaller businesses start repaying bounce back loans only when they are growing again, to help secure jobs and our economic recovery.

Measures like these could have been announced long before now, and could be rolled out immediately if the Government had the political will. However, once again, businesses and workers are being forced to endure an excruciating and inexcusable wait so that the Chancellor can have his day in the sun at next month's Budget—more proof, as if it were needed, that it feels sometimes that he is more interested in boosting his own brand than he is in supporting hard-pressed British businesses. It is a reminder of what Labour would do to secure our economy, compared with the Tory incompetence and indecision that risks derailing our recovery; a Labour party that is responsible and on the side of families and businesses compared to the Tory party that simply will not listen. Above all, we are a Labour party that believes that by working with business and trade unions, we can emerge from this crisis with a fairer and stronger economy and build a more prosperous future.

4.18 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully):** We have heard from the Labour party that, rather than look at the public finances as a whole, as the Chancellor is about to do in a week's time in his considered response to the road map, it would act ad hoc. This Government believe that we should indeed look at the economy as a whole and at the businesses that need that support.

We resolved to protect people's jobs and livelihoods, and to support businesses and public services across the UK through the challenge of covid-19, and that is what we have done, with immediate support on a scale unmatched in recent history. To date, the Government have spent £280 billion more than that, providing certainty over the course of this pandemic, even as measures to prevent further spread of the virus have changed.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced our road map out of the current lockdown in England. Businesses have called for clarity and a road map to lead the country out of restrictions, and the Government have responded. The design of the road map has been informed by the latest scientific evidence. It seeks a balance between our key social and economic priorities while preserving the health and safety of the country. Every step to ease restrictions will be taken at the same time across England, in a national approach. The road map is yet another example of the support that this Government have provided, giving businesses and individuals up and down the country the clarity to plan ahead and manage everything from staff to supplies. In next week's Budget, the Chancellor will set out the next phase in our economic support package to reflect the steps set out in the Prime Minister's road map, including further detail on economic support to protect jobs and livelihoods across the UK. As the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have said previously, this Government are committed to doing whatever it takes to support our country throughout the covid pandemic, and that support will continue.

We have introduced an unprecedented package of support for businesses that have been severely affected by restrictions. Businesses that are legally required to close may be eligible for grants of up to £4,500 per six weeks of closure. The closed business lockdown payment has provided critical support to closed businesses during this difficult spring period, with additional grants of up to £9,000. Just for the period of national lockdown, the

support for closed businesses will amount to more than £6 billion. Discretionary support has been made available to support those businesses that have not been mandated to close, but that have had their trade adversely affected by the restrictions.

**Christian Wakeford** (Bury South) (Con): The hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson) talked about the excluded. Does my hon. Friend agree that the discretionary grant is a fine example of how we can get funding to those who have fallen through the gaps? Does he also agree that councils should be urged to consider all businesses, including those that are home-based?

**Paul Scully:** The discretionary grant is there to show flexibility. Local authorities have been charged to come up with their own plans to reflect their own local economies and their own needs in order to capture as many people and businesses as possible.

In January, the Chancellor announced that a further £500 million of discretionary funding was being made available to local authorities. That is in addition to £1.1 billion already allocated back in November 2020. That business grant scheme has continued to provide business with vital funding during both the national and local restrictions.

**Jim Shannon:** One way the Government could help the self-employed is to provide some help with low tax returns for 2019-20 to be included in the SEISS claims. Would the Government, or the Minister, consider that as a possible option to help those self-employed people who are under real pressure?

**Paul Scully:** I have met representatives from ExcludedUK. We continue to talk to them, we continue to flex and we continue to work out what more we can do to help the economy and to help jobs and livelihoods. The Chancellor will set out his position next week.

In addition to the grant schemes, businesses have received £70 billion in loan guarantees as of 24 January. That has provided a lifeline to more than 1.5 million businesses across the nations and regions of the UK. We have extended the application deadline to apply for those loans to the end of March 2021.

Last year, we changed the bounce back loan scheme rules to allow those businesses that had originally borrowed less than their maximum to top up their existing loans. We also announced the pay as you grow measures, which give all businesses that borrowed under the bounce back loans the option to repay their loan over a period of up to 10 years and to access an additional six months repayment holiday as well as interest-only repayment periods.

On 8 February, we announced that these measures will be made more generous, removing the requirement to make six payments before accessing the six months repayment holiday. Businesses can use these options either individually or in combination with each other, and lenders have begun contacting borrowers to let them know how they can access the pay as you grow measures. These flexible repayment options will give businesses the time that they need to recover from the pandemic and the confidence to build back better.

The Chancellor has also announced our intention to allow lenders to extend the repayment for coronavirus business interruption loans where this is needed to a maximum of 10 years, and we have announced that more support will be available beyond March through a successor loan scheme, more details of which will be announced in due course.

From the outset of this pandemic, we have acted decisively to protect jobs and people's livelihoods. The coronavirus job retention scheme, the first intervention of its kind in UK history, delivers country-wide support to protect millions of British workers. It has already helped 1.2 million employers across the UK furlough 9.9 million jobs. That scheme has been extended until the end of April 2021 for all parts of the UK, but the Chancellor has always been clear that the Government will keep the situation under review, adapting their approach as the context evolves. The Government will set out the next phase of the plan to tackle the virus and to protect jobs at the Budget next week.

A healthy hospitality sector is critical for the UK economy. It not only accounts for 2.4 million jobs and generates more than £59 billion of economic benefit, but underpins other economic sectors, including tourism and, indeed, our high streets. It is also an important part of our society, supporting social cohesion, cultural integration and mental health. It is a gathering place for communities, and we must continue to support it. The pandemic has hit the hospitality sector hard. I have worked extremely closely with the sector since March 2020 to understand the issues as far as possible so that we can strike the right balance between restrictions and business support.

Not only have the Government provided over £280 billion to support businesses, including hospitality, but we have provided support for commercial rents and deregulated to allow the better use of public spaces for outdoor hospitality. We will continue to keep all that support under review. I want the sector to open up. I want businesses to start to recover and thrive, but it must be done safely, led by the data, as the Prime Minister outlined yesterday.

The retail sector is vital not only to the UK economy, but to the communities that it serves, and I am grateful for the continued efforts of those retail staff who have kept this crucial service going throughout. I recognise that the pandemic has impacted on the sector in different ways and brought significant challenges, but while we have seen a welcome boost in the food sector and online sales, we have also witnessed a more challenging outlook for those not permitted to open, and I appreciate that it has been a really uncertain time for many retail staff. Regrettably, we have seen the closure of some well-known household retail brands, with resulting job losses, impacting on young people and women in particular.

The Government have acted to support as many businesses and employees as possible with that economic package worth over £280 billion, and those measures are carefully designed to complement one another to ensure that we protect jobs and livelihoods. However, as I said, we cannot save every business or job and the support can in no way fully compensate businesses for the loss of trade as a result of the restrictions. Retailers, pubs and hotels have been able to benefit from 100% business rates relief, worth about £10 billion in total, and we have frozen the business rates multiplier for 2021-22, saving businesses in England £575 million over the next five years.

[Paul Scully]

I know that many businesses are eager for an extension to the rates relief beyond the current financial year. The next round of covid-19 support measures will be set out in the Budget next week, but the Prime Minister has written to local authorities in the meantime advising them to delay issuing business rates bills until after the Budget, which, hopefully is good news for businesses.

I know that businesses may be disappointed by the decision to delay publication of the final report on the fundamental review of business rates until the autumn, but an interim report will be published on 23 March, and the final report will be published once there is more clarity on the long-term state of the economy and public finances. I encourage the sector to continue engaging with Government on these important issues.

Supporting people back into employment is also a key priority. Our plan for jobs includes a series of measures to protect, support and create jobs, and we are helping those who have lost jobs in the pandemic back into employment through our job entry targeted support programme. A £2 billion kickstart scheme has also been launched to create opportunities for young people, and we are taking action to help the high street to evolve. In September 2020, we brought forward over £80 million-worth of investment to support immediate improvements in 101 towns selected for deals to build back better in the wake of covid-19.

On 26 December 2020, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government confirmed £255 million for 15 areas for the future high streets fund, with a further 57 areas receiving provisional funding offers totalling up to £576 million. We are also launching a £4 billion levelling-up fund, investing in local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities and supporting economic recovery. We will publish a prospectus for that fund soon.

To date, we have provided the largest package of emergency support in post-war history. As highlighted by the Office for Budget Responsibility and the Bank of England, without the action taken by the Government, the outlook could be so much worse. The co-ordinated approach of the UK's authorities has also been praised internationally by the International Monetary Fund as one of the best examples of co-ordinated action globally that has helped to mitigate the damage, holding down unemployment and insolvencies. Given the current climate, it is right that we focus on supporting individuals and businesses through the pandemic. In the past, the Government have ensured that businesses and people have that certainty by extending the furlough and business grants. The announcements at the Budget will reflect the steps set out in the Prime Minister's road map, ensuring that the next phase of our economic support package continues to deliver tailored support for individuals and businesses.

What businesses want now is that road map. They want to be able to give a safe and warm welcome back to their customers, clients and people using their services, but in the meantime, as the Chancellor will set out next week, we will continue to work with businesses and individuals to protect jobs and livelihoods as we see the light at the end of the tunnel in this pandemic.

4.29 pm

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP) [V]: I am pleased to speak in this debate and to confirm that the Scottish National party will support the motion if it comes to a vote. I do not want to eat too much into the time available for the large number of Back Benchers who wish to speak, so I shall look in detail at only a small number of the items in the Labour motion. Given that so many of the main asks in the motion have been publicly supported by some highly influential Tory MPs, including a number of members of the Treasury Committee, I look forward to the Government's supporting the motion if a vote is called later.

We support the call for business rates relief to be extended. Scotland's Finance Secretary, Kate Forbes, made a similar request in a letter to the Chancellor on 27 January, ahead of the Scottish Budget. The SNP Scottish Government have led the way in reducing the rates bills of businesses in key sectors and of small businesses in particular. For example, the small business bonus scheme meant that last year 117,000 business properties in Scotland were paying no rates at all. Some 95% of all Scottish business properties have a lower rate poundage than they would have anywhere else in the United Kingdom. In addition, the businesses worst affected by covid restrictions—those in retail, tourism, hospitality and aviation—will pay no rates at all during the next financial year.

Given that the leader of the Tory party in Scotland and his colleagues demanded, ahead of the Scottish Budget, that

“retail, hospitality and leisure businesses”

be given

“certainty that they will not face full business rates in the next financial year”,

it is a wee bit disappointing that they do not seem so keen to speak up in this debate for hard-pressed businesses in other parts of this precious Union of theirs. But I am sure they will do the decent thing and support the motion later.

We fully support the call to extend the 5% VAT rate, but again I do not think it goes far enough, because if the sectors we are talking about currently have a 5% VAT rate, for all they know, their VAT bill could increase by 300% in just five weeks' time. Nobody can run a business with that degree of uncertainty, so the Government need to make it clear tonight—not next week or in two or three weeks' time—that that 5% VAT rate will be extended.

We need to start to take decisions now, based on the long-term interests of the economy, about the unprecedented levels of debt with which millions of businesses are saddled. They have had to borrow heavily, often through Government-backed schemes, to survive the first year of lockdown; they are not going to be in a position to repay those debts next year, or any time in the next two years.

In addition to supporting the call for small businesses to be allowed to defer the repayments on their loans, the SNP wants to go further. In the previous economic crisis, the Government spent huge amounts of our money on bailing out the self-same banks that were responsible for the problem; surely it is not too much to ask that we should now give the same kind of support to the more than 5 million small businesses that have done nothing

wrong and could play a vital part in our post-covid recovery. We therefore call on the Government to agree to write off the bounce back loan debts of small and medium-sized businesses and to look carefully at proposals from organisations such as TheCityUK that covid debts should be converted into equity or contingent tax liability, so that the public sector retains an interest in the business and the business is not forced to go to the wall because of a lack of cash.

My support, and that of my party, for the excluded 3 million is well documented, so I will not go into it in detail. All I will say is that, when I have raised the exclusion of those people with representatives of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs through the Public Accounts Committee, I have been given the excuse that it was not possible to set up a scheme quickly. It is now almost a year since the first lockdown was announced. The reason that so many self-employed people and owners of small businesses are still excluded is nothing to do with the Government's not being able to help them; it is to do with the Government's not being prepared to help them. For the party that claims to be the party of small business, that is an absolute disgrace.

In the interests of brevity, I bring my remarks to a close with a final observation: the British Government are the only one of the four UK national Governments who have the full range of taxation and borrowing powers necessary to deliver on what the motion asks for. I cannot speak for the people of Wales or Northern Ireland, but I know that as far as my constituents and the people of Scotland are concerned, if the British Government are not prepared to use their powers to get Scotland's businesses back on track and back into business, they should devolve those powers to a national Government who will.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I remind hon. Members that there is now a three-minute time limit on Back-Bench speeches. When that limit is in effect, a countdown clock is visible on the screens of hon. Members participating virtually and on the screens in the Chamber. For those participating physically in the Chamber, the usual clock will operate.

4.35 pm

**John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con) [V]:** I have declared my business interests in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Now is not the time for tax rises. Now is the time to promote a vigorous recovery as soon as it is safe to do so. Yes, the deficit is far too large, but it is affordable as long as it is a one-off. The deficit is the product of sensible support for individuals and businesses when they were locked out or closed down, and it was sensible support for the economy as a whole at a time when tax revenues had fallen sharply because people were not allowed to go to work and businesses were not allowed to trade. The way out of all that is not tax rises that would sap confidence and undermine business cash flows even more. The way out is a vigorous recovery that will replace lost revenues, and reduce the need for the support that the Government have rightly produced for small businesses and individuals.

What businesses and individuals will need is turnover, orders and work. I ask all Government Departments—led, probably, by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—to look at how the UK Government

can make more work available. The Government have mighty procurement programmes, so when we are building great new railway lines, let us ensure that it is UK steel for the tracks and that it is UK-produced trains with plenty of components and value added, as well as the assembly work taking place in the United Kingdom.

As the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs designs new grants and loans schemes, it should be promoting British food and agriculture at the same time as taking care of environmental concerns. There is a great opportunity to reduce the amount of imported food and to substitute Great British food from our farms and fishing grounds.

BEIS itself leads on energy. Why are we importing so much energy through interconnectors? Can we not have another round of capacity procurement so that we have future electricity generation here in Britain? We have plenty of means of generating power; surely we can harness that. The Government should want to greatly expand the electricity output of this country because they want to unleash on us a great electric revolution in transport, space heating and powering our factories, so let us make the provision early. Let us invest now for the future so that we have that electric power when it comes to be needed.

A number of businesses have been very badly damaged by lockdown and shut-out, and I am glad that the Government are making some money available to them. I urge them to be generous. It was not those businesses' fault and we need them to be there when we have recovery. Small businesses and the self-employed are mightily flexible, but they cannot survive on thin air, and they will need to repay their debts, so give them some turnover and some tax cuts.

4.38 pm

**Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab) [V]:** The Government's approach to business support through this latest lockdown does not match the scale of need. The hair and beauty industry has been severely impacted by the pandemic. Some parts of the industry were not able to open after the first lockdown, and businesses were operating at a significantly reduced capacity in order to adhere to covid-safe practices. Those that were eligible for grants and loans have found that they have not covered costs. Bills still need to be paid and, where rent is covered, energy bills, insurance, website costs, booking system costs, pay, national insurance and pension contributions are not.

The owner of Beauty of Bedford wrote to me, saying, "The hair and beauty industry contributes £9.2 billion annually to Britain's economy, with a workforce of over 288,000. The beauty industry plays a big role in our high street." To ensure the survival of SMEs, the Government must introduce targeted financial support packages for industries such as hair and beauty.

Business support should not be a postcode lottery, and the burden should not be placed on local authorities, whose pandemic costs have nowhere near been met by central Government. In Bedford and Kempston, for instance, businesses that do not have commercial premises have lost out on grants. That is hitting small businesses such as self-employed beauticians and others who have home offices or operate outside, such as self-employed taxi and private hire drivers. The self-employed—especially those who have yet to receive a penny of support from

[Mohammad Yasin]

the Government—are facing ruin. Once upon a time, the Tories claimed to be the party of business, but they have left millions of self-employed people to rot. If these people are ignored again in the Budget, there is little hope left. Many of them cannot limp on until 12 April. Taxi drivers certainly cannot.

This week, taxi and private hire drivers in Bedford and Kempston had their licence fees waived by the council, but that is just a sticking plaster for most. It does not put money in their hands, which is what they need to look after their families. The additional restrictions grant system is just not working for them. Too many are falling through the gaps, and there is not a welfare safety net to catch them. What do the Government expect these people without income to do? They need help, and they need help now from this Government. The self-employed business owners I have spoken to are a resilient bunch. They have worked hard to get where they are. They really do not want to be reliant on the Government; they just need some support—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. We have to move on because time is very tight.

4.41 pm

**Paul Maynard** (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con) [V]: It is easy to forget the empty streets and people's concern about not just their health and their families but their personal financial circumstances when coronavirus first arose. But even when this generation's political memoirs have been well and truly pulped and accurate history books are written, I think it will still be considered the Chancellor's own personal achievement to have mobilised the economic resources of this country to stabilise the economic outlook.

Labour Members cry for certainty about future support, yet they would huff and puff if the Budget were leaked today. The PM was clear yesterday that the Government will not pull the plug on support. Surely no one can deny the extent to which the Government have taken extraordinary steps to protect jobs and livelihoods. The furlough scheme has protected some 10 million jobs to maintain that crucial link with employment and make sure it is not severed permanently. I do not accept that that is money wasted, as the shadow Foreign Secretary described it. I hope that some thought can be given to how a cliff edge in the furlough can be avoided, so that we can gradually reallocate the labour force to the most productive parts of the economy.

The necessary extension to the furlough should be made in lockstep with decisions relating to both levels of benefits and wider fiscal measures. We have seen a vital uplift in universal credit of £20 a week. I have frequently urged the Chancellor to extend that, and I do so again. But we run the risk of being beguiled into thinking that that is the sole weapon in the Government's armoury to reduce the financial impact of covid and improve financial resilience. Critics seem to wholly overlook the relaxation of the universal credit minimum income floor for the self-employed, as well as the significant increase in local housing allowance.

The best help we can render right now is not so much retrospective help but ensuring that the economy is relaunched successfully, with no return to lockdown, so

as to restart both cash flow and economic activity. More importantly, we need to think creatively of future fiscal measures to unleash the spirit of free enterprise in a post-covid economy. Representing an area dominated by the hospitality sector, where unemployment is currently at 9.1%, I naturally join the sector in exhorting the Chancellor to maintain the 5% VAT reduction to help repair balance sheets, as well as extending the business rates holiday.

The Government's measures to support jobs and livelihoods have been broad and deep. We know that they cannot endure forever, so the question we must answer is about how we transition from financial decisions taken in the early stages of the pandemic to post-pandemic spending that does not have a detrimental impact on my constituents' financial resilience in what will still be very difficult times.

4.44 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab) [V]: Yesterday, I raised with the Prime Minister the shocking fact that more than a quarter of my constituents over 70 have yet to be vaccinated, and that for some ethnic minority groups the figure is more than half. I raised it with the Health Secretary today. I will go on doing so until there is some sign that the Government have a strategy for dealing with disparities in the roll-out of the vaccine. I made this point in the debate on the economic effects of the pandemic, because health and solvency are two sides of the same coin, and those most at risk from the virus are often those with the least financial security, including those running small businesses.

The greater caution and method in the Prime Minister's road map is to be welcomed. It is a pity we did not see that as we emerged from the first lockdown, or even the second. Controlling the virus, saving lives and protecting vulnerable and at-risk people must be our priority, and the "not before" dates and a more realistic timetable are a step forward, but—there is always a but—the corollary to this approach has to be a greater determination to protect individuals and businesses whose livelihoods are endangered by the virus and our steps to beat it. The fact that this crisis has run for almost a year and that there is now a timetable out of it makes it more, not less, necessary to offer practical financial support.

Furlough and other general relief schemes and cuts in VAT and business rates have been essential and must continue, but other steps have not followed. As a result, many businesses that were viable and are potentially viable will fail before lockdown ends unless Government help is maintained and extended. Some of those businesses have received little or no assistance thus far—I think of the events industry, weddings and hospitality, all over-represented in my constituency, but I also think of the businesses that supply those sectors and the freelancers and self-employed traders who work in them. Above all, I think of the 3 million excluded from relief by the Chancellor despite the overwhelming lobbying from Members from all parties.

I mention just a few examples from Hammersmith. I have businesses supplying desserts and linen to the hospitality and catering sector. I have people who run car washes who are not allowed to trade, when garages with car washes are. I have warehouses that are not classified as qualifying for support. I have travel agents

who have had to pay back moneys given to them but who are not in a position to claim rates relief themselves. The Government are familiar with these examples. They know what needs to be done. Sadly, the response to my constituents has been slow and inadequate thus far. I ask the Government to, please, at this crucial point, hear the voice of those who will sustain this country's economy going forward. Do not let us fail when the end may at last be in sight.

4.47 pm

**Sir David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con) [V]: I begin by welcoming the road map set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister yesterday. It will unlock our economy. I believe this plan is a measured, sensible and constructive approach. It is good to know that the British Chambers of Commerce, the CBI, the Federation of Small Businesses and businesses across the country have all acknowledged that it provides much needed clarity going forward. The road map offers hope to the nation that there is finally light at the end of the tunnel. I believe that businesses will acknowledge the progress on easing restrictions and I welcome the speech today from my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business, who I know speaks regularly to small and medium-sized enterprises. This is a pro-business Government and we are listening to their views.

I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on all his work and the measures that he has put in place over the last year to help individuals and businesses and to maintain jobs. The Government's main focus over the year has been to control and defeat the virus and implement the necessary measures to keep people safe, protect our NHS and assist individuals and businesses to survive financially at this time, with one of the most generous and effective support packages in the world, amounting to £280 billion. It is very disappointing that the Opposition do not acknowledge that. The furlough scheme is being used by 1.2 million businesses and has saved almost 10 million jobs, at a cost of £46.4 billion. The Government have also provided £13 billion to support more than 2.6 million self-employed people so far, which is, again, one of the most comprehensive and generous support packages anywhere in the world.

I know from communications with businesses in my area that the Government's support is much appreciated, particularly the coronavirus grant funding. It has been vital in keeping businesses from going under, especially when they have not been operational. In my constituency, in the main town of Bexleyheath, we are fortunate to have a fantastic business improvement district organisation headed by Carol Linyard, who does a great job with local businesses. Bexley council, too, has been proactive in supporting businesses, allocating funds from the additional restrictions grant provided from central Government. Of course, the hospitality industry remains suffering. I speak regularly with its members, including Pete Marshall, who is a local constituent, businessman and publican. He is grateful for the support that he has had from the Government, but feels more needs to be done.

In conclusion, obviously we can now look to the future and begin to get the economy moving again. As the Prime Minister has said, we are all looking forward to the summer when we can enjoy hospitality, tourism, pubs and social opportunities, of which there are so many across my borough of Bexley. There are so many

places to visit, places of entertainment, restaurants, pubs and historical sites that are all waiting for the lockdown to end. I look forward to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget next month, and I hope he will continue to give businesses the support they need until lockdown is over. Then it will be up to all of us to support, promote and encourage our local businesses so that they can thrive once again.

4.50 pm

**Rebecca Long Bailey** (Salford and Eccles) (Lab) [V]: At least 3 million people have been excluded from covid support schemes. One constituent of mine ran a tourism business from home. She has no rateable business premises to qualify for grant funding, she cannot afford to repay business support loans, and the minimal furlough she receives does not even cover her rent. Her situation is desperate. Another constituent works as a freelance interior designer for the hospitality sector. He has received only 20% of his usual monthly income, and he says:

"I honestly don't know how I can carry on for much longer".

A personal trainer saving to set up her own studio found that she was ineligible for support schemes and, because of her savings, also ineligible for universal credit.

There are hundreds of stories like these in Salford. Many people may now lose their homes, and the impact on their mental health and that of their families is profound. Indeed, recently the mental health spokesperson for ExcludedUK said that the group has had 13 suicides to date and noted widespread mental anguish. Of one case, the spokesperson said:

"I had one woman who posted on our Facebook group asking for someone to come and collect her dogs because she couldn't afford to feed them anymore. She herself had been eating dog food because that was the only thing she had left in her house".

The Chancellor must do the right thing. He must provide an immediate emergency grant for those affected. He must install new monthly arrangements while restrictions remain in place, in complete parity with the extension of the CJRS and SEISS schemes, and remove hard edges to eligibility criteria. Finally, he must backdate payments for a full and final settlement to deliver parity and fairness for those excluded from meaningful support. If the Chancellor refuses to heed these proposals today not only will his promise to leave no one behind be worthless, but he will be responsible for the most glaring and deliberate orchestration of social injustice we have seen during this pandemic.

4.53 pm

**Joy Morrissey** (Beaconsfield) (Con) [V]: May I thank my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for the £280 billion package of financial support for businesses throughout the pandemic? I would like to offer my thanks on behalf of the 3,700 businesses in Beaconsfield that have benefited directly from Government loans throughout the pandemic. I also thank the Chancellor for protecting small businesses and hospitality. Small businesses have been the backbone of my constituency of Beaconsfield—we have more self-employed and entrepreneurs than anywhere in the country—and they want to get back to work and to be able to open up their businesses again. I believe, and may I suggest, that the best way to support our businesses post pandemic is with low taxation and a full lifting of restrictions so businesses, pubs and the local high street can get back to generating taxes and rebuilding our

[Joy Morrissey]

economy as quickly as we possibly can. May I also thank the Labour party for its support for such Conservative policies that even Thatcher would be proud of? Business rates relief and cutting VAT are wonderful Conservative policies, which I support so that we can give businesses a fighting chance to get back on their feet in the next year.

One of the most successful sorts of schemes that I would like to thank my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for are the grant schemes that councils have been administering. Buckinghamshire Council has done an excellent job in getting this vital business support to our local businesses as quickly as possible; unlike some local authorities, it has given out all of its grant funding to small businesses. I ask Ministers for a commitment from the Government for further funding for councils such as Buckinghamshire Council to distribute to local businesses, which need that vital support in the coming months to make it to the end of lockdown. We just need a little bit more to get us over the line, to make sure that all of our businesses are able to open successfully and that we can see our economy restored.

4.55 pm

**Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab) [V]: Having heard the Chief Secretary to the Treasury talk earlier today about the apparent “sunny uplands” we have here in the UK, I fear that he has not been living in the same world as the rest of us. The Conservative party has been in government for 11 years—let us let that sink in. The Conservatives have had 11 years to make the changes needed to rebalance our economy and make our society more equal, but they have not done so. They have made things worse for hard-working families, children, old people, single parents and people with disabilities, and for those who are unable to work and the homeless they have made it much, much worse. When my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson) takes over as Chief Secretary from the right hon. Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Steve Barclay), the note he leaves for her will undoubtedly read, “We’re doomed.”

Next week’s Budget needs to put people at the heart of the recovery. Big businesses undoubtedly need support, but it is our small and medium-sized businesses—our independent shops and our fantastic producers—that will drive the build-back from this crisis. My beautiful constituency’s unparalleled tourism and hospitality sector was thriving before the pandemic, but it has been hard hit by the restrictions in place. The excellent Cakes & Ale in Mumbles, the picturesque King’s Head Inn in Llangennith and so many other businesses across my constituency—too many to mention—have been badly affected. Like so many hospitality businesses, they have been open for only 14 weeks in the past year. One way to help hospitality businesses to recover from this crisis is to keep the current reduced VAT rate, which is what they are all asking for. I know many local hospitality businesses in Gower are proud to be supplied by local producers. Our agriculture and fishery sectors are also missing out on supplying those restaurants, cafés and hotels, and boosting the hospitality sector will mean passing the benefits on to them.

It is also worth noting the challenge faced in the pandemic by breweries, especially my local Gower Brewery. They, too, are desperate for the pubs and hotels to be open, so I would be grateful if the Chancellor would look at proposals on duty on alcohol to aid their recovery. At the end of December 2020, 4,000 people in Gower were still on furlough. That is 4,000 people to whom the Chancellor has given no certainty or reassurance, and we need that scheme to continue after April. We need our recovery to be faster, and this Government need to learn from the Welsh Labour Government.

4.58 pm

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con) [V]: Most of my constituents, regardless of party, are impressed by the generosity of the Government in meeting the costs of covid-19, but they would find it impossible, across the county, to congratulate Somerset County Council on anything at all. This dinosaur of a local authority has received tens of millions of pounds from the Government to help fight the pandemic but it cannot account for, has not accounted for and probably never will be able to account for every penny. I can forgive it for some of the stupid mistakes, but shelling out tens of millions of pounds to some very dodgy personal protective equipment salesmen is very hard to ignore, and it should not be ignored. I believe that funds were deliberately diverted and spent on things that have absolutely nothing to do with covid. We must remember that the council is trying to cover the tracks of its dismal stupidity and the management of its road contracts through Skanska. The position is so bad that the council has no idea how much public money has been wasted.

Somerset County Council is quite untrustworthy. It has even recruited a public relations team the size of which would make Rupert Murdoch jealous, and it has enough journalists to run several national newspapers. Why? There are more there than in No. 10. Somerset County Council has spent much time campaigning for its pipe dream of a single unitary authority—another three quarters of a million pounds has now been wasted. It was pure stubbornness on the part of the county council leader to push ahead with that idea just as the pandemic took hold. Wiser men than he would have put everything on hold, but not Somerset’s leader. He ploughed on with some of the most tasteless, time-consuming diversions while hundreds of Somerset folk fell ill.

Somerset boasted about how it was moving mountains to help people. Yes, many big, hardy people work for the county council, but I am sorry to say that it is run by overpaid idiots. The district councils have done the bulk of the hard work in the pandemic—those self-same districts that the county council leader wants to abolish, grabbing their reserves and thereby bolstering his crumbling empire.

This May, we were meant to be voting for a county council after four years of incompetence. I doubt whether the current lot would have survived a dose of real democracy. They will be doomed at the ballot box, but as of last night, those elections have been postponed until local government reform is settled. I say to colleagues of all parties: if you don’t represent Somerset, thank your lucky stars.

5.1 pm

**Paula Barker** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab) [V]: By my count, I make it 337 days without proper and sufficient support for those who make up Britain's 3 million excluded and forgotten. On the reverse side of the coin, the taxpayer-funded gravy train goes full steam ahead, with billions of pounds in publicly funded contracts handed over to Tory donors. In every sense, and at whatever side of the coin one may look, it is a national disgrace.

Who are these excluded people? They are the people denied furlough; the newly self-employed and those with new start-ups; those who earn less than 50% from self-employment, and, perhaps most immorally of all, women on maternity, parental and/or adoption leave. For those 337 days, livelihoods have been at stake, businesses have been lost and too many have been forced to join the queue for universal credit. Constituents of mine, like Jayne Moore and Grahame Park, Neil McDonald and Claire Ryder, and outside my constituency, people like Tim Pravda, have had 337 days of anxiety and uncertainty about their future.

I had assumed that the excluded would be a natural constituency for the Tory party, but what shocked me, to say the least, was the outright belligerence and refusal to engage with just over 3 million people. That has undermined the increasingly hollow soundbite of doing "whatever it takes". However, the excluded are not going away. Their persistence is testament to their resolve and I am pleased to play my small part in speaking up for them today.

Throughout the pandemic, the Conservative *modus operandi* of dither and delay has compounded the uncertainties and anxieties. Worse, the Government have at times sought to add insult to injury. One example is dropping the self-employment income support scheme to 20% of profits before realising the error of their ways. We know too many who are excluded altogether from that scheme. One minute the spending taps are on, the next the Government turn into the mate who has bolted from the bar to the toilet when they know their round is next. Only when they are metaphorically dragged out of the loo do they buy a round, basking in the glory of it all before doing a runner when they are next up. But the excluded are never truly given a seat at the table.

If the Government act quickly, they can get ahead of the curve instead of bending it, and be proactive rather than reactive. I implore them to hear the stories of the excluded 3 million, work with them to plug the gaps in support and put right the wrongs. Let us also significantly extend furlough alongside the self-employment income support scheme, extend business rates relief, continue VAT reductions and keep the eviction ban in place. That means providing reassurance and acting now, not waiting until the March Budget. Our short, medium and long-term recovery depends on it.

5.4 pm

**Virginia Crosbie** (Ynys Môn) (Con) [V]: Young people here in my constituency of Ynys Môn tell me that they want a future here on the Isle of Anglesey. They want to work here, buy a home here, raise their families here, stay in their community and keep our Welsh culture and language alive. They want quality jobs and they want a pro-business Government who will enable them to have a good job.

The past year under the shadow of coronavirus has had a major impact on everyone, but especially our young people. Their education has been impacted, and they have spent months isolated from friends and extended family. The UK Government have supported them and their families with practical measures to keep jobs and businesses going, with the introduction of schemes such as kickstart, which has already seen new jobs created here on Anglesey. The Chancellor's innovative schemes have offered a lifeline to thousands of people here on Ynys Môn, with more than £7 million in CBILS loans, just under £37 million in bounce back loans, 3,400 employee jobs furloughed, 2,000 claims made under the self-employment income support scheme and nearly £1 million claimed on the eat out to help out scheme.

My constituency has seen underinvestment and the loss of major employers for decades, and I will be fighting to ensure that all my constituents have a future and are a major beneficiary of the UK Government's key manifesto commitments to level up the social and economic playing field across the UK. Ynys Môn can play a key role in the build back better recovery of the UK by embracing the UK Government's levelling up agenda.

Anglesey's bid for freeport status would create a hub of enterprise across the island, fanning out from the port of Holyhead. As the only bid in north Wales, and the only bid in Wales to include a university, the freeport would attract major new employers, bringing permanent employment and boosting the supply chain across the whole of north Wales. Our island's natural resources can play a significant role in helping to make net zero a reality. We have wind, wave, tide and solar, as well as one of the best potential nuclear sites in the UK at Wylfa Newydd. Businesses such as Morlais and Minesto offer huge opportunities to harness green energy locally, as well as providing exciting, new, high-quality jobs.

By investing in homegrown innovative businesses, such as Diagnostig and Virustatic, which are based in the Menai science park, we can encourage our young people to visualise their futures here on the island through initiatives such as my innovation jobs fair, which will be opened by the Science, Research and Innovation Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway), in July.

I want to see our young people in a position where their hope for good employment does not mean they have to leave our island. I want them to be able to stay here, buy their own homes, raise their own families and live in the communities they love. Levelling up is not about handouts, but the country working in partnership with this Conservative Government to bring about regional as well as national prosperity. On behalf of Anglesey, I am grabbing it with both hands.

5.7 pm

**Sarah Owen** (Luton North) (Lab) [V]: Nearly a year has gone by without support for the 3 million workers and self-employed people who have been excluded. Thousands of businesses have been forgotten during this pandemic. A year on, the Government cannot pretend they have not heard the calls of the excluded, so it is now either sheer incompetence or a deliberate choice to leave millions of workers unsupported. Time and time again, we hear Ministers give their big total figures, but

[Sarah Owen]

that means nothing to the people who have had nothing. We need to see support for workers and businesses not just extended but targeted, and the criteria for applications widened.

I have met with fantastic businesses in Luton North that have received little to nothing at all from the Chancellor. Creative8 and Purple Creative Events are just two such businesses. Both are fantastic companies based in my constituency, and they are more than viable. Outside of a pandemic, they thrive and provide skilled work, but crucially, they are part of the business-generating events industry. They are a vital cog in our local and national economy, and their events generate more business. If we want an economic road map out of this mess, the events industry must be part of the answer.

Where this Government turn a blind eye, other countries are acting. Germany has already secured the future of its own live events industry, underwriting events with a “go live” date. Austria and Norway have also done the same. If the Minister does not act now, he risks losing jobs, and an entire industry and its supply chain.

There are few events as personally significant as a wedding. I have had constituents contact me who are unable to get on with the next chapter of their lives, and that is not to mention the photographers, venues, caterers and other small businesses within this important industry. It is another business-generating industry, and if it is allowed to fall, that will not only have a terrible personal impact on those hoping to get married, but a devastating economic impact. The sector has lost out on more than £430 million due to cancelled or postponed weddings, and it is the small businesses, the wedding venues, the self-employed photographer and the families who have borne the brunt of that cost, with little support from the Government.

I want to turn to another group of people all too forgotten in this crisis. Pregnant Then Screwed has rightly highlighted the discrimination faced by working mums, as the self-employment income support scheme has seen tens of thousands of women receive lower payments than those who had not taken maternity leave. It is not a small group of people affected; close to 70,000 women have been left out of pocket. I ask the Minister, are working mums worth less in the eyes of the Government, and if not, when and how will they put right this inequality? When it comes to economic support, when will Ministers stop prioritising their mates and start prioritising hard-working people in places such as Luton North?

5.10 pm

**Fay Jones** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con) [V]: Having heard yesterday the Prime Minister’s road map for exiting lockdown, I am sure that everyone in England is delighted to know the route out of this most difficult of chapters. However, with the Welsh Government unable to explain the Welsh exit plan, many of my constituents can only hope that a similar plan will one day be put in place for us.

Across the UK, we have all made incredible sacrifices over the past 12 months, such as missing out on seeing friends and family, losing the ability to travel, and even losing the simple pleasure of going out for dinner. With hospitality at the heart of my constituency, many thriving

businesses have been forced to temporarily close in the name of public health. Some have been able to continue their businesses by offering takeaway services or meal kits, providing a real treat for many of us on a lonely lockdown evening. I could easily use up all my time talking about HILLS in Brecon and how incredible its home burger kits are.

However, getting back to a normal way of life must be our imperative. As lockdown is eased, it is vital that both UK and Welsh Governments work together to support businesses in my constituency. So I hope that the Welsh Government will be watching next week’s Budget closely, and will instantly match any decisions taken by the UK Government.

From the very beginning, the Chancellor acknowledged that he would not be able to save each and every job, but it is undeniable that his £280 billion economic package has ensured that millions of people have been given peace of mind, and that businesses have been provided with a financial lifeline. That economic package has included almost £6 billion for the Welsh Government. Last year, Cardiff University estimated that £800 million of that money had yet to be spent. That was before last week’s announcement of a further £655 billion. So it is disappointing, and sadly predictable, that the Labour party would rather spend its time prejudging next week’s Budget than asking its own First Minister in Wales, “Where is the money?”

Countless businesses across Brecon and Radnorshire could benefit from the funding that the Welsh Government are sitting on, not least the tourism and hospitality sectors, which are vital to the rural economy. Throughout the pandemic I have met and heard from countless small, often family-run businesses, who are incredibly grateful for the support offered, but rightly question how the Welsh Government can justify keeping such a large amount of money back when those individuals are wondering how to pay their bills each month.

I am concerned that the Welsh Labour Government will hold on to that money as long as they can, only to hand it out to their Labour heartlands just weeks before the Senedd elections in May. Rather than claim that the UK Government have not gone far enough, I want Labour Members to first challenge their colleagues in the Senedd over that incredible injustice and demand that that money is given to those most in need before it is too late, and above all that rural Wales is not ignored again, as it has been so many times by the callous Government in Wales.

5.13 pm

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhési** (Slough) (Lab): I am extremely grateful to be able to participate in this important Opposition day debate on supporting businesses and individuals through the coronavirus crisis.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, those who have been financially impacted by coronavirus have sadly been at the mercy of the Government’s incompetent and delayed decision making. Almost a year on, it seems that little has changed. While the public health road map announced yesterday by the Prime Minister is welcome news to us all, the absence of an economic support plan alongside it was alarming. Previously, the Prime Minister’s and the Chancellor’s dithering resulted in job losses and mass redundancies. Now it looks like history could well repeat itself. Slough has sadly suffered with both our public health and our local economy as a result of the

pandemic. My constituency is a proud, huge business hub, with the highest concentration of global corporate headquarters in the UK outside London, a significant number of workers in the airline industry, and usually a very healthy employment rate. So the impact of covid on local people's lives and livelihoods has been devastating—14,500 constituents are still furloughed this month, while claims for universal credit have skyrocketed. All are doing their best in circumstances beyond their control. My office has been inundated by local businesses, employees, the self-employed, freelancers, food and drink wholesalers, our local football team, private hire taxi drivers, local media outlets, events employees from live music to weddings and theatres, early years providers and childminders, and those working for airports and airlines. A clear comprehensive plan is all they have wanted for the past year.

Even now, businesses are waiting between yesterday's announcement and the Budget, left in limbo yet again. The Government should be doing all they can to get as many people as possible through the crisis and to ensure that we build a brighter economic future by tackling inequality, building up businesses and supporting job creation. Instead, they seem intent on raising council tax, freezing key worker pay, cutting universal credit and keeping businesses in the dark. We all know that targeted economic measures that support businesses and protect family finances will be key to rebuilding our economy and boosting employment, including a smart furlough scheme, a covid debt plan for businesses, a six-month extension of business rate relief for retail, hospitality and leisure, and an extension of the 5% reduced rate of VAT for the hospitality, tourism and culture sectors. Businesses and families need urgent action and support, not the characteristic dither and delay we have come to expect from this Tory Government.

5.16 pm

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab) [V]: Before I became an MP in 2010, I ran my own business. Like hundreds of thousands of others, we were hit hard by the global financial crisis. I know that for many small businesses, the past year of this pandemic has been darker than the darkest days of 2008.

An estimated 3 million people—British taxpayers—have been without work and without support during the pandemic. That is about 10% of the UK workforce. At the same time, billions of pounds of British taxpayers' money has been wasted on crony Conservative contracts that often failed to deliver. Some have even been ruled unlawful and others, like Serco Test and Trace, have been hopelessly wasteful. That is money that could have been spent supporting self-employed workers, owner-managers and employees who were denied furlough, denied self-employed income support and even denied universal credit.

In two days' time, I will host a virtual town hall event with constituents who have been excluded during the pandemic. They will want to know why Ministers lined the pockets of donors to the ruling party at their expense. They will want to know why 2019-20 tax returns still cannot be used for applications for self-employed income support. They will want to know why owner-managers are not eligible for support. They will want to know why so many working people have been left behind.

Take the example of Alison Powell, a taxpayer for more than 40 years. Alison is a self-employed sole trader teaching foreign languages in school clubs. Her tax return showed that she was paid £10 more for her earnings as an employee than her earnings in self-employment. As a result, she did not qualify for any financial support and still does not—not a single penny. She has been hung out to dry by the Chancellor and the Prime Minister.

Last week, we saw the grotesque example of the Chancellor video calling a millionaire celebrity chef who at the outset of the pandemic sacked hundreds of his own staff via email. Instead of organising fluffy photo ops with celebrity chefs, he should be out there meeting business owners who are struggling to survive—those who have been impacted most by his failed policies. What Alison Powell and the rest of my excluded constituents need to hear from the Chancellor is a change of heart. It is not too late for genuine targeted support for the 3 million who are yet to receive any support whatsoever from this Government.

5.19 pm

**Nick Fletcher** (Don Valley) (Con) [V]: I want to start by commending the Government for the sheer amount of work they have done to safeguard as many businesses and as many people's jobs over the past 12 months. Yet while the title of this motion may be "Supporting business and individuals through the coronavirus crisis", there is the obvious question of what happens next. This is particularly relevant as the vaccine continues to be rolled out and the spring Budget comes closer and closer.

In my view, the best way we can support businesses and people in the short to medium term is by pushing forward with the levelling-up agenda, keeping taxes low, and promoting the growth of small, innovative companies. The Government should also help businesses by removing red tape and promoting job creation through initiatives like freeports. As I have made clear time and again, nothing would help Don Valley more than a freeport adjacent to our very own Doncaster Sheffield airport and iPort. Furthermore, the UK needs multinational companies like Apple and Tesla to invest in places like Don Valley—a view that I have proudly championed. However, as good as investment from multinational firms would be as we recover from this terrible pandemic, the UK should also recognise the need to create its own Tesla and its own Apple. We must strive to be the world's workshop yet again. After all, I am sure that Members from across the House will agree that the UK can only move forward if it has world-leading homegrown businesses. I am pleased that this Government share that view. Their recent announcement that they will be founding the Advanced Research and Invention Agency, with a generous budget of £800 million, will ensure that the UK becomes the place for the advancement of cutting-edge research and technology.

In addition to maintaining low taxation and supporting research and innovation, the Government should also encourage businesses to make efficiencies. Unfortunately for Labour Members, I am afraid that this means facilitating a free market and allowing healthy economic competition, for if we are to make the UK economy more innovative, dynamic and resilient, casting away old business practices and embracing new ones must be

[Nick Fletcher]

at the core of our economic recovery. Let us not forget that it was the drive for efficiencies that gave us cars that do 100 miles to the gallon, lights that use a tenth of the power, and boilers that use less and less fossil fuels. All these efficiencies have helped people, the economy and the environment.

Low taxes and business incentives and efficiencies are the way forward out of this difficult economic situation, and there is no better Government to do that than this Conservative Government.

5.22 pm

**Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab) [V]: It has now been almost a year since lockdown measures were first introduced to contain the virus and financial support was brought forward to help the businesses and livelihoods affected, yet this Government are still letting millions of people down and we find ourselves still having to make the case to the Government to do the right thing. We must continue to voice the concerns of those who have been excluded from support, as this issue will not go away until the Government act.

The Government have had many chances to put this right. I and hon. Members from across the House have given countless examples and evidence from people in so many different professions and situations who have been left out of support through no fault of their own and in many cases simply cannot make ends meet. We all remember that the Chancellor insisted at the start of the pandemic that the Government would do “whatever it takes” to ensure that people have the support they need to get through this crisis—a message the Prime Minister repeated only yesterday. In some cases, people have been forced to give up careers and retrain, relying on universal credit on an inadequate system of support. Now it seems that the Government are intent on cutting the lifeline of support even further by going ahead with the callous decision to cut universal credit by £20 a week.

In stark contrast to this Conservative Government, the Welsh Labour Government have been much more allied to the needs of businesses and communities in Wales and have tried to ensure that they have what they need to get through a hugely challenging period. In Wales we have recognised the gaps in support left by this Government’s measures and have made further support available to those who need it, such as through the freelancer fund, which has helped thousands of freelancers across heritage, the arts and other sectors who have been excluded from support by this Government. The Welsh Government have also continued to work closely with local government, the third sector and others to ensure a joined-up approach with a shared interest in providing support to all those who need it right across Wales. That is the difference a Labour Government can make.

The success of the vaccination programme means that a return to normality is in sight, but we know that for many businesses the opportunity to reopen or resume trading is still weeks, if not months, away, and many who have been left out of Government support remain desperate for assistance to get them through this time. Recently, I was contacted by a taxi driver in my constituency who has been self-employed since December 2018. He

was ineligible for the self-employment support scheme because he started just a week too late to provide the required tax return. He, like many others, is struggling to pay his mortgage and feed his family, and faces many more difficult times ahead while a return to regular trading remains some months away, all because the Government have refused to give even a slight degree of flexibility in their schemes, leaving him, and so many others, feeling they have nowhere to turn.

I urge the Minister in his response today to give millions of people across the country the assurances they need that they will not continue to be excluded from vital support simply because they started a new job a week too late or their trading profits are a pound over the eligibility cap. We need the Government to act.

5.25 pm

**Julie Marson** (Hertford and Stortford) (Con) [V]: I have spoken to many small businesses in my constituency that have endured the challenges thrown at them by the pandemic with incredible resolve and an even greater generosity of spirit. Despite their own challenges, many have gone out of their way to help others in the community facing very different struggles from their own.

Small businesses are an integral part of the social fabric of our communities; they are certainly the lifeblood of Hertford and Stortford, providing incomes for families, populating our villages, towns and high streets, and providing a service to people that often goes beyond their customers. In my constituency, Home Instead in Sawbridgeworth created the “Be a helper to a senior” initiative to deliver supplies to elderly people and provide company over the phone to those left isolated by lockdown measures. In Hertford, McMullen brewery has supported its tenants and served our community in a multitude of ways. There are literally hundreds of examples like this.

The good that such businesses do for communities is just one reason why the numerous Treasury interventions over the last 12 months, as well as being crucial to their survival, will be crucial to our recovery. The furlough scheme alone, which supported 10 million people, has been a colossal undertaking and has protected livelihoods across the country.

Generating creative ideas in haste is a complicated business, but the many robustly dynamic schemes are designed to support businesses at every stage of their evolution. Where current profits or revenue amounts were issues for CBILS, the Chancellor introduced the future fund, for example, and for businesses needing more than a loan, grants and rates relief often kept them going.

That is not to claim that these initiatives have been able to save every business or job or that the struggle is over. Just this week I have been speaking to great local businesses in the hospitality and travel sectors that have made use of Government support, but they still face extremely uncertain futures. The road map announced on Monday provides a really helpful base to plan from, but we cannot overstate the challenges they have endured and still face.

This is a marathon, not a sprint, but I know that this Government will support businesses large and small, seize the opportunity to build a truly transformative recovery strategy, and truly build back better.

5.28 pm

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab) [V]: Our country's ability to support families through the covid crisis was fundamentally weak at the very outset. Indeed, a report by the Money Charity found that we entered the covid crisis with 10 million households in Britain having no savings and another 3 million having savings of less than £1,500. Years of pay restraint and insecure employment have left many living off debt, and indeed many businesses and individuals, including the over 3 million excluded, have found themselves unable to claim any Government support specifically intended to relieve the consequences of covid. Among those self-employed groups are taxi drivers, driving instructors, entertainers, performers, small brewers, and many freelancers in the hospitality and catering trades.

The Trades Union Congress has found that households owe an average of £15,385 to credit card firms, banks and other lenders. Over the last decade, public spending cuts have led to higher costs for families at a time when wages have stagnated or been cut in real terms. Even as we speak, members of my own union, Unite, are resisting unscrupulous employers, including the French-owned bus company RATP, which is using covid as a smokescreen to implement pay policies that could see some bus drivers lose up to £2,500 a year. Ministers have created a gig economy that traps people between a rock and a hard place—between low pay and destitution, with the social security safety net being cut away. The £20 universal credit supplement is due to be cut, and we are waiting to hear what the outcome is in the Budget. Again, my own union, Unite, is campaigning alongside charities and civil society for the uplift to be consolidated, not cut.

Despite the speeches from hon. Members on the Government Benches, the Government have created an economy that does not make work pay for all. We have endemic in-work poverty, systemic child poverty and an economy that cannot house and feed all of our people. There have been more than 120,000 deaths as a consequence of covid, but it does not have to be like this. There are numerous examples around the world of how things could be done differently. We need only look at New Zealand as an example. I hope that, moving forward, we can secure a Government who will look on the economy as a partnership between public and private, not as a clash of two competing forces.

5.31 pm

**Jerome Mayhew** (Broadland) (Con) [V]: This motion feels like an attempt by the Opposition to grab some headlines in the run-up to the Budget on 3 March. They chuck in a raft of policy proposals to second-guess the Chancellor, and if they guess right, they can claim the credit. If they guess wrong, they can claim moral outrage. But what is interesting is not so much what is in the motion as what is not in it. Labour Members have been reduced to calling for an extension of existing schemes by a few months and for widening access to the self-employment scheme, although I note that they do not explain how we can do that without exposing the Treasury and the taxpayer to massive fraud. What they have been unable to do is to come up with any significant critique of the Government's support for business and employment in response to the pandemic.

Why has Labour's attack been reduced to carping around the edges? It is because the Government's support for businesses and employment has been truly massive. They have used the hard-won financial credibility of the whole of the United Kingdom, which was painfully recovered after Labour's last spendthrift Government, and used it to inject more than £280 billion of financial support right across our economy. They have been supporting jobs through the furlough scheme, with £46 billion; through the self-employment scheme, with £5.4 billion; and through the kickstart scheme, with £2 billion. They have been supporting businesses through the bounce back loan scheme, with £45 billion; through the CBILS, with £21 billion; through the large company loan scheme, with £5 billion; and through business rates relief and grants to companies that have been forced to close, with over £1 billion every month. The list could go on. There is barely a company in the whole of the United Kingdom that has not benefited in some way from the Government's support, and as a former businessman myself, I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

The Government have succeeded in keeping businesses afloat through the pandemic so that they will be in a position to bounce back as the lockdown eases. These are the businesses that will create the employment and generate the growth and then the tax revenues to pay back the enormous investment that the Government have made. Today's employment figures show that businesses have already started to hire again, with employment having risen in each of the last two months and redundancy notices falling. With huge investment in the productivity-enhancing infrastructure of the whole United Kingdom still to come, and the implementation of the Prime Minister's 10-point plan for a green recovery, there are huge grounds for optimism as we come out of lockdown, and I commend the Government for their herculean efforts.

5.34 pm

**Olivia Blake** (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): As we are debating support for businesses and individuals through the covid crisis, I want to tell the story of one of my constituents, a recently self-employed person called Peter. He started trading in 2019, so he cannot claim on the self-employment income support scheme. He also cannot claim universal credit because his wife earns just a little too much, but not enough to cover all the bills. His life has been turned upside down, and he has been forced to borrow money from friends and family. Desperately looking for help, he telephoned Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and was told by the call handler, "I am sorry, but that is just the way it is." Madam Deputy Speaker, the way it is is not good enough. Peter is one of more than 3 million people whom the Government have failed to support in this public health crisis.

In my constituency, that inaction is hitting young people the hardest. It is young people who were disproportionately in the low-paid, insecure, zero-hours jobs that were the first to go when the crisis hit. Last year, the number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits in Sheffield increased by 158%. For 16 to 24-year-olds, that number increased by a staggering 300%. Many were made redundant because the Government told employers that the furlough scheme would stop, or change, on 31 October. The mixed messages of the past year have not been business friendly.

[Olivia Blake]

Indeed, in many cases, they have been business ending, with sectors such as small breweries seeing two breweries close a week and changes to the small brewers' relief looming.

Ministers were dragged kicking and screaming into extending the furlough scheme, but I wonder how many of those unemployed people would have kept their jobs had the Government communicated this decision sooner. Now, like Groundhog Day, we are going through the same process again. The Chancellor was too slow to act before and we ended up with record redundancies. With 4.6 million people still furloughed, he is in danger of doing it all over again. Rather than wait a month and put those jobs at risk, workers need guarantees next week that they will continue to receive support.

Time and again, the Government have refused to learn the lessons of the past year. The Chancellor must close the gaps in support systems and provide the clarity that workers and business owners alike urgently need to plan ahead. The mistakes of the previous year need to be fixed so that no one is left behind. Our recovery depends on it.

5.37 pm

**Ben Everitt** (Milton Keynes North) (Con): When the Labour party talks about business, we could be forgiven for thinking that every company is some kind of evil, global mega-corporation and that every employer is a cross between Gordon Gekko and that bloke with the top hat from the Monopoly board. Perhaps every employee is some sort of downtrodden Dickensian character bound into servitude by wicked capitalists. The reality, however, is very different. Our small and medium-sized enterprises are the backbone of our economy—99.9% of the 6 million businesses in the UK, and they account for three fifths of all the employment and more than half the turnover in the UK private sector. Total employment is 16.8 million, while total turnover is estimated at £2.3 trillion.

We on the Conservative Benches get that business means jobs, that jobs mean security, livelihoods, the certainty of a wage and being able to provide for our family. That is why our £280 billion financial support package is one of the most generous and effective in the world. That is why our furlough scheme has protected almost 10 million jobs, and that is why our business support schemes have delivered almost 1.6 million loans worth more than £70 billion.

I know that this support is welcomed by the 8,700 businesses in Milton Keynes North and I know how frustrating it is when businesses find it hard to access this support that the Government have allocated for them. That is why it is so important that councils release the additional restrictions grant to support local businesses in these tough times. I am ambitious for Milton Keynes; indeed, I am ambitious for Britain. Towns and cities across our four nations should be grasping the opportunities presented by the free trade deals that this Government are securing. Projects such as global MK, proposed by Conservative councillors in Milton Keynes, can drive inward investment into exciting new industries and help our local economic recovery to support those jobs. Global MK will be a two-year inward investment programme aimed at bringing international businesses to Milton Keynes, as the UK begins our post-Brexit journey.

With trade deals being struck around the world, Milton Keynes is uniquely positioned to attract inward investment in areas such as logistics, FinTech, finance, artificial intelligence, electric vehicles, digital services and sport.

This Conservative Government are throwing the kitchen sink at supporting our businesses during the pandemic, but we should not stop at keeping the show on the road; we need to take the show on a world tour. Global MK can be the centre of global Britain.

5.40 pm

**Florence Eshalomi** (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: Many businesses in Vauxhall will be feeling cautiously optimistic after hearing yesterday's plan for reopening the economy. Here in Vauxhall, our economy is dependent on the hospitality, tourism and entertainment sectors, and is supported by many small, independent businesses that provide auxiliary services to residents and the millions of visitors we normally welcome every year. From this afternoon's contributions, we have heard that this pandemic has created winners and losers. Vauxhall has been hit particularly hard because of the nature of our economy and the supporting workforce. The gradual lifting of restrictions will not see an immediate return to business as usual. It will take time for tourists to come back along the south bank, to Brixton, to Stockwell and to Oval, and for local people to feel 100% comfortable about socialising in public again. But Vauxhall's businesses do not have time. They are struggling to stay afloat after a year of stop-start lockdowns and gaps in Government support.

As we look ahead to next week's Budget, I urge the Chancellor not to withdraw support too quickly and not to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to recovery. It makes no economic sense for businesses to be supported all the way through lockdown only to have that support withdrawn once restrictions are lifted. I call on the Chancellor to make sure that this support is sector-specific and tailored to meet the needs of each and every one of our businesses to ensure that we have a fair and resilient national economic lockdown.

5.42 pm

**Suzanne Webb** (Stourbridge) (Con) [V]: For almost a year now, this Government have been providing an unprecedented level of support to the individuals and businesses of our country. I want to highlight some of the ways in which businesses in Stourbridge have benefited from the measures put in place by this Government, and some of our share of the £280 billion package of support for people and businesses.

I turn first to the business loans scheme. Over 1,500 loans were offered to Stourbridge businesses to a total value of over £60 million. We received help for self-employed people to the value of almost £25 million. For our hospitality industry, there was the eat out to help out scheme; 127,000 meals were served in Stourbridge's excellent pubs and restaurants. For Stourbridge workers, we have the furlough scheme—one of the most generous in the world. Of course, yesterday my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister outlined our way out, with a cautious and prudent plan culminating in a return to normal by the end of June. No other similar country has a route as detailed and as clear as was outlined this week. At the start of the pandemic, we made a promise to support businesses and workers to protect them from the very worst.

We have delivered on that promise with an effective and generous financial support package that has undoubtedly been a lifeline to many.

We should not forget that, despite the gloom of this pandemic, businesses are still growing, hiring and expanding. I have Pegasus Grab Hire, a multimillion-pound business, adding 30 new jobs to the 180 people already employed at the company; the Imperial Works estate has been earmarked for renovation and refurbishment, with investors putting in more than £200,000; and Andyfreight, a logistics company after my own heart, has just completed a £1.5 million expansion project, having started 35 years ago from just a single van.

If all that and more can happen during the worst crisis in living memory, think of the opportunities that will come from all the energy that is waiting to be unleashed when the UK reopens over the next few months. Now is the time to begin our journey back to growth and to a recovery that must be jobs-led. Coupled with the Prime Minister's road map, we really can build back better. The economic foundations that this Government have put in mean that we can get on with the job of promoting global Britain as a beacon of prosperity and optimism.

The Government have been bold and visionary and I think will be transformational—a Government who make decisions in the national interest, with no rhetoric, only sound and prudent financial management, as they put people and jobs at the heart of policy making. Ministers are of course more than welcome to come and visit my local success stories.

5.45 pm

**Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): Diolch, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this important debate, in which we have heard a surprising amount of consensus from both sides—in between a few rhetorical flourishes.

Plaid Cymru would welcome the extension of the 5% reduced rate of VAT, but believes that the measure should be extended for the entirety of the forthcoming financial year. Members will of course be familiar with the dreaded three-winters scenario that many in the hospitality sector have suffered. Although the vaccination programme's progress to date is very promising, we remain in its early stages. At this point, it is difficult to predict how things will develop in the coming months, so extending the VAT reduction for the entire financial year would offer welcome certainty, as well as boosting the sector and helping businesses to get back to their feet. That is particularly pertinent in the economically marginalised areas that are less likely to benefit from large-scale public projects. In Ceredigion, for instance, the hospitality sector employs approximately 4,500 workers, or 16% of the local workforce. Just as important, of course, are our high streets, which deserve and should get our support, so I hope the Chancellor will consider extending the business rates relief package when he unveils the Budget next week.

There is also an urgent need for the Government to look again at the framework for the repayment of Government-guaranteed debt. UK Hospitality has estimated that the sector lost around £72 billion in sales in 2020 and faces, frankly, a debt mountain, including £4.2 billion in state-backed loans. It is therefore important that businesses that took out bounce back loans and CBILS

are required to pay only when they are in a position to do so—in other words, when they have bounced back from the pandemic. Affording such a level of flexibility, and thus preventing avoidable business failures, would help to protect jobs, the taxpayer's investment in the recovery and the integrity of our financial system. I hope the Chancellor will recognise that in his Budget.

Finally, I urge the Government to maintain the furlough scheme, to give employees and employers security as our economy adjusts. The scheme should be phased out only once both the pandemic and the prevailing economic conditions have stabilised; to do otherwise would risk undermining its very success in having protected jobs and risk stifling any nascent economic recovery. I also add my voice to those calling for an extension of the self-employed income support scheme, including the expansion of the eligibility criteria called for in the motion, and for an equivalent director support scheme so as to offer support to those who have thus far not received a penny.

Having done so much to protect the economy and the workforce, we must not withdraw support prematurely, as to do so would risk throwing away vast amounts of taxpayers' money and potentially our economic recovery.

5.48 pm

**James Daly** (Bury North) (Con) [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for his work so far in addressing the pandemic's economic impact on business and jobs throughout the country. The Government have provided a financial support package of approximately £280 billion at present, making it one of the most generous and effective in the world. It includes the furlough scheme, which has protected almost 10 million jobs.

My local authority in Bury has been provided with £107 million in extra funding for this financial year to cover covid-related costs and support local business. Bury Metropolitan Borough Council will receive a further £5.3 million in additional funding for the first three months of the new financial year. The Government have provided nearly £50 million in direct grant funding to support businesses, retail outlets, the self-employed and sole traders in the last 12 months, to be distributed locally by my council. On top of that, businesses that are being required to close under the current restrictions continue to receive monthly payments through the local restrictions grant.

With the Prime Minister's announcement yesterday of the road map out of lockdown, I have been contacted by a number of businesses across my constituency towns of Bury, Ramsbottom and Tottington that will be among the last to open. Even with the generous support package that I have outlined, many businesses need further financial help to survive the next months and benefit from the positive trading conditions that I am sure will result when lockdown ends. Under step two of the road map, hospitality will be able to operate indoor services in 83 days' time at the earliest. Therefore, this sector, which has been so badly impacted by the pandemic, needs help now. In my constituency of Bury North, there are a number of businesses, such as the absolutely fantastic Leckenby's tearoom, that simply do not have outside space. They must not be left to struggle while other business that are fortunate enough to have outdoor seating are able to operate. I hope that will be addressed now that the road map has been announced.

[James Daly]

Further to that, I turn to the distribution of already assigned support. I came together with colleagues from across the House to welcome the support provided through the additional restrictions grants, which have been made available for distribution at the discretion of local councils. The fund has already helped many businesses that might not otherwise have been eligible for grants. Again, I welcome that. However, while some councils had great success with the distribution of these funds, others have not. In my constituency, many businesses are struggling to access the funding, and Bury Council still holds an estimated £5 million from the ARG fund. The road map is conditional on the tests set out by the Prime Minister, but we must support those businesses both nationally and locally to ensure that they benefit when lockdown comes to an end.

5.52 pm

**Alex Davies-Jones** (Pontypridd) (Lab) [V]: I am grateful to be able to speak in today's debate on behalf of the many people in Pontypridd who are still struggling as a result of the pandemic. They and people and businesses across the country desperately need clarity on what support will be available to them in the weeks and months ahead.

I am hugely proud of the way that people across Pontypridd and Rhondda Cynon Taf have come together this past year. They have donated to the Pontypridd and Taff-Ely food banks, they have volunteered their time, and they have helped elderly friends and neighbours to get their shopping and prescriptions safely. Unfortunately, while those in my community in Pontypridd have supported each other through the pandemic, I cannot say the same for this Tory Government. Their insistence on a one-size-fits-all approach to economic support has had a devastating impact on the aviation and coach industries in my area. Fantastic local businesses such as Edwards Coaches and Ferris Coach Holidays face ruin without targeted financial support. People have lost their jobs and livelihoods after redundancies at GE Aviation and British Airways, and there are still far too many people who have been excluded from support by the Government altogether through absolutely no fault of their own.

The ExcludedUK campaign has been doing a fantastic job drawing attention to the 3 million-plus people left behind by the Government. What will it take for the Government to act? I have heard from so many people in my constituency who have been excluded and forgotten by this UK Government. They do not want arms around them; they need financial help and they need it now.

Freelance musicians have also been hit particularly hard by the pandemic, with many having been out of work for almost a year now. The fantastic Musicians Union, of which I am a proud member, has found that some 65% of musicians are currently facing financial hardship. They are soon to be hit again by unnecessary and extremely costly admin fees that make travelling to EU states to tour or perform virtually impossible. It is essential that the Government act to support musicians through the pandemic and beyond, so that fantastic community groups such as the award-winning Cory Band from RCT can recover properly.

Pregnant women and new mothers have also faced unprecedented challenges during this crisis and have been left high and dry by the Government. My hon.

Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) has been doing fantastic work with the Pregnant Then Screwed campaign, and she is right to say that it is mams who are bearing the brunt of the unemployment. Mams are much more likely to have been furloughed and are therefore much more likely to face redundancy. The Government urgently need to do more to halt the unequal impact of their policies and to avoid backsliding on the progress that women have made in the workplace. They urgently need to provide greater clarity to my constituents and theirs. My constituents have come together to support each other during the pandemic, and they deserve a Government who will do the same.

5.54 pm

**Christian Wakeford** (Bury South) (Con): This is a debate of two halves: we have the doom, gloom and naysaying from those on the Opposition Benches, and on the Government Benches we have optimism. We have a route map out of these restrictions. We have light at the end of the tunnel, and now we know how long that tunnel is. We have the additional restrictions grants, business and hospitality support grants, self-employed support schemes, business rates relief and discretionary funding. We should be immensely proud of all those measures. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Daly) said, roughly £280 billion has been invested to support businesses and individuals, and we should rightly be proud of that.

There are the excluded, and as I said earlier to the Minister, the discretionary funding that has been brought forward is a prime example of how to tackle that. I say again to the Opposition, to the Mayor of Greater Manchester and to my local council that if they are serious about tackling these cohorts, they should speak to their councils and tell them to open up that discretionary funding for these businesses. [Interruption.] The discretionary funding is available for all. We are hearing, "We want action now," but it is not right to take these decisions in isolation; we should be taking them in a wider context, as part of the Budget. It will give the Opposition their attack ads today and the ability to create a story that is almost non-existent, but we will see a truly all-encompassing approach next week in the Budget, and that is the right thing to do. It will give the Opposition another week to see which Conservative policies they like and want to try to adopt as their own for another week.

As we come out of these restrictions, we have the ability to build back better, build back fairer and build back greener. The "Skills for Jobs" White Paper has been published, and we should be proud of it. It talks about institutes of technology, which will make sure that our skills force of the future is trained for the jobs that are coming. Businesses—and in particular those in the hospitality supply chain, weddings and events—not only need a date for when they can reopen, but they need to know whether they will be opening with covid-secure measures or no restrictions whatsoever. They need to know that early, so that they can plan for all eventualities. While most businesses in the travel industry will be able to reopen and hopefully reopen fully, the sector will be heavily dependent on global restrictions, so we may need to look at further assistance for it. I hope the Minister will be able to address that.

5.57 pm

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP) [V]: We are effectively a year on, and solutions for the 3 million excluded still have not been found, so we know that this is a Government choice. Excuses about quick implementation, complexities and the risk of fraud no longer stand up to scrutiny as an excuse for doing nothing.

Let us look at the limited company director issue. First, it is absurd to still be going on about being unable to distinguish between earned income and unearned income from dividends. It is quite clear that the majority of these sole traders are not exactly living it large from a portfolio of other investments, and HMRC has access to their tax returns. There is a solution available: the directors income support scheme, which is supported by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, ForgottenLtd and the Federation of Small Businesses. This award would be based on the trading profits of a company. Maximum thresholds could be applied, and the Government could even look at rates being based on the living wage, but there seems to be a dogged determination that nothing is possible.

Let us also look at the lack of targeted sectoral support that has been announced. The Scottish Government and other devolved Administrations have responded much better in this regard. In Scotland, for example, there has been food wholesaler funding, given that these major suppliers were excluded from hospitality sector support. The UK Government need to do likewise, given the extended lockdown we are still in. They also need to copy the bus, coach, taxi and private hire funding packages, among other things. Now is the time for the UK Government to look forward by investing in battery and hydrogen-powered buses. It is an ideal time to support manufacturers in a way that will grow businesses as well as provide short-term support.

Where is the support for the wedding industry and the travel industry? The latter is even more crucial, given the restrictions that will be in place for a long period. The Scottish Government have announced a further rates relief extension for airports and a travel agent support scheme. Surely the UK Government could do likewise, which would create further Barnett consequentials.

We know that freelancers in the creative industry have been completely hung out to dry. To make matters worse, Brexit and the lack of visa-free travel has taken away further work opportunities, which is completely crazy.

If we look at the hospitality and leisure industry, we see that the Scottish Government have just committed to rates relief for the next year, which goes beyond Labour's call for six months. In this period, we should also look at extending the temporary VAT level of 5% for the full year, considering the latest road maps we have, where some businesses could be looking effectively at a five-winter scenario. This ties in with the need to start looking at converting these loans to equity or grants. When the loan schemes were first devised, it was not envisioned that we would still be under restrictions a full year later, so clearly, the terms of these loans need to be reassessed.

Going forward, there is going to be a massive debate about what an independent Scotland could do to recover better, and I look forward to that as well.

6 pm

**Peter Gibson** (Darlington) (Con) [V]: We have another Opposition day debate that presents a fantastic opportunity to highlight all that has been done by this Government. There has been incredible support for people and businesses in Darlington. The coronavirus job retention scheme has supported over 12,300 people. The self-employment income scheme has been accessed by over 3,200 people. Put together, that is more than 15,000 families in my constituency who have continued to put a roof over their heads and feed their families from these two schemes alone.

There are business owners, too, who have accessed grants, loans, VAT reductions and specialised grants. Through Darlington Borough Council, grants have been distributed to businesses quickly, from our large hospitality businesses in our town centre to one-man bands operating from home. Indeed, our Tees Valley Mayor, Ben Houchen, has provided much support to our businesses, too. There are many who have, sadly, lost their jobs, and the robustness of the universal credit system has coped magnificently with the increased demand upon it. So whether someone is employed, unemployed or an employer, there has been support throughout this unprecedented global pandemic.

This Conservative Government have delivered over £280 billion of financial support, protecting millions of jobs and businesses, so that, as we embark on the road to recovery, these businesses can bounce back and these employees can return to work, and if they have, sadly, lost their jobs, they can access training and support to reskill. If they are a young person entering the world of work, there is support in the form of the kickstart scheme and apprenticeships. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor said that he could not "save every job", but he has done a pretty fine job of reaching every corner of our economy and, indeed, responding with changes as the pandemic has unfolded.

Earlier today, I outlined the fantastic investment that Darlington has had with our train station, our towns funding and, we hope, in the near future, with a freeport and Treasury jobs relocated to the Tees Valley, but I really must place on record my sincere thanks to Government for the millions of pounds in support for Darlington's residents—the shopkeepers, the business owners, the furloughed staff and the council as it has responded at a local level to our specific needs, tailoring the discretionary grants to reach even more in our community.

As we unlock our economy and build back better, following the road map to recovery, I am heartened that it was this Conservative Government at the helm, supporting those in need and setting our course on the vaccination programme, and not the gloom-mongering party opposite.

6.3 pm

**Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: It is a privilege to speak in this debate. Today, I will focus much of my contribution on those who have fallen through the gaps in support—commonly known as the excluded.

Nearly a year into the pandemic, there are still 3 million people missing out on meaningful financial support. They are people who have lost homes and possessions and have had to close businesses or saddle themselves with a frightening amount of debt just to keep going during the pandemic, an event not of their making.

[Tracy Brabin]

This has inevitably led to an increase in destitution in our country. It will not have escaped the Minister's attention that a report by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research found that, by the end of 2020, there were 220,000 more households living in destitution than at the start of the year. Destitution is defined as a two-adult household living on less than £100 a week and a single-adult household living on less than £70 a week, after housing costs. That worrying trend will continue, unless we direct urgent and significant support to the excluded.

There is a regional aspect, too. The Office for National Statistics has revealed that redundancies in Yorkshire have reached a five-year high, with 18,000 people being made redundant in the last three months of 2020—a 63% increase on the same time in the previous year. The all-party parliamentary group Gaps in Support has tried to help. We have offered schemes to the Treasury to bring the newly self-employed into eligibility for SEISS, a directors income support scheme, a targeted income support scheme and a one-off, taxable grant. They are not exclusive demands and we are certainly open to any fixes that the Treasury would like to propose.

I would like to focus on one group of people who have significantly missed out—pregnant women and new mothers. Women who were on maternity allowance throughout the period 20 March to 30 October will not have submitted a PAYE real-time information submission, which is required by the scheme, meaning they could miss out on furlough. That really needs to be rectified. The Government should also provide a system to backdate furlough payments to new mothers who have missed out due to insufficient government guidance.

We must also examine the proposals supported by the TUC for a temporary right to shared furlough, which would bring the commendable principles of shared parental leave into the furlough scheme, allowing families to make decisions based on what works for them and their children, because it is frankly absurd that self-employed mothers have no ability to discount their maternity leave from SEISS payments. Tens of thousands of women have been discriminated against and are out of pocket, against a background where women's wages have already dropped 12%, double that of men; 48% of women have seen their disposable income fall; and women in the 25 to 34 age bracket are twice as likely to be made redundant.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. The hon. Lady has significantly overrun her time. I am sorry I cannot allow her to make her final point.

6.7 pm

**Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con) [V]:** Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Treasury has taken unprecedented action. The support provided by Her Majesty's Government to aid businesses and individuals affected by the coronavirus pandemic has been nothing short of extraordinary. More than 10 million workers have been supported through furlough schemes, ensuring that bills and expenses can be paid. Thus far, 1.6 million businesses have received loans totalling more than £70 billion. For most people and businesses, money was received in a timely manner and proved to be vital in preventing businesses from going under, protecting employees and employers.

For those on low incomes, additional support mechanisms have also been implemented, with a £500 test and trace support payment for those who cannot work from home and have been asked to self-isolate. Some businesses have repaid the support, totalling £1.8 billion, provided to them by the Government through a business rates holiday, including Tesco, Sainsbury, Asda, Aldi and Morrisons.

These support measures have been critical in shielding our economy during lockdown. This is the essence of conservatism—rather than seek to dominate and direct businesses, we seek to protect and support them. These measures are temporary and do not reflect a permanent transition towards increased Government intervention. The Prime Minister's statement yesterday outlined the road map out of lockdown and a return to normality. It does not, however, spell the immediate end of support measures that businesses still need.

This Conservative Government have outlined further measures that will aid in rebuilding Britain and encouraging economic growth, such as the £5 billion of capital investment projects, which include the rebuilding of schools and maintenance of hospitals. Opposition Members may not be able to control their knee-jerk reaction to attack the Government for their handling of the pandemic, but without the schemes implemented by the Chancellor, businesses, individuals and local government would not have received the support they so desperately needed when, or in the quantity, required. I look forward to the Chancellor's Budget statement next week and will carefully listen to his comments on the support measures available to businesses, including what additional provisions will be implemented to support and encourage the United Kingdom's recovery.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for sticking precisely to the three-minute time limit and not being distracted by the fact that the clock was not working. That is quite the opposite of what we have seen from so many colleagues who pretend the clock is not there. I am sure that will not happen when we go to Sheffield—to Paul Blomfield.

6.10 pm

**Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab) [V]:** I am sure it will not, Madam Deputy Speaker, and can I thank you for giving me this opportunity?

Hospitality and particularly the night-time economy provide thousands of jobs in my constituency: restaurants, bars, pubs, clubs, live music venues—brave businesses making a vibrant city, but hit hardest over the last year. Too many who work within them have fallen through the gaps in the support schemes: new businesses ineligible for it because of administrative deadlines, self-employed who have missed out and workers who had moved employer at the wrong time. So it is no surprise that, according to figures announced this morning, the number of claimants in my constituency has doubled over the last year.

Next week's Budget must address these issues and provide the flexible help the hospitality sector needs as we navigate the road map out of restrictions and ensure that businesses do not fall at the first hurdle. Support is essential not only for businesses that will remain closed, but for those that will initially only be able to open partially, with outside-only service. Crucially, it must extend to

their supply chains. Continuing VAT and business rates relief will help, and so will a smart furlough scheme that does not abandon those who can only open in a limited way. Dropping support too quickly or too crudely will fail jobs and businesses.

Another group who are key to my local economy are students. They have been hard hit by the pandemic, and not just in terms of education. With maintenance loans not even covering rents for many, part-time work provides vital income to sustain many students at university. Jobs they depend on in hospitality and retail have disappeared in the pandemic. Income lost through the absence of those jobs has had a huge impact. As students, they have not been eligible for the support that is available to others, although they have still been required to pay rent for accommodation that they have not been allowed to use. That is why the all-party parliamentary group on students, which I chair, has asked for substantial additional hardship support from Government, as well as support for universities to address lost learning—practical recommendations on which the Government have fallen short.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister confirmed that many students will not be allowed back to campus until after Easter, and the jobs on which they rely are not returning any time soon either. This morning, the Minister for Universities wrote an open letter to students, highlighting the £70 million of hardship support that has been provided. It is worth just £36 per student in England: equivalent to the wages of a short bar shift—barely a sticking plaster—and much less than the £80 in Scotland, £300 in Wales and £500 in Northern Ireland. This generation of students will be paying for the pandemic longer than the rest of us, and they deserve our support now.

6.13 pm

**Aaron Bell** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con) [V]: I draw the House's attention to my business interests in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), who spoke about hospitality, which I will come to later as well.

First, I would like to speak about the road map, which was published yesterday and announced by the Prime Minister to the nation. Like the British Chambers of Commerce, like the CBI, like the Institute of Directors, like the Federation of Small Businesses, I absolutely welcome this road map. I welcome the hope and the clarity it provides for businesses and the people of this country as we get back towards normality. The single best thing Government can do for businesses and for their employees is to enable them to reopen. Businesses need customers, they need visitors, they need audiences, they need orders and they need turnover, and the road map offers us a route for that.

The road map, of course, is only possible because of our brilliant scientists, because of our pharmaceutical businesses—the party opposite would have broken them up had it won the last election—and because of the foresight of the vaccine taskforce. I do hope Labour will withdraw its totally unwarranted criticism of Kate Bingham, who last year did a marvellous job, for which we should all be grateful. The portfolio she got us has been rolled out splendidly, thanks to the hard work throughout the NHS and to the leadership from the Department of Health and Social Care, the Minister for Covid Vaccine Deployment and his team. Because of our foresight,

because of our scientists and because of the success of the roll-out, British businesses are now better placed than those in our closest international competitors, so we have a lot to be hopeful about. The road map is the right strategy, guided as it is by science, but I wonder whether the steps are the right distance apart. The lesson of last year is that scheduling the path of the virus three months into the future is a fool's errand. So if on 5 April, at the first review of step 1, the science thinks that things are going better than expected—we did have great data about the vaccine programme and its effectiveness this week—I hope we will be able to look again at the later dates, for the sake of our businesses.

As we build back better from the pandemic and help people back into jobs, I look forward to the Budget next week, when I am sure my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will build on the schemes already announced: the £2 billion already announced for kickstart, helping 200,000 young people get into work; the £2.9 billion for the UK-wide restart programme for universal credit recipients out of work for 12 months or more; and an expansion of apprenticeships that is music to the ears not only of young people in Newcastle-under-Lyme, but of our training providers, such as the excellent Newcastle College and PM Training.

Speaking specifically about Newcastle-under-Lyme, I was glad to hear the Minister talk a lot about hospitality in his opening remarks, because our hospitality and live entertainment businesses are a key part of our economy in the town centre, especially given the systemic weakness we have in the retail sector, which covid has exacerbated. I have spoken up many times in this House and in Westminster Hall for these businesses in Newcastle-under-Lyme. The grants, loans, rates holidays and tax deferrals we have offered them so far have been extremely welcome, but we need to do more just for these last few months. I know that the Chancellor will hear what I am saying today, and what colleagues have said, and will help these businesses survive for these last few months, as we all begin to emerge from this coronavirus nightmare and get our lives back to normal.

6.16 pm

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): While all nations have grappled with how to respond to the pandemic, our Government's slowness to react has had a devastating impact on businesses and left many on the brink of financial ruin. The Government's financial support for businesses has been patchy at best, and non-existent for freelancers and some limited companies. In Enfield, Southgate, we are lucky to have many excellent family-run businesses, such as Perry's The Wedding Company in Winchmore Hill, which I know was pleased to hear the road map out of lockdown and what it means for the wedding industry.

Just over a week ago, I started a survey of local small businesses in Enfield, Southgate. I asked them what their experience of the Government's support was and what they felt their prospects were for the future if they did not receive urgent help. A hair salon owner said,

"It's all about surviving month by month from now on".

A local popular family restaurant owner said:

"We have had to go into our savings as we are still paying rent and utilities etc even though the business is closed; in our 43 years there we have never experienced anything like this. Hopefully we can save the business."

[*Bambos Charalambous*]

A local well-loved family pub will most likely have to close as a result of the lack of Government support. A local café owner said,

“We have had no help to keep us afloat... It’s been awful. We will need rents paid and business rates paid to help us for the next year.”

A local start-up business sole trader said,

“I have had no company income for 7 of the previous 11 months. Business is still solvent, but all reserves built up used”.

Those are comments from real businesses that are all struggling and in urgent need of help.

The Government’s announcements on lockdown measures have always failed to take into account the impact on small businesses, and any financial support has lagged behind. It is as though it has been an afterthought, and yesterday’s announcement of the road map out of lockdown was no exception. As we wait for the Chancellor to make his announcement about the financial support in next week’s Budget, I can tell him what local small businesses are thinking. Although they welcome the Government’s recently announced options on how to pay back the business loans, the reality of struggling for years is devastating for them. Overwhelmingly, they told me that they need to take the option of paying back their loan over 10 years. They are also calling on the Government to extend the business rates holiday, to ensure their survival, and there are other measures that could be taken, including the extension of the furlough scheme and the availability of grants until businesses are able to open, as per the milestones stated in the road map out of lockdown. Small businesses have taken a huge knock over the past 12 months due to the Government’s slow reaction to the pandemic. The Government have been found wanting in their support for small businesses and they will not be forgiven if they fail again to give the support for small businesses in next week’s Budget.

6.19 pm

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD) [V]: There is surely no more important debate at the moment than how we support businesses and individuals through the pandemic. Just last week, it was confirmed that the UK economy has suffered its worst slump in any year since we began recording gross domestic product after the second world war. This morning, we learned that the unemployment rate is 5.1% and that in my constituency of Edinburgh West, a relatively affluent area of Scotland, it is 4%, having increased by more than a third since this time last year. We have all the evidence we need that businesses and individuals need support.

For most people, businesses are about the individuals. The troubles we are going through will come as no surprise to thousands of shops, households, small businesses, retailers at airports, taxi drivers, cafés, pubs and restaurants—they are all suffering and they need our support. That is why we are all watching very carefully for what the Chancellor says next week. We are hoping—and trying to persuade him—that there will be a further extension of furlough. The summer is not enough; it needs to go at least until the end of the year. We need to give businesses time to recover and we need to give people certainty. We need to give them reassurance that the safety net will not disappear right away. The vaccine

will need time to be effective and we will need time to recover. The Chancellor should bear that in mind next week.

I think we have all felt the impact through our constituents and the daily calls we receive. We know that there is nothing more important than supporting businesses and individuals through the recovery. That should be the first thing we think about every day: putting the recovery first. Sadly in Scotland, we have a devolved Administration who are not doing that. They are focusing on an independence debate that many of us feel is inappropriate at this time. We need the strength of the UK economy and we need the ability to work together. For example, we need the strength that comes from our tourism industry: 80% of tourists in Scotland come from the rest of the United Kingdom.

Businesses all need our support, they need certainty and they need the strength of the United Kingdom. That is what I hope the Chancellor and the Government will provide next week. I also hope that they will think about relief from business rates and VAT for small businesses that are losing money and going out of business through no fault of their own, because they are following the rules. We need to put their recovery and our recovery first.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** We were going to go to Stoke-on-Trent, but the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) has to be dressed as if he were here in the Chamber. We will try to come back to Mr Gullis in due course, but we will go now to Chesterfield and Toby Perkins.

6.23 pm

**Mr Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab) [V]: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will be pleased to see that I have all my clothes on.

This is an important debate as we head towards the Budget. As somebody who was formerly self-employed, I think it is incredibly important to recognise not only the importance of the self-employment scheme, but all the people who have been excluded from it. We need to recognise that people do not go into self-employment expecting to rely on the Government for help; they do it because they are willing to focus on their own abilities and to bring about the best outcomes for themselves. When self-employed people are left having to rely on Government, it comes very unnaturally to them.

We should remember that the majority of self-employed people were asked by the Government back in March to stay at home and not to go to work. They were told that there would be a self-employment scheme to support them. It has become transparently clear that so many of them have been missed out, while, simultaneously, other people who have continued to work have still been able to claim via the scheme. Just this week, I spoke to a constituent who has been excluded because, over the course of the three years, he has had periods when he has been employed; and he took a pension when he first became self-employed, to get him through. As a result he is unable to demonstrate, according to the Chancellor’s very arbitrary 50% of income rules, that he is self-employed. He has had almost 11 months during the vast majority of which he has been unable to work and unable to be supported by the scheme. At the same time, he has been

working on building sites for people who have worked all the way through—have hardly missed a day—and have said, “This is wonderful: the Government are giving me money, even though I am carrying on.” We have schemes that have not worked as they should.

Directors of small businesses who have paid themselves through dividends have been excluded, and I am afraid that throughout the life of the scheme, too many people have been missed out. That was understandable back in March, as the scheme was being put together in a rush, but there really has been enough time to sort this out now, and the Government should get to getting it sorted out.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** We are now going back to Stoke-on-Trent, where I observe that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) is now properly dressed. Lest anyone should be confused, when people are participating virtually they are appearing in this Chamber, the Chamber of the House of Commons, and therefore it is absolutely imperative that everybody taking part in these debates should be dressed in the way that they would be in the House of Commons.

6.26 pm

**Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): There you are, Madam Deputy Speaker: the jacket is now on. Apologies.

I thank the Labour party for giving me the opportunity to outline the tens of millions that have been poured into Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke since the start of the global health pandemic: 81 coronavirus business interruption loan schemes, worth £15.2 million; 1,408 bounce back loans, worth £41 million; 5,000 people on the furlough scheme; and £23 million given out over tranches 1 to 3 of the self-employment income support scheme. In total, that has seen the Government give out just over £79 million to businesses and individuals in my constituency of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke, excluding the cost of furlough.

There was also the eat out to help out scheme, something which time and again some Labour Members, either in the Chamber or the media, moan and groan about, showing how out of touch the Labour party is with us Stokies. Locally, 23 local restaurants and cafés in Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke, such as the Teapot At Milton, took part in that, and in total we saw 51,000 meals claimed for. But it is not just the front end of hospitality that benefited, but the supply chains that serve them, like the world-beating ceramic tableware that can be found only in the Potteries. It saw a big increase in sales—so good that they told me they want it back at Westminster’s hottest all-party parliamentary group, the APPG for ceramics.

Imagination and creativity will be needed to help our brewers too. Burslem-based Titanic Brewery on my patch, co-owned and founded by Keith and Dave Bott, shared an idea with me. If a temporary rate of duty for draught beer could be set at a significantly lower rate for the finest beer sold in containers over 20 litres in size, it would reduce the price gap between cheap supermarket booze and a beer drunk in the safe, supervised environment of a pub, like the Bull’s Head in Burslem. I will leave that brainstorming in the hands of Ministers, for them to come back to Keith, Dave and me. I look forward to hearing whether such a scheme is practicable.

When I speak to stallholders at Tunstall indoor market or individuals at the vaccine centres in Birchenwood in Kidsgrove, or Goldenhill medical centre, I find people are aware that the Government are doing their utmost, but they are also aware that these are unprecedented times, with no playbook to work from. The people of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke respect the honesty of the Chancellor when he said:

“Sadly, we...will not be able to save every job and every business”.—[*Official Report*, 11 January 2021; Vol. 687, c. 23.]

However, with the excellent progress of the excellent UK vaccine roll-out, light is now at the end of the tunnel for individuals and businesses, and support will continue to be in place as life returns to normal.

6.29 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP) [V]: Nearly a year into the restrictions necessitated by the pandemic, people are still falling through the cracks. After that length of time, they are no longer cracks: they are chasms that have been deliberately left open by the Government with millions trapped in them, like the women on maternity leave told by this Government that leave was in fact a holiday—a horrible piece of discrimination that could only have happened with our male Chancellor and male Prime Minister—or employees like the 80 staff of the Erskine Bridge hotel in my constituency who are relying on food banks and the kindness of their local community to make ends meet after they were all TUPE-ed but the HMRC report went through a day after the retrospective and arbitrary deadline for furlough.

Firing and rehiring has been almost endemic during this pandemic, which Minister after Minister has called unacceptable while refusing to act. That is unacceptable. Even in the middle of a pandemic, the Tory addiction to means testing and separating out the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor still carries on apace. Just as there are millions of people left with nothing or claiming universal credit, itself due to be slashed by over £1,000 next month, there are industries and businesses that appear to be favoured a lot. A lot of companies have made a lot of money from Government contracts in the past year. Those in the aviation sector are still waiting on the promises made by the Chancellor nearly a year ago when he spoke of a support package for airlines and airports. The reality is that we faced a potential collapse of many aviation businesses, with the loss of tens and perhaps hundreds of thousands of jobs, if that support was not forthcoming. At the very least, and for a start, it is time for the UK Government to follow the Scottish Government, again, and confirm 100% rates relief for aviation, in addition to all retail, hospitality and leisure businesses, for the next financial year. The level of indebtedness in the sector, particularly given the likely slow recovery to 2019 levels, is dangerous, and any further support simply cannot and must not be loans.

We will need that growth desperately if the first weeks of Brexit are anything to go by. Over recent weeks I have spoken to road hauliers and logistics businesses and their customers, some of whom need to fill in and process 35 separate documents to facilitate export to Europe when before they needed just one. Hauliers are seeing their vehicles returned to the UK empty and are now considering downsizing and letting drivers go.

[Gavin Newlands]

Scotland's high-value and high-quality food and drink industry is also suffering. James Withers of Scotland Food and Drink said:

"What I do know is we sell £1.2bn of Scottish food into the European Union every year and that has got an awful lot more difficult, an awful lot more expensive and an awful lot slower."

Other countries across Europe have managed to support their workers without the red tape and testing beloved of this Government. It is time that we followed their lead as we move out of this pandemic.

6.32 pm

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab) [V]: In the past few days, Governments across the UK have outlined the first tentative steps out of lockdown and towards the reopening of our economy, but this will clearly not happen overnight, so the Government must avoid cliff edges and must also help businesses and individuals to get back on their feet. That is why Labour's British recovery bond proposal is so crucial.

The hospitality sector has been particularly hard hit by this crisis. Pubs and restaurants in my Aberavon constituency tell me that the uncertainty over future economic support packages is making a difficult situation intolerable. They do not know whether they will have the money to pay bills and they cannot give their employees assurances over whether they will be furloughed because they are waiting for the UK Government to decide. The UK Government need to provide businesses and employees with clarity by extending and reforming the furlough scheme so that it lasts for as long as restrictions are in place and while demand is significantly reduced. Pubs and restaurants have not been able to take advantage of the reduced VAT rate, as for large parts of the year they have been shut, and when they have been able to operate, it has been at reduced capacity. Decisive action by the UK Government is therefore needed. Extending the temporary 5% reduced rate of VAT for the hospitality, tourism and culture sectors would allow businesses to plan for survival and invest in safeguarding jobs.

The UK Government also desperately need to address the gaps in support schemes. It is a travesty that after almost a year the Government continue to ignore the plight of so many who have been excluded from the support schemes and have not received support they desperately need. My Aberavon constituency is a hotbed of creative talent, following in the footsteps of Anthony Hopkins, Michael Sheen and Richard Burton. For many in the creative arts industry, it has been horrendous: their industry is closed down, their work has dried up, their income has fallen off a cliff and because of the nature of their employment, they have not qualified for any of the support schemes and their savings preclude them from universal credit.

Others outside the creative industries have also found themselves in difficult positions—for example, a driving instructor in my constituency, who was not eligible for any of the self-employment support schemes, received support through furlough, which only managed to cover his national insurance contributions.

The UK Government have been consistently slow in responding to the crisis and have failed to provide the long-term clarity about economic support that is required.

We need to do the right thing, plug the gaps in the schemes and support hard-working people in Aberavon and across the country.

6.35 pm

**Apsana Begum** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab) [V]: Before the pandemic, a decade of austerity left far too many trapped in low-paid, insecure work and consistently failed by the social security system. The failing economic system has been further exposed throughout the coronavirus pandemic, which produced a policy that led to 3 million people being left out of economic support. That is simply unacceptable.

We are at a critical juncture in the pandemic and the Government's stop-start approach has meant that many businesses are now being forced to make tough decisions about their future. In my constituency, Crisp Street market, Watney market and surrounding businesses are key to our local economy. Indeed, given the close proximity in which they operate, their sustainability is tied together. Despite that, market traders were slow to receive any support from the Government in the last financial year. To make matters worse, many small and independent businesses could not access grants and relief measures because of the premises criterion, whereby because they did not pay business relief directly, they were left out of support. It took months for the Government to begin to address that.

Conservative Members are quick to claim that every single business has had some form of support in the pandemic, but that is simply not true, and too many have spent 2020 in turmoil. Perhaps the Minister can today outline how markets, traders and small independent businesses will be supported towards long-term and sustainable economic recovery.

Economic measures are vital for businesses, but they are also vital to protect individuals. Under this Government, in the pandemic, unemployment is spiralling out of control. Just today, Office for National Statistics figures confirmed yet again that the economic impact of the pandemic continues to feed on inequality, with people living in more deprived areas experiencing mortality rates more than double those in less deprived areas. Unemployment is higher among ethnic minority communities: 13.8% among black people compared with 4.5% among their white counterparts; and 10.6% for ethnic minority women.

If the Government's economic support measures are sufficient, why are there such glaring disparities in pandemic unemployment? If the economic measures are so satisfactory, why does there need to be 18 food banks—18—in my borough, trying to keep households afloat with the bare necessities? The answer is simple. The Government's support measures are insufficient, unfair and inconsistent. At this critical juncture, the Government must do better.

6.38 pm

**Charlotte Nichols** (Warrington North) (Lab): The past year has been terrible for so many people and disastrous for innumerable business sectors, but as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on pubs, I want to speak for those iconic small businesses, whose livelihoods have been shuttered by the Government for months through no fault of their own. An industry of 900,000 jobs contributes £23.6 billion to the UK economy annually and its venues are the lifeblood of our communities.

Pubs in my constituency of Warrington North, including the Station House in Padgate and The Albion and The Hawthorne in Orford, have gone above and beyond to support our community throughout the pandemic, providing free school lunches, a food bank and an online community to keep regulars connected, but they have been left without support.

Many publicans were looking to the Prime Minister's announcement in the hope of refreshing news, but they remain mostly parched. Few industries have tried harder to comply with changing Government rules than pubs. Landlords spent thousands of pounds on adjustments to make their venues covid-secure, imposed unpopular and unscientific curfews, invested in tech like apps for ordering drinks, reconfigured their spaces to allow for social distancing, and even tried to unravel the esoteric substantial meal or scotch egg requirement. Yet not only did their revenues collapse, but they invested in perishable stock only to be shut in a trice because the Government had failed to limit transmission rates, spending the year doing the hokey cokey, bouncing in and out of rolling regional closures at little or no notice. So, compared to their existential crisis, last night's road map was small beer indeed.

Pubs will look forward to reopening outdoors in April and indoors in May, assuming they can survive that long. The Chancellor's grants of up to £9,000 have hardly made up for the shortfalls of the past year, and the whole pub industry will be looking for additional support in his Budget.

The British Beer and Pub Association estimates that 60% of pubs will not be able to open during step 2 of the road map and that many of those that can open will struggle to operate viably. That cannot be considered a proper reopening, and these pubs and landlords will still be hit hard by these requirements. Financial support will still be needed until all pubs can open fully, so Ministers should know that the Campaign for Real Ale is calling for an extension to the VAT cut and for it to apply to alcohol sales, the cancellation of business rates for another year, and furlough to be extended until every pub is properly open again, as well as a lower rate of duty on draught beer to encourage people back into pubs when they reopen.

With summer days ahead, the Government must not permit the Royal Oak to be felled and the Red Lion to be shot. These are the cornerstones of our communities, giving employment, communal spirit and mental health to so many people, and they must be supported through these dark days so that we can come together in our pubs to celebrate their end.

6.41 pm

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD) [V]: A number of Members have mentioned the gaps in support. For the record I was the first chairman of the all-party group on gaps in support and now I am co-chair, and I want to put a couple of facts on the record.

I have been absolutely delighted by the cross-party support this APPG has received, and we are in constructive discussions with the Treasury as I speak. In fact this evening we had a meeting with the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, and the whole point is that there is good

will and we are working together to try to identify solutions to the terrible situation many Members have pointed out this evening.

I have three quick points to make. It is very pleasing that the targeted income grant scheme is under consideration by the Treasury; I believe it would be easy to administer and fraud resistant, would offer long-term economic benefits for the country as a whole, and could support as many as 2.9 million UK taxpayers. We believe the Government should aim to allow pay-as-you-earn workers and freelancers to claim support based on their total income, including their trading and non-trading income. Finally, for those refused furlough by their employers, we strongly recommend that the Government pursue solutions and investigate employee rights, and this could include an appeals process.

Those are only three examples of the work we are doing, but it is important that the House understands that this is ongoing, and I am going to repeat myself by saying I am deeply grateful to Members from all parties who have been supporting these endeavours.

In the short time left I simply want to echo a point made very eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine). The hospitality and tourism industry is fundamental to the economic wellbeing of my far, far away, far north constituency and it is very important that the businesses are protected so that the seedcorn is ready to flourish and grow when the pandemic recedes and visitors can return. As my hon. Friend said, yes, we are one UK economy, and 80% of the rest of the UK comes to my constituency to enjoy the beauty of Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross. They will be very welcome when they come, and they will be very welcome to come within one United Kingdom.

6.44 pm

**Abena Oppong-Asare** (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): We have heard today from my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson) and from Members up and down the country about the very real difficulties that so many businesses are facing, the despair felt by so many of our constituents at the prospect of their job disappearing or their businesses failing, and the desperate need for the Government not to wait another few days, but to set out clearly now the package of support they have in mind for businesses and families in the months ahead.

I begin by thanking Members for speaking very passionately in this debate. Many shared heartfelt stories about the issues facing businesses and individuals during the covid pandemic. I am afraid I cannot mention by name all the Members who have participated in this debate, but it is very clear that many constituents have been excluded.

We heard from my neighbour, the right hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Sir David Evennett), about Pete Marshall the publican, who said that the Government must do more to prevent our treasured pubs from going under. That point was echoed eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols). We heard the sobering contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey), who relayed the fact that ExcludedUK has reported 13 suicides during this crisis.

[Abena Oppong-Asare]

I am sure I speak for all Members when I send our sincerest thoughts and prayers to all those families who have been impacted by such a tragic and life-changing loss.

We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin), who powerfully advocated for the health and beauty industry, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi), who celebrated local artisan producers, acknowledging that they would drive the economic recovery. My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) talked about how his survey of local businesses showed that lockdown measures failed to take account of their impact on small businesses.

What all these interventions have in common is the need for the Government to ensure what we on this side of the House have called for time and time again—for economic support to go hand-in-hand with the restrictions in place on public health grounds. We called for that as the pandemic began. We called for that month in, month out last year, and we call for it now, as we have a clear hope and expectation that the restrictions will soon be over.

The roll-out of the vaccine is good news for our country and good news for our economy. For much of the past 11 months, good news has been too elusive, and there now seems to be a way out and a way forward. For people in insecure jobs or whose employment has been severely affected by the pandemic or by the restrictions brought in to control it, the optimism brought by the vaccine is sadly tempered with concerns.

We have heard so many moving stories today about the concerns that firms have, that unions have and that families and individuals in every part of our country have. Those are concerns that my own constituents share, including Phoenix Tours, a family-run coach company that is concerned about paying its mounting rent arrears, business rates, wages, finance and insurance. Those concerns are shared by my constituent Anneke Scott, a world-renowned classical musician, whose self-employed musician colleagues trained tirelessly for years to master their trade and are now facing debt and depression.

This country is concerned about the debts that companies and individuals have built up and about paying them off over a sensible timeframe. They are concerned about meeting the full costs of business rates before turnover and profits are back to what they were before, and they are concerned about the level of trade they can expect if they have to hike up prices again before demand picks up. Individuals are concerned that their employer will not be able to keep them on without a furlough scheme that tides them through, even though the businesses will soon be running again. The self-employed are concerned that they still have not heard from the Government about the fourth self-employment income support scheme grant. People are concerned that those who work hard, play by the rules and have submitted a 2019-20 tax return still do not know whether that will make them eligible for support. There are concerns about the millions of excluded who fall through the gaps in the Government's support schemes—they are still forgotten, still not supported and still excluded.

Today we ask the Government to act responsibly and take the right decisions that will secure our economy and rebuild our future. Our country has seen the worst excess death rate and the worst economic crisis of any

major economy. That was not inevitable; nor is it inevitable that people should be worried about their jobs, their livelihoods and their futures. This Government should be taking decisions now with a relentless focus on jobs and growth, not putting them off for another week or longer. These are decisions that the Chancellor should have taken, should be taking and should be prepared to go on taking, and the failure to take them is itself a decision that the Chancellor should be here defending today. It is a pleasure to see the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), in his place today, but this crisis was made not on Victoria Street but on Great George Street, and it is extraordinary that the Chancellor is not here today.

In closing, I ask the Government again to remember that not every individual has savings, not every business has reserves and not every family has more than one earner. Not everyone can wait for the Chancellor to come to Parliament. It is past time for him and the Treasury to rise to this challenge and to set out a clear package of economic support for businesses and families, driven, as the Prime Minister might say, by data not dates, and to recognise that every day of delay causes more unaffordable hardship for people in all our constituencies. The Chancellor must do the right thing and act now.

6.51 pm

**The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Anne-Marie Trevelyan):** [Interruption.] My apologies for the cough, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would like to thank hon. and right hon. Members for raising so many important points here today. I should confess that this is the first debate I have ever had the pleasure of closing, and it has been wonderful to be able to sit and hear properly from all parts of the House—and indeed all parts of our virtual country—some of the really important messages that colleagues wanted to share. We have heard some really powerful and passionate speeches, and I am grateful to everyone who has been able to contribute today.

Let me address some of the important issues that have been raised by our colleagues. The business grant scheme has continued to provide support to businesses across England during the periods of national and local restrictions. I do not think that any of us underestimate the challenges, particularly for many of our small businesses, as a result of these changes, but they have been incredibly resilient and the Chancellor has continued to provide the support that was needed. The Government have introduced unprecedented packages of support to assist those businesses that have been mandated to close, as well as those that have been severely affected by the restrictions. Indeed, many colleagues have highlighted their own constituency business situations, from Darlington to Brecon and Radnorshire and from Stourbridge to Stoke-on-Trent, once my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) was correctly dressed.

The depth of support and continuing commitment from the £280 billion that the Treasury has found has been extraordinary. It is the largest package of emergency support in post-war history, of which the loan guarantee schemes are an important and successful part because they have protected, created and supported jobs. We are committed to protecting those jobs, and we have extended

the coronavirus job retention scheme until the end of April. The Chancellor will set out the next phase of the plan to tackle the virus and protect jobs at the Budget next week. It would be remiss of me not to say that it is well beyond my pay grade to even begin to guess what he might have prepared for us. That is a question that we would all like an answer to. It has been asked many times today, not unreasonably, but the Chancellor will be here next week, when he will give us a plethora of solutions, I am sure.

Retailers have a history of responding to change. They are continually innovating and adapting to market pressures. That is what they do. That is the art of the retailer, and much of that dynamism has had to play out under the pressures of the last year, but we absolutely recognise the challenging environment that this sector has been operating in. Retail will always be a vital part of our local communities, and I want it to be at the heart of our high streets where our constituents live, shop, use those services and spend their leisure time as we return to normal. Traditionally, the hospitality sector has been the first to recover from an economic downturn, helping to drive our economic recovery more generally. As a result, it is more important than ever that the hospitality sector is able to play a leading role in our post-covid recovery, not only economically but for the health and wellbeing of their customers, too. We all know and understand—indeed we have seen it for ourselves—that too many of our constituents are really struggling with the mental health pressures: the challenges of having to work from home, of having to teach their children at home, and of having to worry about the state of their finances. There are so many pressures, and, quite genuinely, the hospitality industry is part of the recovery not only of the sector itself but of all of us.

We will continue to work very closely with the sector. I would like to put it on record, and I know that the sector and colleagues will support me, that the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) has been incredibly committed throughout this period, working with the sector and really trying to support it, and providing a constant voice and listening ear to make sure that he can do the best he can for it. I know that all those hospitality businesses are ready and waiting to recover quickly as soon as it is safe to open fully. They are ready to bounce back stronger and greener.

**John Spellar:** If premises are physically covid secure, and their customers have vaccine certificates, why will the Government not let them open earlier?

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan:** The road map sets it out very clearly, as the Prime Minister has done as well, that we will open safely and steadily, making sure that we do not have to return to any kind of lockdown. We want to go at the right speed and steadily to make sure that we can get there.

Let me return now to my green point. When discussing support for individuals and businesses across our constituencies, we must touch on our plans to build back greener, supporting those green jobs, accelerating to net zero and creating that long-term advantage in low-carbon sectors, such as nuclear, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie) highlighted in her speech. The Prime Minister's 10-point plan for a green industrial revolution will mobilise £12 billion of

Government investment to unlock three times as much in private sector investment by 2030. This will help to level up regions across the UK, supporting up to 250,000 highly skilled green jobs. That will include quadrupling our offshore wind capacity to 40 GW by 2030, committing £500 million for low-carbon hydrogen production across the decade and investing £1 billion to make our homes, our schools and our hospitals greener, warmer and more energy efficient—an area of policy that I consider to be extremely important. The 10-point plan will be driving a revolution in electric vehicles and hydrogen buses, and enabling all of us to change how we live our lives in a way that is genuinely sustainable. Our businesses will have opportunities across so many sectors to drive to net zero.

We cannot avoid the fact that coronavirus is indeed one of the greatest challenges that the UK and, indeed, our planet have faced this past year. The Government recognise the significant disruption that individuals, businesses and public services have experienced as a result of the steps that have had to be taken to manage it and to protect our citizens.

To protect people's jobs and livelihoods, the Government have provided immediate support on a scale unmatched in recent history, but as restrictions ease and the economy is gradually and safely reopened, the Government will carefully tailor the level of support to individuals and businesses to reflect the changing circumstances. The Prime Minister's road map will set out our commitment to give businesses large and small the support and clarity required to plan ahead and manage everything from staff to supplies. Indeed, it will help businesses such as Leckenby's tearoom in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Daly) to be able to open safely for customers once again.

We will build on our short-term response to ensure long-term economic growth, working towards our longer-term objectives, boosting productivity and giving businesses throughout the country the confidence to invest as we put them at the forefront of new opportunities. The Government stand—

**Mr Nicholas Brown** (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab) *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

*Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.*

*Question agreed to.*

*Main Question accordingly put.*

*The House divided: Ayes 272, Noes 0.*

**Division No. 232]**

**[6.59 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Black, Mhairi
Abrahams, Debbie	Blackford, rh Ian
Ali, Rushanara	Blackman, Kirsty
Ali, Tahir	Blake, Olivia
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Blomfield, Paul
Amesbury, Mike	Bonnar, Steven
Anderson, Fleur	Brabin, Tracy
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Ashworth, Jonathan	Brennan, Kevin
Bardell, Hannah	Brock, Deidre
Barker, Paula	Brown, Alan
Beckett, rh Margaret	Brown, Ms Lyn
Begum, Apsana	Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Benn, rh Hilary	Bryant, Chris
Betts, Mr Clive	Buck, Ms Karen

Burton, Richard  
Butler, Dawn  
Byrne, Ian  
Byrne, rh Liam  
Cadbury, Ruth  
Callaghan, Amy  
Cameron, Dr Lisa  
Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
Campbell, Mr Gregory  
Carden, Dan  
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
Chamberlain, Wendy  
Champion, Sarah  
Chapman, Douglas  
Cherry, Joanna  
Clark, Feryal  
Cooper, Daisy  
Cooper, Rosie  
Cooper, rh Yvette  
Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
Cowan, Ronnie  
Coyle, Neil  
Crawley, Angela  
Creasy, Stella  
Cruddas, Jon  
Cryer, John  
Cummins, Judith  
Cunningham, Alex  
Daby, Janet  
Davey, rh Ed  
David, Wayne  
Davies, Geraint  
Davies-Jones, Alex  
Day, Martyn  
De Cordova, Marsha  
Debbonaire, Thangam  
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
Dodds, Anneliese  
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.  
Doogan, Dave  
Dorans, Allan  
Doughty, Stephen  
Dowd, Peter  
Dromey, Jack  
Duffield, Rosie  
Eagle, Dame Angela  
Eagle, Maria  
Eastwood, Colum  
Edwards, Jonathan  
Efford, Clive  
Elliott, Julie  
Elmore, Chris  
Eshalomi, Florence  
Esterson, Bill  
Evans, Chris  
Farron, Tim  
Farry, Stephen  
Fellows, Marion  
Ferrier, Margaret  
Fletcher, Colleen  
Flynn, Stephen  
Fovargue, Yvonne  
Foxcroft, Vicky  
Foy, Mary Kelly  
Furniss, Gill  
Gardiner, Barry  
Gibson, Patricia  
Gill, Preet Kaur  
Girvan, Paul  
Glindon, Mary  
Grady, Patrick

Grant, Peter  
Gray, Neil  
Green, Kate  
Greenwood, Lilian  
Greenwood, Margaret  
Griffith, Nia  
Gwynne, Andrew  
Haigh, Louise  
Hamilton, Fabian  
Hanna, Claire  
Hanvey, Neale  
Hardy, Emma  
Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
Harris, Carolyn  
Hayes, Helen  
Healey, rh John  
Hendrick, Sir Mark  
Hendry, Drew  
Hill, Mike  
Hillier, Meg  
Hobhouse, Wera  
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Hollern, Kate  
Hopkins, Rachel  
Hosie, Stewart  
Howarth, rh Sir George  
Huq, Dr Rupa  
Hussain, Imran  
Jardine, Christine  
Jarvis, Dan  
Johnson, Dame Diana  
Johnson, Kim  
Jones, Darren  
Jones, Gerald  
Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
Jones, Ruth  
Jones, Sarah  
Kane, Mike  
Keeley, Barbara  
Kendall, Liz  
Khan, Afzal  
Kinnock, Stephen  
Kyle, Peter  
Lake, Ben  
Lammy, rh Mr David  
Lavery, Ian  
Law, Chris  
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
Lewis, Clive  
Linden, David  
Lloyd, Tony  
Lockhart, Carla  
Long Bailey, Rebecca  
Lucas, Caroline  
Lynch, Holly  
MacAskill, Kenny  
MacNeil, Angus Brendan  
Madders, Justin  
Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
Mahmood, Shabana  
Malhotra, Seema  
Maskell, Rachael  
Matheson, Christian  
Mc Nally, John  
McCabe, Steve  
McCarthy, Kerry  
McDonagh, Siobhain  
McDonald, Andy  
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
McDonald, Stuart C.  
McDonnell, rh John

McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
McGinn, Conor  
McGovern, Alison  
McKinnell, Catherine  
McLaughlin, Anne  
McMahon, Jim  
McMorris, Anna  
Mearns, Ian  
Miliband, rh Edward  
Mishra, Navendu  
Monaghan, Carol  
Moran, Layla  
Morden, Jessica  
Morgan, Stephen  
Morris, Grahame  
Murray, Ian  
Murray, James  
Nandy, Lisa  
Newlands, Gavin  
Nichols, Charlotte  
Nicolson, John  
Norris, Alex  
O'Hara, Brendan  
Olney, Sarah  
Onwurah, Chi  
Oppong-Asare, Abena  
Osamor, Kate  
Osborne, Kate  
Oswald, Kirsten  
Owatemi, Taiwo  
Owen, Sarah  
Paisley, Ian  
Peacock, Stephanie  
Pennycook, Matthew  
Perkins, Mr Toby  
Phillips, Jess  
Phillipson, Bridget  
Pollard, Luke  
Powell, Lucy  
Qureshi, Yasmin  
Rayner, Angela  
Reed, Steve  
Rees, Christina  
Reeves, Ellie  
Reeves, Rachel  
Reynolds, Jonathan  
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
Rimmer, Ms Marie  
Robinson, Gavin  
Rodda, Matt  
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd

Saville Roberts, rh Liz  
Shah, Naz  
Shannon, Jim  
Sharma, Mr Virendra  
Sheerman, Mr Barry  
Sheppard, Tommy  
Siddiq, Tulip  
Slaughter, Andy  
Smith, Alyn  
Smith, Cat  
Smith, Nick  
Smyth, Karin  
Sobel, Alex  
Starmer, rh Keir  
Stephens, Chris  
Stevens, Jo  
Stone, Jamie  
Streeting, Wes  
Stringer, Graham  
Sultana, Zarah  
Tami, rh Mark  
Tarry, Sam  
Thewliss, Alison  
Thomas, Gareth  
Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
Thompson, Owen  
Thomson, Richard  
Thornberry, rh Emily  
Timms, rh Stephen  
Trickett, Jon  
Turner, Karl  
Twigg, Derek  
Twist, Liz  
Vaz, rh Valerie  
Webbe, Claudia  
West, Catherine  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Whitford, Dr Philippa  
Whitley, Mick  
Whittome, Nadia  
Williams, Hywel  
Wilson, Munira  
Wilson, rh Sammy  
Winter, Beth  
Wishart, Pete  
Yasin, Mohammad  
Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**

**John Spellar and  
Matt Western**

**NOES****Tellers for the Noes:**

**Bambos Charalambous and  
Jeff Smith**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*The list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy, is published at the end of today's debates.*

**Resolved,**

That this House calls on the Government to support businesses and individuals still struggling as a result of the coronavirus crisis in the forthcoming budget by extending business rates relief for at least another six months, extending the temporary 5 per cent reduced rate of VAT for three months after restrictions are lifted or for another six months, whichever is later, helping British businesses struggling under the burden of Government-guaranteed debt by ensuring that small businesses can defer paying loans back until they are growing again, extending and reforming the furlough scheme so that it lasts whilst restrictions are in place and

demand is significantly reduced, immediately confirming that the fourth Self-Employment Income Support Scheme grant will be set at 80 per cent of pre-coronavirus crisis profits and extending eligibility to that scheme to include anyone with a 2019-20 tax return and fixing the gaps in coronavirus support schemes to support those who have been excluded from the beginning of the crisis; and further calls on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make a monthly oral statement to Parliament updating the House on these matters.

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION (CUSTOMS)

That the Customs Tariff (Establishment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 (S.I., 2020, No. 1430), dated 15 December 2020, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16 December, be approved.

That the Taxation Cross-border Trade (Special Procedures Supplementary and General Provision etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 (S.I., 2020, No. 1439), dated 15 December 2020, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16 December, be approved.

#### CUSTOMS

That the Customs Tariff (Establishment and Suspension of Import Duty) (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (S.I., 2021, No. 63), dated 21 January 2021, a copy of which was laid before this House on 21 January, be approved.—(*James Morris.*)

*Question agreed to.*

## Death of PC Yvonne Fletcher

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

7.10 pm

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): On 17 April 1984, Woman Police Constable Yvonne Fletcher of the Metropolitan police was fatally wounded by a gunman. He was hiding in the Libyan People's Bureau, which was in St James's Square in London. In this debate, I want to remember her by talking about her life and her tragic death, as well as making a request that she, even now, be considered for a posthumous gallantry award. I do not intend to speculate about who was responsible for pulling the trigger, as I believe there is now very little chance of bringing the murderers to justice, much as I would dearly like to see that happen.

Yvonne Fletcher was born on 15 June 1958. Her parents, Michael and Queenie Fletcher, lived in Semley, Wiltshire. Yvonne was the oldest of four daughters, and from the age of three, she told her parents that she wanted to join the police. It was her primary ambition in life. By the time she was 18 and a half, she tried, but she was 1½ inches too short to reach the height required; she needed to be 5 feet 4 inches, and she was 5 feet 2½ inches. Disappointedly, she applied for any police service that she could get into, which included the Royal Hong Kong police. Yvonne's persistence paid off, and the Metropolitan police waived the height requirement in her case. She must have been very special for them to do that.

After training and a two-year probationary period, she was confirmed as a regular woman police constable. After being given her warrant, she spent most of her police service working from Bow Street police station. It was there that she became engaged to another police officer, Police Constable Michael Liddle. For some six years, Yvonne was based at Bow Street, where she was hugely respected and liked by her fellow officers. I gather she was called "Super Fletch", and that was because, first, they liked her, and secondly, she was very good at her job.

On 17 April 1984, Yvonne was asked to reinforce a police operation monitoring a demonstration of mainly Libyan students who were protesting about the regime of Colonel Gaddafi. The main part of that demonstration was occurring in St James's Square. A detachment of about 30 police officers was sent to St James's Square, including Yvonne Fletcher, her fiancé Michael Liddle, and members of the police diplomatic protection group. The anti-Gaddafi protesters consisted of about 75 people, and their demonstration started at about 10 am. Many of the demonstrators were wearing masks to make sure that they could not be identified by photographers standing at the windows of the Libyan People's Bureau. Gaddafi's regime had a habit of murdering opponents, wherever they were in the world, so this precaution was very sensible.

The police had erected barriers. The demonstrators were behind them, and Yvonne and her colleagues were in front. The demonstrators carried anti-Gaddafi banners and chanted slogans against the dictator. I think that there was actually a pro-Gaddafi protest there as well. Suddenly, at 18 minutes past 10, automatic gunfire was discharged from two windows of the People's

[Bob Stewart]

Bureau. It was presumably directed at the anti-Gaddafi demonstration, but a round hit Yvonne Fletcher. I suspect that the gunman simply sprayed the area and did so without really looking out of the window, with their hands up so that they could not be identified. The bullet entered Yvonne's back and tore through her body. She collapsed on the road. Several other people were wounded, although none was as badly hurt as Yvonne.

The police shepherded the demonstrators into Charles II Street, while several of Yvonne's police colleagues tried to save her. I quote from an email that I received from PC John Murray, who was with her at the time. Forgive me for quoting directly, but he did email me last week. He said:

"Yvonne was shot from the bureau, and fell to the ground. I went over to her. I was only feet from her and cradled her head. The square quickly emptied, leaving three of us with Yvonne. We carried her into a nearby street and I went with her in the ambulance to hospital. In the ambulance there were other Libyan students who were bleeding from their wounds, but she seemed more concerned about them. 'Keep safe. Be calm,' she said."

What incredible courage and conduct for a young woman of 24 or 25. What an example—to the Metropolitan police themselves and to every one of us. I am in awe of that, and I suspect that anyone listening is too.

At 10.40 am, Yvonne had been taken to Westminster Hospital. For some of the time going there, she was conscious but in huge pain. As she was being transferred from the ambulance on to the trolley in the hospital, the spent bullet that had travelled through her body fell out of her uniform. Yvonne was taken straight into the operating theatre, but it was too late; she died on the operating table at about midday.

Yvonne's hat and four other officers' helmets were left lying in the square during the ensuing siege of the bureau. At the time, I was a staff officer in the Ministry of Defence. In the days that followed, I remember—I suspect others do too—the images of the hats and helmets in St James's Square being shown repeatedly in the media, on the television and in newspapers.

Ten days later, on 27 April, a police officer called Clive Mabry, acting against specific orders, ran in and retrieved Yvonne's hat from in front of the bureau. Getting that hat back was hugely symbolic and doing that meant one heck of a lot to the policemen and policewomen. Typically for any uniformed organisation—I have been in one myself—Mabry was admonished, but praised too. He was fined seven days' pay by the police for his indiscipline, as well as being given the freedom of the City of London for doing the right thing. The hat was placed on Yvonne's coffin for her funeral, which took place later the same day in Salisbury Cathedral. Six hundred policemen attended that funeral.

Yvonne's conduct exemplified the very highest standards of the Metropolitan police service. When she was mortally wounded, she seemed to care more about others who were with her in the ambulance than herself. What courage she displayed by saying to those trying to look after her that they should keep safe and stay calm. That was within minutes of her death. She did that when she must have been in the gravest of agony.

From my own experience of writing citations, may I suggest that a posthumous award of the George Medal could be considered, despite the passage of years, and

because of Yvonne's calm, courageous demeanour while she was grievously wounded, and dying? As so many of us remember, Police Constable Keith Palmer was murdered near here, in New Palace Yard, on 22 March 2017. He was awarded the George Medal posthumously. I believe there should be such an award for Yvonne Fletcher, who showed valour of a similar nature to that of Keith. Keith tried to stop the madman, although he was unarmed; it cost him his life. Yvonne was saying things and showing, in the way she behaved, how courageous she was.

**Mr Mark Francois** (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): In view of my right hon. Friend's elevation to the Privy Council, on which I congratulate him, I believe his recommendation carries even more weight. Some years ago, I was Veterans Minister at the Ministry of Defence. I was never a Minister in the Home Office; nevertheless, I pay tribute to Keith Palmer, and also to Yvonne Fletcher. For what it is worth, may I wholeheartedly endorse my right hon. Friend's recommendation that her valour and conduct is wholly worthy of the award of the George Medal?

**Bob Stewart:** Thank you, on behalf of everyone who is campaigning. The more of us who say it, the better.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Bob Stewart:** I give way to my honourable friend—he is my hon. Friend, even though he is in the Opposition.

**Jim Shannon:** The right hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) has a great part in every one of our hearts. I salute him, as an honourable and gallant Member.

I remind him as well that we in Northern Ireland have felt all too often the devastation of the death of our serving police officers. I know that the right hon. and gallant Gentleman will have known some of those officers who served and died for Queen and country. Does he agree that the message must be clear in every part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland that every life is precious, that there will be no tolerance of the murder of those who served, and that the maximum penalty can and will be applied on every occasion? I support entirely the campaign on behalf of Yvonne Fletcher. I wish the right hon. Member well, and I hope that the Minister will respond in a positive fashion.

**Bob Stewart:** I thank the hon. Member. All I can say to that is that I entirely agree with him on the Police Service of Northern Ireland and its predecessor, the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

To make a little aside, when someone is killed in the military, they give out the Elizabeth Cross to the next of kin. I would have thought that that is quite a nice thing to consider doing for the police. It is just a thought, which has only just come into my brain at this moment, but the Elizabeth Cross really means something to the next of kin of people who have lost their lives serving in the military. I would have thought that for the police that would be quite a good idea, too.

The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Allan Dorans), who was a serving officer in the Metropolitan police on the day that Yvonne was murdered, cannot be with us today. He has told me that he did not know Yvonne personally, but he did know that she was

an exceptionally talented, passionate and caring young police officer who loved her job and the opportunity to help people—she was really good at that. He told me that he would provide full support for the posthumous award of a George medal.

As I prepared for this debate, I have personally spoken to 59 past and present members of the Metropolitan police about Yvonne Fletcher. Only one or two of those officers needed to be reminded who she was, and that is because they were not even born when this incident happened, but to a man and to a woman they were utterly supportive that such recognition should be given to their incredibly gallant late colleague. I entirely agree with them. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker—over to my friend the Minister.

7.27 pm

**The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse):** I congratulate my right hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) on a moving and compelling speech. I know that the tributes that he has paid to Yvonne Fletcher will mean a lot to her family, friends and loved ones, not least coming from a man who has exhibited no small amount of courage during a lifetime of service.

They say that the shot that initiated the American civil war was heard around the world, but it is also true that the shot that killed Yvonne Fletcher was one that had global implications. Having tragically killed her, it also lodged itself deep in the body of UK policing, with a generation of Britons for whom she will always be remembered, and of whom I am one. I can remember, as a teenager, that awful day and that terrible incident, and the palpable shock that was felt throughout the country when it occurred. I have often contemplated the monument to Yvonne Fletcher, which was erected where she fell in St James's Square, as I have happened to pass through the square. I have turned to look at the building from where the shot came and marvelled at how such wickedness and evil could have been at the very heart of our capital city 37 years ago. It was a terrible day, not just for her and her family—of course, it was tragic and awful for them—but for the whole country and the entirety of UK policing.

The fact that she was a remarkable person, as my hon. Friend says, was exhibited by her thought for others in the face of her own mortal wounds. It was extraordinary that even as she lay dying, her first thoughts

were for others who were in extremis nearby. As my right hon. Friend pointed out, it speaks to somebody with very special qualities—qualities that she had shown throughout her progress in the police and through her determination to join by whatever means she could find, as well as in the way she lived her life, sadly short though it was.

My right hon. Friend asked whether she should be posthumously awarded a medal for gallantry. He will know that very often such nominations are made through official channels. However, it is the case that anybody can make a nomination for a gallantry award. I would be more than happy to ask my officials to work with him and, indeed, other Members who have spoken movingly in the debate this evening to make sure that the right evidence is gathered, so that it can be submitted in good time to the committee that makes these decisions. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) said, I know that the nomination will come with particular weight, given the standing my right hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham has both within this House and through the service he has given the country in his career.

**Bob Stewart:** I accept that commission from the Minister. I consider it a great honour and accept it wholeheartedly.

**Kit Malthouse:** Madam Deputy Speaker, it is not often that Adjournment debates result in a positive action, but I am pleased that we are able to work together to see where we can get to. As I say, these decisions are made by a committee that looks at particular incidents and individuals, but we will work with my right hon. Friend and others to put the evidence together and to help him make the case for the award that he seeks for this remarkable individual, who exhibited the best of British policing and for whom there is long and strong memory into the future.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Indeed, it is not often that we have such a moving and positive Adjournment debate. I, too, thank the right hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), as well as congratulating him on his elevation to the Privy Council.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.32 pm

*House adjourned.*

## Members Eligible for a Proxy Vote

*The following is the list of Members currently certified as eligible for a proxy vote, and of the Members nominated as their proxy:*

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con)	Chris Loder
Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudon) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Jon Cruddas (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP)	Jim Shannon	John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain	Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	James Daly (Bury North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con)	Ben Everitt
Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain	Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Robert Courts (Witney) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP)	Patrick Grady	Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew	Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	John Glen (Salisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell	Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell	Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain	Damian Green (Ashford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance)	Wendy Chamberlain	Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew	Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kate Griffiths (Burton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	James Grundy (Leigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell		

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Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP)	Ben Lake	Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
James Heapey (Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	David Johnston (Wantage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell	Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Anthony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain	Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Howell (Henley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew		

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Robert Largan (High Peak) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con)	Mr William Wragg	Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Alan Mak (Havant) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP)	Jim Shannon	Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Patrick Grady
Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Damien Moore (Southport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

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Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con)	Chris Loder	Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell	Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Will Quince (Colchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell	John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain	Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy	Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (Con)	Jim Shannon	Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Priti Patel (Witham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Dean Russell (Watford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
		Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
		Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)	Ben Lake

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy	Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con)	Mr William Wragg
Grant Shapps (Welwyn Hatfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell	Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op)	Sir Alan Campbell
Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Elizabeth Truss (South West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP)	Patrick Grady	Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Matt Vickers (Stockton South) (Con)	Chris Loder
John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North)	Stuart Andrew
Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain	Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	David Warburton (Somerset and Frome) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell	Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew	Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind)	Bell Ribeiro-Addy
		Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
		Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Whittingdale (Malden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC)	Ben Lake
Gavin Williamson (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)	Patrick Grady
Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell
Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab)	Sir Alan Campbell



# Written Statements

Tuesday 23 February 2021

## CABINET OFFICE

### Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee Meeting

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove):** The next meeting of the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee will take place on 24 February 2021, by video conference, hosted by the UK.

The meeting will be co-chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), and Vice President of the European Commission, Maroš Šefčovič.

The agenda will include four items:

*Introduction and opening remarks from co-chairs*  
Stocktake of specialised Committee activity

*Update on withdrawal agreement implementation since the end of the transition period*

Citizens' rights

Ireland/Northern Ireland protocol

*AOB*

*Concluding remarks*

The UK delegation will include:

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, right hon. Michael Gove MP

The Paymaster General, right hon. Penny Mordaunt MP

Representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive have been invited to form part of the UK delegation.

[HCWS790]

### UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement: Provisional Application

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Michael Gove):** Today the UK-EU Partnership Council has agreed to extend the date on which provisional application of the Trade and Co-operation Agreement (TCA) will cease from 28 February 2021 to 30 April 2021.

The decision was taken by written procedure: the EU co-chair of the Partnership Council, Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič, proposed extension by letter on Friday 19 February, and the current UK co-chair, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, agreed to this proposal today, 23 February. This exchange of letters formalises the adoption of the decision. Copies of the letters and the draft decision have been published on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

Provisionally applying the TCA was not the UK's preferred outcome in the first place, given the uncertainty it creates for businesses, individuals and the parties. The extension of provisional application prolongs that uncertainty and it is disappointing that the EU did not complete its internal procedures in the timeframe set out in the TCA. We expect the EU to meet the new timeline.

[HCWS791]

## FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### GuarantCo: Callable Capital Agreement

**The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs and First Secretary of State (Dominic Raab):** It is normal practice, when a Government Department proposes to undertake a contingent liability in excess of £300,000 for which there is no specific statutory authority, for the Minister concerned to present a departmental minute to Parliament giving particulars of the liability created and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from incurring the liability until 14 parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the statement, except in cases of special urgency.

I have today laid a departmental minute outlining details of a new liability of up to £90 million which FCDO has undertaken in respect of the Private Infrastructure Development Group (PIDG). This £90 million increase will be added to the existing liability of £40 million for PIDG which has been in place since 2016, creating a total liability of £130 million.

GuarantCo was established in 2003 as an investment facility of PIDG. PIDG encourages and mobilises private investment in infrastructure in the frontier markets of sub-Saharan Africa and south and south-east Asia. PIDG makes it viable for private investors to participate in infrastructure deals, using limited sums from its publicly funded trust to crowd-in many times that value in private capital. The UK has committed over £1 billion to PIDG since 2002 alongside other donors. This has collectively leveraged over £26 billion in investment from the private sector and partner international and development finance institutions.

PIDG supports private investment throughout the project development cycle from its earliest stages, through a number of separate facilities or companies. GuarantCo supports local currency lending for infrastructure projects in developing countries by providing guarantees to banks and bond investors. This helps to reduce the risks to borrowers of borrowing in hard currency for projects that earn revenues locally, while reducing the risks to lenders to enable them to finance projects in developing countries. In this way, it helps to promote domestic infrastructure financing and self-sustaining capital market development in low and lower-middle income countries.

GuarantCo's business model requires it to demonstrate the capacity to honour guarantees for transactions it is discussing with counterparties. GuarantCo expects to have only a minimal number of defaulting projects. However, it needs to have a legally solid call on sufficient capital for it to pay out against called guarantees.

Until 2016, the UK supported GuarantCo through paid-in capital. To ensure better value for money for UK taxpayer funding, the UK entered into an arrangement with GuarantCo in 2016 to provide support in the form of unfunded, callable equity—capital. It is this arrangement which FCDO is now proposing to amend, increasing the callable capital to a total of £130 million, and adjusting the terms to better reflect the current operating environment of GuarantCo. This form of support allows cash to remain with HM Government, only releasing funds if and when there is a clear need for the money.

GuarantCo will continue to be able to leverage its increased equity base as it will have a sovereign guarantee of callable capital. Consequently, it will be able to continue its development objectives and significantly expand its pipeline of projects.

FCDO's total contingent liability for GuarantCo would be increased by £90 million to a total of £130 million under this renewed callable capital agreement. This £90 million increase is part of the overall approved budget for PIDG under its current business case. The sole purpose of this arrangement is to achieve better value for money for taxpayers by providing callable capital instead of cash while achieving the same development outcomes.

The agreement would be in place for 20 years and capital can be called by GuarantCo only if predefined "trigger" events are met. The trigger events are based on GuarantCo's liquidity position. If its liquidity falls below the amount of USD \$100 million, this would trigger a tranche of the callable capital to be paid out—subsequent tranches would be paid out only if liquidity fell below this amount again, with three tranches in total. For this trigger event to occur, it would require GuarantCo to lose over 60% of its paid-in equity—approximately US \$200 million. FCDO considers the risk of this happening to be low but not negligible. Even if called towards the end of the agreement, it would still provide better value for money than FCDO providing cash now.

FCDO will continue to review the financial performance with GuarantCo regularly and GuarantCo will be required to report quarterly on the risk of the capital being called. In the circumstance where the contingent liability is called, provision for any payment will be sought through the normal supply procedure.

The Treasury has approved the proposal in principle. If, during the period of 14 parliamentary sitting days beginning on the date on which this minute was laid before Parliament a Member signifies an objection by giving notice of a parliamentary question or by otherwise raising the matter in Parliament, final approval to proceed with incurring the liability will be withheld pending an examination of the objection.

[HCWS789]

### State Immunity Act 1978: Remedial Order

**The Minister for Asia (Nigel Adams):** In 2017, the Supreme Court judgment in the case of *Benkharbouche v. Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs* [2017] UKSC 62 held that certain provisions of the State Immunity Act 1978 were incompatible with articles 6 and 14 of the European Convention of Human Rights. The incompatibility related to employment claims brought by individuals employed by diplomatic missions in London. The Government have considered the Supreme Court's judgment and decided to address the incompatibility by way of a remedial order under section 10 and schedule 2 of the Human Rights Act 1998. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office will lay the draft remedial order before Parliament in due course.

[HCWS788]

## TREASURY

### Double Taxation Convention: United Kingdom and Sweden

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman):** A protocol to the Double Taxation Convention with Sweden was signed on 23 February. The protocol will give effect to certain OECD/G20 base erosion and profit-shifting recommendations that protect tax treaties against avoidance activities, ensuring that the UK's double taxation agreement with Sweden meets the minimum OECD/G20 recommended standards. The text of the protocol is available on HM Revenue and Customs' pages of the [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) website and will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses. The text of the protocol will be scheduled to a draft Order in Council and laid before the House of Commons in due course.

[HCWS792]

## HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Bailiff Enforcement Regulations: Extension

**The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher):** I wish to update the House on the Government's continuing commitment to protecting tenants over the national lockdown period, while ensuring landlords can access justice in the most serious cases.

*Preventing the enforcement of evictions against residential tenants*

The Government laid a statutory instrument on 19 February which extends existing protections for renters by continuing to prevent enforcement agents—bailiffs—from attending residential premises to enforce a writ or warrant of possession except in the most serious circumstances. This measure will continue to protect public health by preventing people being evicted from their homes by enforcement agents, at a time when the risk of virus transmission remains high, and to avoid placing additional burdens on the NHS and local authorities.

Exemptions continue to be in place for the most serious cases that present the most strain on landlords and on local communities. These circumstances are illegal occupation, false statement, antisocial behaviour, perpetrators of domestic abuse in the social sector, where a property is unoccupied following death of a tenant and serious rent arrears of six months' rent or more. The SI applies to England only and expires on 31 March 2021. Given that 14 days' notice is required before an eviction can take place, no evictions are expected before 14 April except in the most serious circumstances.

*Wider measures*

The requirement on landlords to provide tenants with six months' notice before starting formal possession proceedings continues to apply in all but the most serious cases until at least 31 March 2021. This means that most renters served notice today can stay in their homes until August 2021, with time to find alternative support or accommodation. We will keep these measures under review.

Most tenants are continuing to pay their rent as normal. However, we recognise that a small proportion are experiencing trouble paying their rent. The Government have put in place a significant financial package to support them.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has offered support for businesses to pay staff salaries, enabling people to continue to pay their rent and has been extended until April 2021. The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme is also available.

In addition, the Government have put in place an unprecedented amount of financial support to ensure tenants can continue to pay their rent. Notably, we have increased the local housing allowance rate (LHA) to the 30th percentile. The increased LHA rates are expected to provide 1.5 million claimants with around £600 per year of housing support more than they would otherwise have received. This measure maintains that significant increase for all rates, by protecting the rates at the current levels in cash terms in 2021-22, even in areas where the 30th percentile of local rents has gone down. This continued investment in LHA will support claimants in

the private rented sector to manage housing costs. We have also increased Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit by up to £1,040 for the year. We spend around £30 billion a year on housing benefits—and spend more than any other OECD country as a proportion of GDP on housing support—2018 data.

#### *Guidance*

We have updated our guidance to support landlords and tenants in the social and private rented sectors navigate the possessions process, which can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-the-possession-action-process-guidance-for-landlords-and-tenants>.

We have also recently updated our covid-19 renting guidance for landlords, tenants and local authorities to ensure it reflects the latest information. It can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-and-renting-guidance-for-landlords-tenants-and-local-authorities/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-landlords-and-tenants>.

[HCWS793]



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**not later than  
Tuesday 2 March 2021**

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