

**Wednesday
16 June 2021**

**Volume 697
No. 18**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 16 June 2021

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

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

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

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Today marks the fifth anniversary of the death of our friend and colleague Jo Cox, who was murdered on her way to meet constituents in her Batley and Spen constituency. She was doing what so many of us do as constituency MPs, and that made her death more shocking to us all. May I, on behalf of the whole House, express our sympathy with her family, friends and colleagues on this sad anniversary? We will never forget Jo or her legacy. We remember her wise words: that we have

“far more in common than that which divides us.”—[*Official Report*, 3 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 675.]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

MONKEN HADLEY COMMON BILL

Bill read the Third time and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Negotiations: Lord Frost and the European Commission

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with Lord Frost on negotiations with the Vice-President of the European Commission on Northern Ireland. [901165]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis): May I associate myself with your remarks about Jo Cox, Mr Speaker? I am sure that none of us in that House will ever forget where we were on that day. My thoughts are with her friends and family, and the amazing legacy that she has left.

I would like to thank Arlene Foster, who resigned as First Minister of Northern Ireland earlier this week. Arlene has given 18 years of public service to the people of Northern Ireland. We have seen throughout the covid pandemic the phenomenal work that she has done as First Minister in Northern Ireland, working with all the parties to take Northern Ireland through a very difficult time, especially as the Executive were newly reformed just weeks before. I would like to thank

Arlene for her work. I will continue to work, as I have done over the past few days, with all the party leaders in Northern Ireland to ensure that we can keep a sustained and stable Executive in the weeks, months and period ahead.

I regularly discuss our approach to the Northern Ireland protocol with Lord Frost. We have conducted joint engagements together in Northern Ireland on a regular basis with businesses and civil society, as well as joint engagements with Vice-President Šefčovič to consolidate our understanding of the real-world impacts of the protocol. At last week's Joint Committee, the Government outlined our continued commitment to engaging to find the pragmatic solutions that are urgently required and needed to ensure that the protocol can achieve the delicate balance that was always intended. We in the UK will continue to work actively to find and deliver the solutions.

Joanna Cherry [V]: May I, too, express my condolences to the family, friends and comrades of our late colleague Jo Cox on this anniversary?

A trade war has been threatened, but, most importantly, the stability and the peace process in Northern Ireland are at stake. Two international treaties are at stake; so, too, is the reputation of the United Kingdom in the eyes of the world, because our allies fear that this Government would be prepared to breach either or both of those treaties. Does the Secretary of State now regret saying that the Government were prepared to

“break international law”,

albeit

“in a very specific and limited way”?—[*Official Report*, 8 September 2020; Vol. 679, c. 509.]

Brandon Lewis: I was answering a question that I was asked last year and giving a factual position. The reality, as we outlined at the time, is that we were creating an insurance policy to ensure that we could continue to deliver on the Good Friday/Belfast agreement in terms of unfettered access from Northern Ireland to Great Britain. We were then able to secure that, and we therefore did not need to take those clauses forward. That was exactly what we said we would do. Our colleagues around the world can be very clear that we will do what we have said we would, and they can have confidence that we will continue to protect the Good Friday/Belfast agreement in all its aspects and all its strands.

Mr Speaker: Let us go to the Chair of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con) [V]: Like the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), Jo Cox was in my intake in 2015. She was a sparkling light among us and we miss her enormously. I associate myself with your remarks at the start of our proceedings, Mr Speaker.

Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agree that mutual trust is possibly the key ingredient to sorting out the position with regard to the Northern Ireland protocol? Our Committee has just had Lord Frost before us for an hour and a half, taking questions; I think that he agreed on that proposition as well. What is my right hon. Friend doing as Secretary of State to ensure that the issue of trust and its importance is understood across Whitehall?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee makes an important point. I have not had a chance to see the transcript of the meeting this morning that he and his Committee had with Lord Foster, but I work closely with Lord Foster on these issues and one of the key things is that mutual understanding and trust. That is one of the reasons I have always felt strongly that our colleagues, friends and partners in the EU should be engaging with civic society and businesses in Northern Ireland to ensure that they really understand the sensitivities and the nuances in Northern Ireland. I am pleased that the Commission and Maroš Šefčovič have done a couple of those meetings already. I would like to see more of that as we go forward, so that we can build that understanding. It is fundamental to the basis of having trust that each one understands why it matters to deliver on the protocol in the way that was always intended: in a pragmatic, flexible way that delivers for the people of Northern Ireland.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I join the Secretary of State in sending all our love to Jo's family on this very difficult day, and in paying tribute to the outgoing First Minister, Arlene Foster, for her many years of public service and for the lesson she has treated all of us to in recent weeks on how to do politics with dignity, even in difficult times.

I support the Secretary of State in his efforts to ensure that there is a strong, stable, functioning Executive in the current negotiations to meet the enormous challenges facing Northern Ireland, and one that respects all existing commitments. However, it was an extraordinary diplomatic failure for the Prime Minister to spend a crucial summit on home soil being rebuked by our closest allies. Northern Ireland does not have any more time for bickering or blame games, so is it not time to get serious and commit to a veterinary agreement that would eliminate the vast majority of checks down the middle of our Union?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Lady has a different reading of the weekend. One thing that was very clear over the weekend was that our partners—particularly our partners and friends in the United States—were very much in the same place as us on the precedence and importance of protecting and delivering on the Good Friday agreement. That is something that they were such a strong part of, and that we are always focused on as being of paramount importance for us. We have put forward a number of proposals—more than a dozen, I believe—to the European Union Commission around how we can deliver on the protocol in a pragmatic, flexible way that delivers for the people and businesses in Northern Ireland. We look forward to continuing those discussions with the EU, but when the EU talks about flexibility and pragmatism, it has to show it as well as talk about it.

Louise Haigh: We need to see the details of that veterinary agreement in order to ensure that it really would eliminate the vast majority of those checks. A significant part of the problem is that people in Northern Ireland feel that these changes have been imposed on them—that they have been done to them, not with them. So how is the Secretary of State going to ensure that representatives from politics, business and civil society in Northern Ireland are brought meaningfully into the negotiations, not just engagement, so that any solution is sustainable and permanently eases tensions?

Brandon Lewis: The Executive and Executive members have been part of a specialist committee. They have also been part of the wider engagement meetings and had a chance to feed into them. Obviously this is a negotiation between the UK Government and the European Commission, and it is therefore right that the UK Government lead on that, but we have been the ones who have been engaging across businesses and civic society, as well as with the Executive politicians, and we will continue to do that and continue to encourage the EU to do that.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): May I associate my colleagues with the comments made about the late Jo Cox and also pay tribute to our former leader and First Minister, Arlene Foster, for the sterling leadership that she provided to Northern Ireland during what has been a very difficult period for all of us?

What progress has been made in the Secretary of State's discussions with the EU side to ensure that when people are travelling with their pets between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in either direction, they are not required by the EU to carry so-called pet passports and incur the cost of having their pets vaccinated for a disease that has not existed in the United Kingdom for almost a century?

Brandon Lewis: In reflecting on the excellence of delivery that Arlene Foster had, I am going to learn a lesson that I am sure all Members here will be pleased about: I am going to avoid singing at any point this afternoon as I simply cannot live up to the talent that she showed on Friday.

Pet travel from Great Britain to Northern Ireland is one of the critical issues that we have been discussing with the EU. We see no reason why part 1 listing could not be granted by the EU, and indeed it should be. We meet all the requirements for it, as the right hon. Gentleman has rightly outlined, and we have one of the most rigorous pet checking regimes in Europe to protect our biosecurity, so we will continue to push for a solution with the EU. As he will be aware, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland has recently confirmed that there will be no routine compliance checks on pets or assistance dogs entering Northern Ireland from Great Britain until at least October 2021.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: We hope it will go well beyond October and that this matter will be fully and completely resolved.

Does the Secretary of State agree with the Prime Minister that it would be wrong for the EU to impose a ban on the sale of chilled meats, including sausages from Great Britain, to Northern Ireland? What action does he intend to take to prevent this from happening?

Brandon Lewis: I absolutely agree. Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom and its consumers should be able to enjoy the products that they have bought from Great Britain for years. Any ban on chilled meats would, in fact, be contrary to the aims of the protocol itself and would be against the interests of the people of Northern Ireland. An urgent solution must be found so that Northern Ireland's consumers can continue to enjoy chilled meat products bought from Great Britain.

We have proposed options for either extending the grace period or putting permanent arrangements in place. We are working hard to try to resolve these issues consensually with our partners, but as the PM has always made clear, we will consider all options in meeting our responsibility to sustain peace and prosperity for the people in and of Northern Ireland.

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP) [V]: Mr Speaker, may I associate myself and my colleagues with your opening remarks, and those from both Front Benches, in paying tribute both to the legacy of Jo Cox and to the public service of the outgoing First Minister, Arlene Foster?

In his discussions with Lord Frost and Maroš Šefčovič, to which of the following did the Secretary of State commit his Government? The integrity of the Good Friday agreement; the free flow of goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland; building trust by working to implement what they agreed to in the protocol; or further standards-lowering trade deals, which could restrict the ability to agree a veterinary deal with the EU? Surely the Secretary of State must recognise that it cannot possibly be all four.

Brandon Lewis: I fundamentally disagree with the principle that the hon. Gentleman has just outlined. The reality is that the Good Friday/Belfast agreement—he has fallen into the trap that too many people fall into—has more than one strand. East-west is a vital strand, and we will continue to protect it. That is why it is important for people to recognise and understand that Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom and should have the same rights and access to products as anywhere in the United Kingdom.

Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP): I, too, send my thoughts to Jo Cox's family today.

With all the talk of sausages and the protocol, I hear very little from this Government on the benefits of the protocol for local producers. What is the Secretary of State doing to promote those benefits? Can he tell the people of Derry what exactly he and Lord Frost think is wrong with Doherty's sausages?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Gentleman and I agree on a number of things, including the quality of sausages from across Northern Ireland, which, as Members can probably tell, I get to enjoy from time to time. He makes a fair point, and it is at the heart of the issue. It should be a matter of consumer choice, not regulatory regime. The reality is that, as across the United Kingdom, consumers who go into a supermarket in my constituency in Great Yarmouth will see a range of products that is different from what they will see in the midlands, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. That is because of consumer choice, not regulatory command.

We have to ensure that Northern Ireland's residents have the ability to make that choice. If the hon. Gentleman looks, as I know he does constantly, at the media, I have made the point a few times that, if we get the protocol to work in a proper, flexible, pragmatic way, it creates an opportunity for Northern Ireland. But we also have to be cognisant of the fact that, at the moment, it is causing real disruption and real problems for businesses and consumers in Northern Ireland, across the whole community, and it has an impact on people's sense of

identity in the Unionist community. We have to accept that, respond to it and deal with the protocol in a pragmatic way. That is why I think it is so important that the EU engages with people in Northern Ireland to get a real understanding of why Northern Ireland is such an important part of our United Kingdom.

Links with the United States

Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): What steps he is taking to promote Northern Ireland's links with the US. [901166]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis): The Government have always cherished our close relationship with the United States. It was a combined effort of the UK, Irish and US Governments that brought the troubles to an end, and it will take a renewed and ongoing partnership to safeguard Northern Ireland's stability and prosperity in the future. That is why I announced earlier this month the appointment of Trevor Ringland MBE as the first special envoy to the United States on Northern Ireland. The special envoy will support our Government's important mission to promote Northern Ireland as an excellent place to live, work and do business.

Julie Marson: I welcome the news that my right hon. Friend has appointed a special envoy. Does he agree that it is important to engage not just with the US but with all our international friends and partners to ensure a greater understanding of the challenges that Northern Ireland faces, but also of the opportunities that this integral part of the UK has?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend is spot on: she is absolutely right. We in the UK are committed to working internationally to tackle global challenges, as was demonstrated by our hosting of the G7 just last weekend. As an integral part of the Union of the United Kingdom, we will always fully represent the issues that matter most to Northern Ireland when we engage with our international partners. That is the spirit in which we appointed the special envoy to the US, and I look forward to working with Trevor Ringland on that. She is also right to say that Northern Ireland is a phenomenally exciting place to live and work, with so much opportunity, in cyber, advanced engineering, technology—I could go on. It has a lot to offer the world and we will continue to promote that around the world.

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab): May I associate myself with your comments earlier today, Mr Speaker? My thoughts are with all of Jo's friends, family and former colleagues.

Inflaming tensions, undermining trust and a formal diplomatic rebuke—we would expect this language and action to form the backdrop to a summit with our adversaries, rather than with our closest allies. Is the Secretary of State not alarmed that our Government are increasingly isolated from our partners on the protocol? What comfort can the Secretary of State, who boasted about breaching international law, provide to the new US Administration that his word can be trusted?

Brandon Lewis: Obviously, I do not recognise the context the hon. Lady outlines, but I would say to her, as I said earlier, that what colleagues and people around

the world can see is that I will always be straight and give a direct and honest answer to a question, as I did last year. I work regularly with our partners in the US, and they are clear in understanding our determination to make sure we deliver on what is, to an extent, a joint endeavour between the UK and Irish Governments, with the support of the US: delivering protection of the Good Friday/Belfast agreement. We make no apologies whatsoever for putting the people of the UK and the people of Northern Ireland first in everything we do around Northern Ireland.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP) [V]: I congratulate the Secretary of State and wish Trevor Ringland well on his appointment as a special envoy from Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State will know that Northern Ireland has attracted significant interest internationally over the last number of decades. At pivotal moments, it has been incredibly helpful, but at other times that involvement can be naive and, worse still, partisan. In that vein, may I ask the Secretary of State what reflections he has to make on the deeply unhelpful and destabilising contribution from the Irish Tanaiste yesterday, at such a grave time of political instability in Northern Ireland?

Brandon Lewis: I join the hon. Gentleman in expressing some surprise at the comments we saw yesterday. We would be concerned about any deviation from the principle of consent, as enshrined in the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, but that agreement of course also respects the right of anyone to express their views, and we fully support that. We note the recent life and times survey, which showed support for a united Ireland at a low of 30% in Northern Ireland. I am also aware of the polls that put Sinn Féin ahead in the Republic, which may explain the timing of some of these comments from the Tanaiste. I urge everyone to dial down any rhetoric, particularly at this time of year, as it is unhelpful and ill-advised. Whatever the circumstances, this Government will support the principle of consent and all of our obligations under the Belfast/Good Friday agreement.

Northern Ireland Protocol: Implementation

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): What discussions he has had with EU officials on the need for pragmatic implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol. [901169]

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): What discussions he has had with EU officials on the need for pragmatic implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol. [901179]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis): There have been extensive technical discussions with the European Commission, both as part of the formal withdrawal agreement structures and in support of them. I have joined Lord Frost in his comments, engagements with Vice-President Šefčovič, Northern Ireland businesses and civil society, as I have said, as well as meetings with the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney. These discussions have covered a wide range of issues related to the operation of the protocol. There is an urgent need for this ongoing dialogue to make real progress soon—as soon as possible—so that we avoid any disruption to critical supplies such as food and medicines.

Jerome Mayhew [V]: I was not lucky enough to be in this place with Jo Cox, but it is clear that she made an enormous impact during her time here and is much missed.

I know that both negotiating teams worked hard, but it was really disappointing to see the lack of a significant breakthrough last week. We need pragmatic, sensible arrangements in place, just as we need devolved government working again with a new First Minister. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the EU needs to engage with the practical proposals that are being put forward on issues such as veterinary agreements and authorised trader schemes if we are to make progress on the ground?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I know that he has a huge knowledge and understanding of the nuances and the issues in Northern Ireland. It is absolutely right that we need to see a pragmatic and flexible approach. The EU has talked about that, and the vice-president himself outlined that point on British media. We need to see that in practice as we move forward. As I said, we have put forward a whole series of proposals and we look forward to the European Commission engaging with those in a real and direct way.

Jack Brereton: Following some of the comments last week, particularly those from President Macron, will my right hon. Friend do everything in his power to make it very clear to those in the EU who want to divide up our country that Northern Ireland is an integral part of the UK?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a correct and an important point. We have been crystal clear on this, and I will be again today: Northern Ireland is a full and an integral part of the United Kingdom. Authority is exercised within Northern Ireland by the UK, not the EU. We believe that being part of the UK is in the best interests of all in Northern Ireland, but we also believe, and I think it is fundamental, that Northern Ireland contributes to making us a stronger and more prosperous United Kingdom.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): Given that certain provisions of European Union law apply to the United Kingdom in respect of Northern Ireland by virtue of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, can the Secretary of State explain the legal effect of the unilateral extension of grace periods? Does he not agree that the time has come to do the right thing by the people of Northern Ireland and make use of the diversion of trade provisions of article 16 that allow for legally effective action against arrangements that are damaging the United Kingdom's internal market, businesses in Great Britain and consumers in Northern Ireland? Secretary of State, the time for action is now, not when the Belfast agreement is in complete tatters.

Brandon Lewis: We are working hard and in good faith to find solutions. Our overriding focus, as I have said, is on stability and safeguarding the Belfast/Good Friday agreement and restoring cross-community confidence in the practical operation of the protocol. The protocol could work with common sense, good faith and flexibility from the EU, and we are working to resolve the issues urgently, acutely aware of the time constraints that we face, as the hon. Lady rightly outlined.

We are continuing to talk, and I hope that we can make better progress through the Joint Committee structures designed for resolving these problems. If we cannot do that, as I and the Prime Minister have said, no options are off the table.

Mr Speaker: We now come to Kevin Brennan. It's Question 16.

Northern Ireland Protocol: Implementation

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol. [901170]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Brandon Lewis): You are always here to help, Mr Speaker. Thank you.

We have taken extensive steps to implement the protocol, including providing £500 million for a range of support schemes, such as the trader support service and the movement assistance scheme. The trader support service alone has created 1.8 million declarations, supporting nearly 700,000 consignments since January. Despite these huge efforts, though, the protocol is presenting significant challenges for Northern Ireland, and we are seeing sustained disruption to trade, which is causing real impacts on livelihoods and disruption for citizens. So unless pragmatic, risk-based solutions can be found rapidly to a range of issues, cross-community confidence in the protocol will be eroded. We will therefore be continuing to work actively with the EU to find urgent solutions.

Kevin Brennan: Sorry for the delay, Mr Speaker—I have only been here 20 years.

Is not the truth that the Prime Minister signed up for something in the protocol that he had no intention of honouring, in the way and practice he has followed throughout his life and got away with? The truth is, though, that he is not getting away with it now. Is not that the reality?

Brandon Lewis: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman has a very good read of the protocol. The protocol that we signed up to is very clear that it will not disrupt the everyday lives of people in their communities, but it will respect the integral market of the United Kingdom and the Good Friday/Belfast agreement. Arguably, two—some would argue all three—of those things are currently in breach. We have a duty to deliver for the people of Northern Ireland and we will do that.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Is it not a fact that the protocol has partitioned the United Kingdom? It has undermined business, damaged the political and social fabric of Northern Ireland, and our EU partners, in whose single market we share, do not even know that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom. There are more checks now happening between GB and Northern Ireland than between Belarus and the EU and between Russia and the EU. This morning, Lord Frost has told us that there is no risk whatever for any of these goods entering the single market. Give us a timeline, Secretary of State: when will this be fixed?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Gentleman makes some very important and correct points. The protocol was always about dealing with goods that are at risk or are moving

into the European Union. It is farcical to have a situation with products that are never moving into the European Union. Indeed, businesses, including well-known supermarkets that do not even have stores in the Republic of Ireland, are having to go through the same sort of checks. We want to ensure that that is resolved. We absolutely understand that the EU's core focus, as it has said, is on protecting its single market. For us, this is about respecting the single market, but our core focus is on protecting the Good Friday/Belfast agreement in all its strands, and ensuring that the residents and citizens of Northern Ireland can have access to the products that they should have as an integral, important part of the United Kingdom.

PRIME MINISTER

Mr Speaker: Before we start Prime Minister's questions, I would like to point out that the British sign language interpretation of proceedings is available to watch on parliamentlive.tv. I call Sir Robert Neill.

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [901305] **Sir Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I know that the Prime Minister will report later—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member has been away a long time. Question 1—try again.

Sir Robert Neill: Question 1, Mr Speaker; in my case, I have only been in the House for 15 years.

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): Today marks five years since the murder of our friend and colleague Jo Cox. My thoughts—and I am sure those of the whole House—are with her family and friends.

I am sure that the House will wish to join me in offering our thanks and best wishes to Sir Roy Stone, who is leaving the Government Chief Whip's office and the civil service. He has worked for 13 Chief Whips, and for over 20 years has played an invaluable role in delivering the Government of the day's legislative programme. We wish him well.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Sir Robert Neill: I am sure that we would all wish to associate ourselves with the Prime Minister's remarks in relation to both Jo Cox and Roy Stone.

I know that the Prime Minister will report to the House in more detail later on the G7 summit, which President Biden described as "extremely collaborative" and successful. In taking forward the agenda—in particular, the part of the agenda of the summit that calls for us to work to uphold the rule of law and respect for an international rules-based system—will the Prime Minister bear in mind and task all parts of the Government to promote the great asset that we have in English common law, and in the expertise and reputation for integrity of our judiciary and legal systems? Will he make sure that those willing assets are harnessed in the pursuit of that

G7 agenda, be it through writing commercial contracts with English law as a jurisdiction or helping, through our expertise, developing countries and markets?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an important and vital sector of our economy—our legal services industry and judicial system, which is admired around the world. It is one of the reasons that we are capable of attracting so much inward investment to this country and one of the key exports that we have been able to promote just recently—thanks, for instance, to our free trade deal with Australia.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): May I join with the Prime Minister's remarks in relation to Sir Roy Stone?

This week also marks the fourth anniversary of the Grenfell fire tragedy, in which 72 people lost their lives. It is frankly an outrage that there are still more than 200 high-rise flats with Grenfell-style cladding, and that many leaseholders are trapped in homes that are neither safe nor sellable. The best way to mark this tragedy is not with words, but with action; I urge the Prime Minister finally to end the cladding scandal.

As the Prime Minister has already said, today is the fifth anniversary of the death of our dear friend and colleague Jo Cox. Jo had already changed so many lives for the better. She was passionate about creating a fairer, more just world. I know she would have gone on to achieve so much more, and that she would have been so proud of the work of her foundation and what it is doing in her name. Jo and I were in the same intake into this House; we were friends and our children are around the same age. There is not a day that goes by when we do not miss Jo. I know that I speak not just for those on the Opposition Benches, but for many across the House, when I say that today we remember Jo. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Does the Prime Minister recognise that his decision to keep our borders open contributed to the spread of the delta variant in this country?

The Prime Minister: No. Captain Hindsight needs to adjust his retrospectoscope, because he is completely wrong. We put India on the red list on 23 April, and the delta variant was not so identified until 28 April and was only identified as a variant of concern on 7 May. When the right hon. and learned Gentleman criticises this Government for wanting to keep our borders open, just remember that he voted 43 times in the last five years to ensure that our border controls were kept in the hands of Brussels.

Keir Starmer: This is absurd. I have, on seven occasions at PMQs, raised the question of the borders with the Prime Minister. They are all marked up in the transcript; they are all there in *Hansard*, Prime Minister. It is time for a better defence: your defence is as bad as your border policy.

The Prime Minister talks about the dates. Let us go through the dates. On 24 March, a new variant was reported in India. On 1 April, India was reporting over 100,000 new infections a day, and rising. But the Prime Minister kept India off the red list until 23 April. In that time, 20,000 people came into the UK from India. What on earth did the Prime Minister expect would be the

consequences of that? The British people did their bit by following the rules and getting vaccinated, but the Prime Minister squandered it by letting a new variant into the country. That was not inevitable; it was the consequence of his indecision. If the Prime Minister disagrees with me—he answered the first question, "No"—what is his explanation as to why Britain has such high rates of the delta variant?

The Prime Minister: There is a very simple reason why the UK generally has a better understanding of the variants in these countries: we do 47% of the genomic testing in the world. I really think that the Leader of the Opposition should get his facts straight, because the delta variant, as I have said, was identified in this country on 28 April. I have a document on which I believe he is relying—it seems to be published by somebody called David Evans, general secretary of the Labour party—in which he says that the delta variant was identified on 1 April. He says that B1617—the delta variant—was designated as under investigation on 1 April. That is not the delta variant; that is the kappa variant. It is a "gamma" for the Labour party. The delta variant, as it happens, is seeded around the world in 74 countries and, sadly, is growing. But there is a difference between those countries and this country. In this country, we have vaccinated almost 79% of the adult population and given two vaccinations to 56%—a programme that he would have stopped by keeping us in the European Medicines Agency.

Keir Starmer: The question was: what is the Prime Minister's explanation for our high rates of the delta variant? Answer came there none, other than that, apparently, we understand the variants.

The data is very, very clear. Our NHS has been doing an amazing job with the vaccine roll-out, but while the NHS was vaccinating, the Prime Minister was vacillating. It is because of his indecision that our borders stayed open. It is because of his indecision that India stayed off the red list. It is because of his indecision that in that period 20,000 people came to this country from India. The consequences are now clear. The rate of the delta variant is much higher here than in other countries, and we learn today that tragically, once again, the UK has the highest infection rate in Europe: we did not want to top that table again. If his borders policy is so strong, how does the Prime Minister explain that?

The Prime Minister: For the ease of the House, the right hon. and learned Gentleman should begin by pulping his document in which he incorrectly identifies what the delta variant is. We took the most drastic steps possible to put India on the red list on 23 April, before that variant was even identified. The big difference between this country and the rest of Europe—he loves these comparisons—is that we have had the fastest vaccine roll-out anywhere in Europe. We have a very, very high degree of protection. It is thanks to the vaccine roll-out and the fantastic efforts of the NHS that we now have and can continue with one of the most open economies and societies in Europe and get on with our cautious but irreversible road map to freedom.

Keir Starmer: If the Prime Minister put as much effort into protecting our borders as he does to coming up with ridiculous excuses, the country would be reopening next week. Even now, what do we know? The delta

variant is responsible for 90% of infections in this country. He is persisting with a traffic light system that does not work and will not stop other variants coming in. After so many mistakes, and with the stakes so high, why does the Prime Minister not do what Labour is calling for: drop the traffic light system, get rid of the amber list, secure the borders and do everything possible to save the British summer?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman does not even know what the delta variant is. We have the toughest border measures anywhere in the world, and we will continue. We have 50 countries on the red list. If he is now saying that he wants to stop all transit, traffic and travel to and from this country, it is yet another flip-flop from the Leader of the Opposition—yet another totally unintelligible flip-flop. If he wants to close this country down to travel, which is what I understood him to be saying, it is not only yet another flip-flop, but it is also totally pointless, because we have 75% of our medicines and 50% of our food coming in from abroad. He has got to adopt a consistent position.

Keir Starmer: What I have learned is that the worse the position for the Prime Minister, the more pathetic it gets. Is he really suggesting that the 20,000 people who came in from India were bringing in vital medical supplies or food? It is absolutely ridiculous. What we were arguing for was for India to be on the red list between 1 and 23 April. If that had happened, we would not have the delta variant here, and it is as simple as that. The Prime Minister's former senior adviser got it absolutely right. He said, and I quote:

“Fundamentally, there was no proper border policy, because the Prime Minister never wanted a proper border policy.”

That is the man who was in the room. It is those in hospitality, in clubs, in pubs, the arts, tourism and travel who are paying the price of the Prime Minister's failure. All they ask is that if they have to keep their businesses closed, they get the support they need, but where is it? Business rate relief is being withdrawn from the end of this month, affecting 750,000 businesses. Furlough is being phased out. In Wales, the Labour Government have acted by extending business rate relief for a year and providing new support for those affected. When is the Prime Minister going to do the same for businesses in England?

The Prime Minister: We are proud of the support we have given to businesses up and down the country. The whole point about the cautious approach we are taking is to continue support with furlough, support through business rates, support through grants of up to £18,000, and there is support from councils—all that is continuing, but what we are also seeing is businesses slowly recovering. The growth in the economy in April was 2.3%. Card spending over the bank holiday weekend was actually 20% above pre-pandemic levels. I know how tough things have been, and we will look after business throughout this pandemic, but thanks to the vaccine roll-out and the cautious steps we are taking, we are seeing a shot in the arm for business across the country, and we will look after them all the way.

Keir Starmer: Yet again, it is not what the Government have done; it is what is needed now in light of the decision taken this week. UKHospitality says that the

sector will lose £3 billion because of the delay and that 200,000 jobs could be at risk. That is not what has been done, but what is needed now, Prime Minister. The Federation of Small Businesses warns that the Government are being dangerously complacent, and I think we have just seen an example of that.

We all want these restrictions to be over, for our economy to be open and for businesses to thrive, but the Prime Minister's indecision at the borders has blown it. *[Interruption.]* The problem with everything that the Prime Minister says today—both what he says at the Dispatch Box and also what he mutters—is that we have heard it all before so many times. Last March, he said we could turn the tide in 12 weeks—remember that? Then he said it will all be over by Christmas. Then we were told 21 June would be freedom day. Now we are told that 19 July is terminus day.

The British people do not expect miracles, but they do expect basic competence and honesty. When it comes to care homes, protective equipment or borders, we see the same pattern from this Prime Minister—too slow, too indecisive, over-promising, under-delivering. After all these failures and mistakes, why should anyone believe the Prime Minister now?

The Prime Minister: Why should anybody believe the Leader of the Opposition when he cannot decide what he thinks from one week to the next? He says he has a tough position on borders. Actually, he was attacking quarantine only recently, and saying that it was a “blunt instrument” that should be lessened. What I think the people of this country want to see is a Government getting on with the vaccine roll-out and getting on with our cautious but irreversible road map to freedom. I am very pleased, and he should say it again, that we have one of the fastest vaccine roll-outs anywhere in the world—certainly the fastest in Europe. It would not have been possible if we had stayed in the European Medicines Agency. We would not have been able to control our borders if, as he voted for 43 times, we had stayed in the EU. We are getting on with the job. We are bringing forward now 23 and 24-year-olds and asking them to come forward for their vaccines. I ask everybody to come forward for their second jab. I trust he has had his. We are delivering on our commitments to the British people—not only a great outcome at the G7 summit last weekend in Carbis Bay, but a new free trade agreement with Australia and building back better across our country. We are getting on with the job, and it would be a wonderful thing, once in his time as Leader of the Opposition, to hear some support for what the Government are doing and some backing up for our approach.

[901309] **Paul Bristow** (Peterborough) (Con): Last year, doctors and care settings issued an unprecedented number of “do not resuscitate” orders to patients with learning disabilities and mental illness. Many were unlawful and caused avoidable deaths. Despite urgent Care Quality Commission and NHS guidance, shockingly, this practice has continued. Last week, *The Telegraph* reported that Sonia Deleon died unresuscitated. Her family said she was given a DNR without them knowing, and with her learning disabilities and schizophrenia stated as reasons. Does the Prime Minister share my alarm about these cases, which should have no place in our care, and does he agree that they should be independently investigated?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this very sad case with me, and I am sure the whole House will be thinking of Sonia Deleon and her family. I think that such decisions on “do not resuscitate” should be made only in accordance with a decision involving the person concerned and their carers and families.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Can I associate myself with the remarks made by you, Mr Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition on the absolutely brutal death of our friend and colleague Jo Cox five years ago? She was a woman dedicated to public service who made, in her short time here, a tremendous contribution to this House. Our thoughts are very much with her family, her friends and all those who care very deeply for her loss.

Of course, as we do that, we should also reflect on what we saw earlier this week with the journalist Nick Watt chased through the streets of Whitehall by a mob seeking to intimidate. We must all stand up in this House for the rights of journalists to be able to go about their work safely.

I say good wishes both to Scotland and England ahead of the football match on Friday evening, but if I may say so, I hope that we do not see Scotland being dragged out of the Euros against our wishes at the end of the week.

As we enter the Chamber, we see what is reported to be a WhatsApp communication between the Prime Minister and Dominic Cummings. Perhaps the Prime Minister will clarify whether or not these are genuine, and whether or not the derogatory comments that he expressed on his Health Secretary are valid.

This morning, the details of the disastrous trade deal with Australia are slowly seeping out. It tells us everything we need to know that these details are being celebrated in Canberra, but are busy being concealed in London. For all the spin, it is clear that this Tory Government have just thrown Scottish farmers and crofters under their Brexit bus, just as they sold out our fishing community. So, today, those with most to lose from this deal do not need to hear the Prime Minister’s usual waffle. Their livelihoods are at stake, Prime Minister. Just this once—just this once—they deserve honest answers from this Government. Will the Prime Minister confirm that from day one of this deal, 35,000 tonnes of Australian beef, and 25,000 tonnes of Australian lamb will be free to flood the UK market, tariff free?

The Prime Minister: This is a great deal for the UK. It is a great deal for Scotland, for Scottish whisky, and for Scottish business and services exports. It is a great deal for Scottish legal services. It is also a great deal for Scottish farming, and how tragic—how absolutely tragic—that it should be the posture of the Scottish National party to see absolutely no way that Scottish farmers will be able to take advantage of opportunities to export around the world. What the right hon. Gentleman does not realise, is that £350 million-worth of UK food already goes from this country to Australia. This is an opportunity to turbocharge those exports, get behind Scottish farming, and encourage that, not run it down.

Ian Blackford: My goodness—I do not even think the Prime Minister can believe that tripe. In the Tories’ desperation to get a post-Brexit trade deal with somebody—

anybody—they have given the farm away, literally. It is blindingly obvious who are the winners and who are the losers in this deal. Australia’s economy will benefit to the tune of \$1.3 billion a year. The UK Government’s own assessment states that the Australian deal is worth just “0.02% of GDP”. We would need 200 Australian deals to come close to mitigating the cost of Brexit. We were told that Brexit was all about taking back control, but for our farmers and crofters there has been no scrutiny, no consultation, and no consent. If the Prime Minister is really confident about the benefits of this deal, does he have the guts to put it to a vote in this House?

The Prime Minister: The people of this country voted for this Government to get on and deliver free trade deals around the world. I believe they were totally right. The right hon. Gentleman talks about tripe, and when it comes to exporting the intestines of sheep, which I know is a valuable part of Scottish tradition, even that is now being opened up around the world, thanks to the deals that this country is doing. If he is saying that he wants to go back into the EU, hand back control of our fisheries and our agriculture to Brussels, and lose all the opportunities that this country has gained, I think he is frankly out of his mind and going in totally the wrong direction. If he means another referendum, we had one of those.

Mr Speaker: May I just say gently to everybody that we now need to turbocharge questions and answers?

[901311] **Robert Lagan** (High Peak) (Con): Thanks to our unique geography, High Peak has some of the worst broadband and mobile coverage gaps anywhere in the country. We are making good progress, but may I urge the Prime Minister to redouble efforts in the roll-out of ultrafast broadband, especially to hard-to-reach rural areas such as High Peak? May I suggest that the Government build on the success of the kickstart scheme, with more focused support for key infrastructure industries, so that we can recruit a new generation of highly skilled broadband engineers to turbocharge the roll-out?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, which is why we are working with industry to accelerate our rural network. Coverage across the UK has massively increased, and will be increasing thanks to the steps we are taking.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): I know that, like me, the Prime Minister cares passionately about the Union. Can he confirm that the passing of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 and the Northern Ireland protocol that forms part of it, has not resulted in an implied repeal of article 6 of the Act of Union, which enables Northern Ireland to trade freely with the rest of this United Kingdom? Will he commit fully to restoring Northern Ireland’s place within the UK internal market?

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course. I can give assurances on both counts. I can say that unless we see progress on the implementation of the protocol, which I think is currently totally disproportionate, then we will have to take the necessary steps to do exactly what the right hon. Gentleman says.

[901315] **David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the rebuild of Hillingdon Hospital will be of great benefit

to his constituents and mine? Will he commit to working with me and other local Members of Parliament, and potential future MPs such as Peter Fleet in Chesham and Amersham, to secure the future of services at Hillingdon's other site, Mount Vernon Hospital in my constituency, which provides specialist medical treatments to a very wide catchment area?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is totally right about Hillingdon Hospital, which has a great future. I look forward to working with him to ensure that the future of services at Mount Vernon is also protected. I know that a full consultation is due to start in September.

[901306] **Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Keith, a hotel manager in Oxford, contacted me last week because he is worried. Even if this country does open up in the next few weeks, he will not be able to run at full capacity due to chronic staff shortages. Local staff are leaving the industry because of the uncertainty caused by this Government's bungled handling of the pandemic. The EU staff have already left because of the botched handling of Brexit and he cannot recruit from abroad because of the damaging new immigration policy. This is the Prime Minister's wake-up call. Oxfordshire's economy alone relies on the hospitality industry to the tune of £2.5 billion. Will the Government introduce a covid recovery visa to help Keith to recruit the staff he desperately needs?

The Prime Minister: It is absolutely true that as we open up our economy there are more vacancies, which is great. We also have large numbers of young people in this country who need jobs and large numbers of people who are still furloughed. What we want to see is those people coming forward to get those jobs. Of course, we will retain an open and flexible approach towards allowing talent to come in from overseas.

[901318] **Anthony Mangnall** (Totnes) (Con): The Prime Minister knows the full value of the UK shellfish industry and the opportunity potential. This week the Food Standards Agency produced a list of recommendations that will allow us to regrade our waters and challenge anomalous results. However, the recommendations only come in in September this year. Will the Prime Minister flex his muscles and see if the report and the recommendations can be brought forward to the end of this month?

The Prime Minister: I will do everything I can to ensure that we accelerate that process. My hon. Friend is right to raise it. A great deal of progress has already been made and the Food Standards Agency has been flexible, but we need to go further. We will make sure that great British shellfish can continue to be exported to Europe and around the world.

[901307] **Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): The UK Government's trade deal with Australia has been made with no consultation, no consent and no parliamentary scrutiny. The president of the National Farmers Union Scotland said:

"Our seafood industry has already been hit hard by Brexit and now Scottish farming is next to be sacrificed – and once again it's Scotland's key industries which will bear the brunt of a Tory Brexit people here did not vote for".

Does the Prime Minister accept the concerns of the NFU Scotland president, or does he think he knows better?

The Prime Minister: From listening to the SNP, Mr Speaker, you would think there was no Scotch whisky industry or no banking and financial services industries in Scotland. Even then, they are missing the point because this is a massive opportunity for the Scottish agriculture sector. What they need is a different type of MP who can champion and get behind them, and who actually believes in Scotland. That is what the people of Scotland need.

[901319] **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): One of the reasons for the popularity of the Prime Minister is that he has always been on the side of the public, rather than on the side of the establishment. Given that overall deaths in the UK over the last 13 weeks are 8,873 below the five-year average, which includes the time the Indian variant has been around, can my right hon. Friend explain why, instead of trusting his world-leading vaccine programme, the common sense of the British people and his Conservative instincts of individual freedom and individual responsibility, he instead prefers to trust people like Professor Susan Michie at the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, a long-standing member of the Communist party who last week let the cat out of the bag and said she wanted some covid restrictions to last forever?

The Prime Minister: Nobody, least of all my hon. Friend or I, wants to see covid restrictions last forever, nor do I think that they are going to last forever. As I made clear earlier this week, I think we can have a high degree of confidence that our vaccination programme will work. I think that we need to give it a little more time, as I have explained, to save many thousands more lives by vaccinating millions more people. That is what we want to do.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): My constituent Ross has been invited to sit his driving theory test in Oban, 100 miles away from his home in Hamilton. His test has already been cancelled twice, first in November last year and then in February 2021. This September, Ross is starting a university course in paramedic science with a view to becoming a qualified paramedic in the Scottish Ambulance Service with placements across Scotland. Being able to drive is crucial. Will the Prime Minister meet me to discuss the delays in the scheduling of Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency theory tests, and the impracticality of the locations being offered? [901308]

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the problem, and we are doing what we can to accelerate the number of driving instructors and testers to allow young people such as the gentleman that she mentions to get their driving test done, and enable them to fulfil their ambitions.

Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): I support the Prime Minister's comments on Jo Cox and, as a former Chief Whip, his comment on Sir Roy Stone. Sir Roy gave amazing service to me when I was Chief Whip during the worst of the Brexit years in dealing with a hung Parliament and with the occasional disruptive Back Bencher.

Northern Ireland faces some challenges over the coming weeks in terms of nominating a First Minister and a Deputy First Minister. Does the Prime Minister agree that it is vital that the parties stick to the agreements

that have been made in the “New Decade, New Approach” deal, which he and I negotiated 18 months ago, and that if they fail to do that—I know he does not like this concept—the UK Government ultimately act as a backstop?

The Prime Minister: It gives me great pleasure to thank my right hon. Friend for all the work that he did on the “New Decade, New Approach” deal. I agree that it would be a good thing for the whole package to be agreed, and I certainly support the approach that he has set out. I think that what the people of Northern Ireland want is a stable, functioning and mature Executive.

Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (Alba): A new Lord Advocate has taken up position, but the structural flaws in the office remain. In no other legal jurisdiction in the UK, or indeed in the western world, is the Government’s senior legal adviser simultaneously the country’s chief prosecutor; yet the role is enshrined in the Scotland Act 1998. Will the Prime Minister commit to changes so that that historical anachronism can be changed and a separation of powers achieved? [901310]

The Prime Minister: First, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the outstanding success of his party in the recent elections. I will study the anomaly that he raises and revert to him as soon as possible.

Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con): May I welcome the Taskforce on Innovation, Growth and Regulatory Reform report, published today by my right hon. Friends the Members for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) and for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman)? The report makes recommendations about how to seize new opportunities from Brexit and back start-ups and new tech. Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister look closely at that report so that we can make the most of the great benefits of Brexit and lead the world in the development of new technologies?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I thank my hon. and right hon. Friends for their excellent report, and I think it is time to put a TIGRR in the tank.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I associate myself with the remarks concerning the fifth anniversary of the murder of Jo Cox. Jo was a dear personal friend and colleague, who will always be missed and remembered, and whose extraordinary legacy endures far beyond this place. Last month, a fire in an east London block of flats caused three people to be hospitalised and dozens more to be treated for smoke inhalation. That block was one of more than 200 high-rise buildings in England still fitted with Grenfell-style cladding. I ask the Prime Minister why it is that four years after the Grenfell tragedy took 72 lives, and after all the warnings, all the tireless campaigning and the unspeakable injustice, people are still living in unsafe flats, and his Government have failed to end the cladding scandal. [901312]

The Prime Minister: We have invested massively in removing cladding from high-rise blocks, and we will continue to do so. I know the structure in question and I do believe that Ballymore, the company concerned, has been too slow. We are on its case. I think it is very important that people understand that overall risks of

death by fire have been coming down for a very long time and will continue to come down. It is simply not the case that all the high-rise buildings in this country are unsafe, and it is very important that Members of Parliament stress that.

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con): Independent lifeboat stations such as the Hamble lifeboat in my constituency respond to over 100 incidents a year in the Solent. The pandemic has increased the operating costs of independent lifeboat stations while also restricting their ability to raise money. Will the Prime Minister look to see what more the Government can do to support independent lifeboat stations such as the Hamble lifeboat as they keep a watchful eye on all of us?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising the excellent work of Hamble lifeboat. In April last year, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor put forward another £750 million in support of charities such as that one.

[901313] **Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): Staff at two hospitality venues in Glasgow, Blue Dog and AdLib, have had no furlough payments since the summer of last year. Although I have raised this with HMRC directly, the situation still has not moved forward. If I send the Prime Minister the details, will he knock heads together; help the staff, whose bills are going unpaid and debts are rising; and get the cash that they are entitled to into their accounts?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to look at it.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): When can we expect the co-ordinated chorus of SAGE members recommencing their media appearances to depress morale, and does my right hon. Friend fear having to give another press conference at which he again postpones the return of our freedoms? We are rightly told that we need to learn to live with covid, so what can the Prime Minister say to the country to convince us of that reality?

The Prime Minister: Academic and scientific freedom are an invaluable part of our country, and I note that my scientific colleagues would echo my sentiment that we need to learn to live with covid.

[901314] **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): The Government’s two-child cap and childcare proof of payment rules mean that my hard-working constituent, Ms Cowan, who is a single parent on universal credit supporting four kids, faces £1,000 of nursery arrears. She is therefore at risk of losing the kids’ nursery places, as a result of which she would have to give up work and would therefore be at risk of sanction and forced further into debt and poverty. Can the Prime Minister help my constituent out of this trap and fix these rules that are pushing people out of work and into poverty?

The Prime Minister: I would be happy to study the case, but the whole point of universal credit, which this Government introduced, is that it is helping hundreds of thousands of people into work. That is its success.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): I associate myself with the comments of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition about our friend Jo Cox.

Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating rugby league legend Kevin Sinfield on his OBE in the Queen's birthday honours? Kevin has done so much to raise awareness of motor neurone disease and support his good friend Rob Burrow. MND is a devastating disease. There is no cure, but scientists believe they are on the cusp of developing effective treatments. Will the Government please commit to investing £50 million over five years to establish a virtual MND research institute and to accelerate research?

Mr Speaker: Prime Minister, I totally agree with that, and it should have been a knighthood.

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is an OBE, and I thank Kevin Sinfield very much for his outstanding work. We are following it up by spending £55 million on research into MND, but there will be more to come as part of our general massive investment in life sciences.

[901316] **Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Simply put, the trade deal that the Prime Minister has struck means undercutting our farmers and short-changing consumers, and it will set animal welfare standards back by decades. The RSPCA has said that the Prime Minister's deal

"will start a race to the bottom and the losers will be billions of farmed animals and UK farmers."

Does the Prime Minister accept these concerns from the experts at the RSPCA, or does he think that he knows better?

The Prime Minister: I really think that these constant attacks on Australia, its standards and its animal welfare standards will be very much resented by the people of Australia, and will not be recognised. Australia is marked five out of five, which is the highest possible, for animal welfare by the World Organisation for Animal Health performance of veterinary services evaluation team. This deal that we have done is the first ever to incorporate high animal welfare standards, as part of the package that Australia has agreed.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to assisted dying campaigner Noel Conway, who has died after taking the decision to

have his breathing support removed, and does my right hon. Friend agree that it is now time for Parliament to properly consider the law on assisted dying?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend, and I know that the whole House will be in sympathy with Noel Conway's family and friends. There are very deeply and sincerely held views on both sides of this matter, and a change in the law would obviously be one for Parliament to consider.

[901317] **Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): Over the course of this question session, the Prime Minister has been presented with the views of stakeholder after stakeholder expressing real fears and concerns over these bungled trade talks. Why is the Prime Minister willing to put the livelihoods of farmers and crofters across Scotland in peril for a shoddy trade deal with Australia, which will not even cover 1% of the lost opportunities to Europe's markets that we have lost through Brexit?

The Prime Minister: We have not lost opportunities to Europe's markets through Brexit.

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): In 2014, Runnymede and Weybridge was hit by devastating floods, and my constituents live under the fear of flooding. Last week, the Government signed off the outline business case for the River Thames flooding alleviation scheme, which will allow the detailed design and planning for this scheme to begin in earnest. It is fantastic news and a monumental milestone, and it will massively improve our protection from flooding. Will the Prime Minister join me in celebrating and thanking everyone who has got us to where we are, and does he agree that we need to keep the momentum going?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is completely right. The £1 million River Thames scheme will reduce the flood risk for 11,000 homes and 16,000 businesses, and I thank him for raising it with me today.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the questions, so I will now go straight to the statement. I call the Prime Minister to make the statement.

G7 and NATO Summits

12.41 pm

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on the G7 summit I chaired in Carbis Bay and the NATO summit in Brussels.

Let me first thank the people of Cornwall, Carbis Bay and St Ives for welcoming the representatives of the world's most powerful democracies to their home, an enchanting setting for the first gathering of G7 leaders in two years, the first since the pandemic began, and President Biden's first overseas visit since taking office. Our aim was to demonstrate how the world's democracies are ready and able to address the world's toughest problems, offering solutions and backing them up with concrete action.

The G7 will combine our strengths and expertise to defeat covid, minimise the risk of another pandemic, and build back better, fairer and greener for the benefit of all. Alongside our partners, the G7 is now engaged in the biggest and fastest vaccination programme in history, which is designed to protect the whole world by the end of next year. My fellow leaders agreed to supply developing countries with another billion doses—either directly or through other channels—of which 100 million will come from the UK.

The world's most popular vaccine was developed here, and the express purpose of the deal between the British Government, Oxford University and AstraZeneca was to create an inoculation that would be easy to store, quick to distribute and available at cost price, or zero profit, in order to protect as many people as possible. The results are becoming clearer every day: over 500 million Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines have been administered in 168 countries so far, accounting for 96% of the doses distributed to developing nations by COVAX, the global alliance that the UK helped to establish. With every passing hour, people are being protected across the world, and lives saved, by the formidable expertise that the UK was able to assemble.

But all the efforts of this country and many others, no matter how generous and far-sighted, would be futile in the face of another lethal virus that might escape our efforts, so the G7 has agreed to support a Global Pandemic Radar to spot new pathogens before they begin to spread, allowing immediate containment. In case a new virus gets through anyway, our scientists will embark on a mission to develop the ability to create new vaccines, treatments and tests in just 100 days, compared with the 300 required for covid.

Even as we persevere against this virus, my fellow leaders share my determination to look beyond today's crisis and build back better, greener and fairer. If we can learn anything from this tragedy, we have at least been given a chance to break with the past, do things better and do them differently. This time, as our economies rebound, we must avoid the mistakes we made after the financial crash of 2008 and ensure that everyone benefits from the recovery. The surest way to our future prosperity is to design fair and open rules and standards for the new frontiers of the global economy, so the G7 will devise a fairer tax system for global corporations, reversing the race to the bottom, and will strive to ensure that new technology serves as a force for prosperity and hope, strengthening freedom and openness.

My fellow leaders will act as one against an increasing injustice—the denial of an education to millions of girls across the world—by working to get another 40 million girls into school by 2025. I am happy to say that the G7 agreed to provide more than half of the \$5 billion sought by the Global Partnership for Education to transform the prospects of millions of children in developing countries, and £430 million will come from the UK.

Our duty to future generations compels us to protect our planet from catastrophic climate change. Every country in the G7 has promised to achieve net zero by 2050, wiping out our contribution to global warming from that date onwards. To achieve that target, we will halve our carbon emissions by 2030 compared with 2010 levels. The G7 resolved to end any Government support for unabated coal-fired power generation overseas, and to increase and improve climate finance between now and 2025. We will consecrate 30% of our land and sea to nature, protecting vast areas in all their abundance and diversity of life, giving millions of species the chance to recover from the ravages of recent decades.

It is precisely because safeguarding our planet requires global action that the G7 will offer developing countries a new partnership, the Build Back Better World, to help to construct new, clean and green infrastructure in a way that is transparent and environmentally responsible. There is no contradiction between averting climate change and creating highly skilled and well-paid jobs, both in our country and around the world; we can and will achieve both by means of a green industrial revolution at home and green infrastructure abroad.

I was honoured to welcome our friends the leaders of India, South Korea, Australia and South Africa as guests in Carbis Bay—virtually, of course, in the case of the Prime Minister of India. On Monday, Scott Morrison and I were delighted to reach a free trade agreement between the UK and Australia, creating fantastic opportunities for both our countries, eliminating tariffs on all British exports—whether Scotch whisky or cars from the midlands—and making it easier for young British people to live and work in Australia. We have also included protections for British farmers over the next 15 years and unprecedented protections and provisions for animal welfare. This House will, of course, be able to scrutinise the agreement once the texts are finalised.

This is exactly how global Britain will help to generate jobs and opportunities at home and level up our whole United Kingdom. Our agreement with Australia is a vital step towards the even greater prize of the UK joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a \$9 trillion free trade area embracing the fastest growing economies of the world.

Together with the G7, the countries represented at Carbis Bay comprise a “Democratic XI”—free nations living on five continents, spanning different faiths and cultures, but united by a shared belief in liberty, democracy and human rights. Those ideals were encapsulated in the Atlantic charter agreed by Winston Churchill and President Roosevelt in 1941, when Britain was the only surviving democracy in Europe and the very existence of our freedom was in peril. The courage and valour of millions of people ensured that our ideals survived and flourished, and 80 years on, President Biden and I met within sight of HMS Prince of Wales, the Royal Navy's newest aircraft carrier and the linear successor of the battleship on which the original charter was devised;

and we agreed a new Atlantic charter, encompassing the full breadth of British and American co-operation in science and technology, trade and global security.

The surest guarantee of our security is NATO, which protects a billion people in 30 countries, and the summit in Brussels on Monday agreed the wholesale modernisation of the alliance to meet new dangers, including in space and cyber-space, reflecting the priorities of our own integrated review of foreign and defence policy.

Britain has the biggest defence budget in Europe, comfortably exceeding the NATO target of 2% of national income. We have committed our nuclear deterrent and our cyber capabilities to the alliance, and we contribute more troops than any other country to NATO's deployment to protect Poland and the Baltic states. We do more for the security of our continent than any other European power, showing that we mean it when we say that an attack on any NATO ally shall be considered an attack on all—a pledge that has kept the peace for over 70 years, and which President Biden reaffirmed on behalf of the United States.

Together, these two summits showed the enduring strength of the Atlantic alliance and the bonds we treasure with kindred democracies across the globe. They have provided the best possible foundation for COP26 in Glasgow in November, when the UK will bring the whole world together in a common cause. They demonstrated how global Britain creates jobs at home, while striving in unison with our friends for a greener, safer and fairer world.

I commend this statement to the House.

12.51 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for advance sight of his statement.

It was a Labour Government and a Labour Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, who helped found NATO, and it is an alliance that Labour will always value and protect. So we welcome agreement on the NATO 2030 agenda—in particular, strengthening NATO's cyber-security capability. We also welcome the deepening support for our friends and allies in Ukraine and Georgia, and the recognition of the global security implications of the climate emergency, and for the first time, of the challenges that China poses to global security and stability.

On the UK-Australia trade deal, we all want to see Britain taking trading opportunities around the world, but the devil will be in the detail, and we look forward to scrutinising the deal in Parliament, in particular for its impact on British farmers and on food standards.

The G7 summit should have been the most important G7 in a generation—the first of the recovery, the first with a new US President, a chance for Britain to lead the world, as we did at Gleneagles in 2005 or after the global financial crisis in 2009; but whether on global vaccination, the climate emergency, middle east peace or the Northern Ireland protocol, the summit ended up as a wasted opportunity.

The priority for the summit had to be a clear plan to vaccinate the world. That is not just a moral imperative; it is in our self-interest, as the delta variant makes clear. Without global vaccine coverage, this virus will continue to boomerang, bringing more variants and more disruption to these shores. The World Health Organisation has said that 11 billion doses are needed—11 billion doses.

The summit promised less than one tenth of that. No new funding, no plan to build a global vaccine capacity and no progress on patent waivers. The headlines of 1 billion doses may be what the Prime Minister wanted, but it is not what the world needed.

The same is true of the climate emergency. This is the single greatest challenge that the world will face in decades to come, but this summit saw no progress on climate finance. The communiqué speaks only of “commitments already made” and of those yet to be made. There was no plan, let alone a Marshall plan, to speed up cuts to global emissions, and there was little in the communiqué beyond existing commitments. This summit was meant to be a stepping stone to COP26, but, if anything, it was a step back.

It was also disappointing that there was nothing to suggest that any progress was made to restart the middle east peace process. A new Government in Israel, combined with a new US President, provides a real opportunity to end the injustice and finally to deliver an independent and sovereign Palestine alongside a safe and secure Israel. Sadly, the resumption of hostilities overnight shows the price of that failure. Did the Prime Minister discuss this with world leaders, including with President Biden?

The summit should also have been an opportunity to resolve, not inflame, tensions over the Northern Ireland protocol. It started with an unprecedented diplomatic rebuke from our closest allies, and it ended with the White House still speaking of “candid” discussions. It was overshadowed by the failure of the Prime Minister to make the deal that he negotiated—he negotiated—work.

The Prime Minister may think that this is all part of a grand diplomatic game, but Northern Ireland is far too serious for that. When a Prime Minister loses the trust of our allies and trashes Britain's reputation for upholding international law, it is hardly surprising that we are left isolated and unable to lead.

Despite all this, I have no doubt that the Prime Minister will be pleased with the G7 summit, because it delivered everything that he wanted: some good headlines; some nice photos; and even a row with the French over sausages. That just shows how narrow the Prime Minister's ambition for Britain really is. It is why this was never going to be a Gleneagles-style success, and why the Prime Minister played the role of host but not leader, of tour guide but not statesman. On those terms, this G7 was a success, but on any other, it was a failure.

The Prime Minister: In a long career of miserabilism and defeatism, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has really excelled himself there. It was a very powerful statement after a long and difficult period in which the world came together and decided to build back better for the world. One thing that he did not mention was the fantastic agreement that we reached to come together to support the whole of the developing world, which I think he should approve of, in allowing them to have access to clean, green technology, financed by the multinational development banks, but bringing in the private sector from around the world. It is a fantastic step forward for the world.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman nickels and dimes what happened on vaccines. I think that it was fantastic that, on top of the 1 billion that we have already given, the world agreed another 1 billion vaccines, when people are racing to vaccinate their own populations.

[*The Prime Minister*]

They agreed another 1 billion vaccines from the G7—100 million more from this country. He is constantly running this country's efforts down. Of the 1.4 billion COVAX vaccines that have already been distributed, 500 million of them are directly due to the efforts of this country, which has given £1.6 billion to supporting COVAX and another £548 million to supporting Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

As for climate change, I do not know what planet the right hon. and learned Gentleman is on. This was an extraordinary achievement by the summit. Not only did all countries commit to net zero by 2050, but we are a long way towards getting the £100 billion that we need for climate change financing. He complains about the Northern Ireland protocol, but it is not at all clear what he believes himself. He says that he is not in favour of checks at the border between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. [*Interruption.*] There should be no border, he says. He is quite right. Then what is his policy? That is exactly what this Government are standing for. I would like to understand what he actually stands for. [*Interruption.*] We want to get rid of those checks, and if he will support us in doing so, I would be grateful, finally, for his support.

I think the right hon. and learned Gentleman said something positive about the NATO summit. I am glad of that, although it is striking that he is not joined, for once, by the shadow Foreign Secretary, as it is still her view, as far as I can remember, that we should get rid of the nuclear deterrent—our own nuclear deterrent, on which our NATO security guarantee relies. [*Interruption.*] Maybe that is not her position; maybe she has changed it. As for the trade deal with Australia, the shadow International Trade Secretary has said that she does not think it possible for the UK to export food and drink to Australia because it goes “off”—actually, this country exports £350 million-worth of food and drink. The right hon. and learned Gentleman should congratulate UK exporters, support the free trade deal and stop being so generally down in the mouth about everything.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's leadership of the G7 over the weekend and many of its successful outcomes. During the G7, the United States proposed that all the countries adopt a common strategy on China's disgusting use of forced labour and confront it. I understand that some of the European countries dissented from that approach, so I ask my right hon. Friend: does he stand with President Biden on this issue, not with his dissenters? If so, will my right hon. Friend emphasise that by informing the House when the Government will bring forward their promised export controls to keep goods produced by Uyghur slave labour off our shelves and the promised changes to the Modern Slavery Act 2015? Those things are very important and the Prime Minister can re-emphasise his strong credentials.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. We have already put in Magnitsky sanctions against those involved in forced labour in Xinjiang, and we will continue to have very tough import controls on any such produce.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I thank the Prime Minister for advance sight of his statement. I can sense, after a week of ascending to the heady heights of hosting global leaders, just how thrilled the Prime Minister is to be back in this House answering questions from us mere mortals. But even us mere mortals, looking at the G7 from afar, can detect the difference between a welcoming host and an influential leader. Even a raft of carefully crafted photo opportunities in Cornwall could not hide the fact that this Prime Minister and his Government are deeply diminished on the world stage. The UK is the only G7 country cutting overseas aid and the only G7 country being questioned about its commitment to previously signed international treaties; and the UK remains the G7 country with the smallest covid stimulus package.

Although the Prime Minister may have hoped to relaunch global Britain, what was really on show over the last week was Brexit Britain—a more isolated and less influential place. Prior to the summit, the Prime Minister built up the prospects of a new Marshall plan, promoting climate action in developing countries, but what was announced appeared to be a repackaging of previous announcements. I can see the Prime Minister shaking his head, so may I ask him to confirm the exact figure the UK will be contributing to this “Marshall plan” for climate action?

On covid recovery, President Biden openly encouraged other leaders to embrace the economic logic of an investment-led recovery, instead of returning to the failed policy of austerity cuts. Does the Prime Minister agree with that economic logic? Will he therefore explain why the UK has the smallest covid stimulus package of any G7 country? Finally on the NATO summit, will the Prime Minister detail what concrete proposals were agreed to apply appropriate pressure to protect the human rights of the persecuted Uyghur Muslim minority in China?

The Prime Minister: On the Uyghurs in China, no concrete measures were discussed at NATO, but as I said in my answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith), we in this country remain implacably committed to opposing the forced labour there and to sanctioning those who profit from the forced labour in Xinjiang.

The right hon. Gentleman's characterisation of the summit is as erroneous as that of the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). It was a fantastically successful summit in bringing the world together on vaccination and on tackling climate change. The UK's own contribution, which the right hon. Gentleman deprecates, is massive. I think the people of this country will think it astonishing that at a time when we have been through a pandemic, and have spent £407 billion looking after jobs and livelihoods in this country, we are still able—[*Interruption.*] I will give him the figure: we are still able to supply £11.6 billion to help the developing world to tackle the consequences of climate change. The right hon. Gentleman should be proud of that and not run his country down.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend's significant success at the G7 last weekend has sadly been dented by the fact that Britain is the only G7 country cutting vital aid and is doing so in the middle of a global pandemic. That decision is not

only doing grave damage to the reputation of global Britain; it will also lead to more than 100,000 avoidable deaths, principally among women and children. Will he reflect on the fact that many of us, in all parts of the parliamentary party, are urging him to reverse these terrible humanitarian cuts, and that we are not, as he suggested in Prime Minister's questions last week, lefty propagandists, but his political friends, allies and supporters, who want him to think again?

The Prime Minister: I have the utmost respect for my right hon. Friend's record in overseas aid, but I have to say that the changes that we have made to official development assistance have not been raised with me by anybody at the G7; nor have they by any recipient country—and I have talked to many of them. That is because they know that the United Kingdom remains one of the biggest donors in the world—second in the G7—and, in spite of all the difficulties that we have been going through, we are contributing £10 billion this year to supporting countries around the world. We have also just increased our spending on female education. That was one thing that people did raise with me, and they did so to congratulate the UK Government on what we were doing. People in this country should be very proud of the contributions that they are making.

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD) [V]: [*Inaudible*] the Prime Minister waxed lyrical about the fight against climate change, but only after stepping off his private jet; he made the case for investing in girls' education around the world, yet he is cutting the amount we spend on it by 40% this year; he talked up the importance of international agreements while reneging on the one he signed; and he advocated the importance of democracy while introducing plans to make it harder for people to vote in this country. When will the Prime Minister realise that his approach of "Do as I say, not as I do" is ruinous to Britain's reputation on the world stage?

The Prime Minister: The Liberal Democrats should get their facts right. We are not cutting spending on girls' education, to pick one of the points made by the right hon. Gentleman; we are actually increasing it by at least 15%. We are spending £432 million on the Global Partnership for Education.

Look at what this country is doing on tackling climate change, with the commitment to net zero. That was actually made after we were in coalition with the right hon. Gentleman. Freed from the shackles of Lib Dem hypocrisy, we were able to get on with some serious work and commit, under my premiership—freed from the uselessness of the Lib Dems—£11.6 billion to help the people of the world to tackle climate change. He should realise that for people listening to him who really care about tackling climate change and allowing the world to build back cleaner, greener and better, he is making it harder not just to vote, but to vote Lib Dem.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend recall President Macron insisting that nothing in the Northern Ireland protocol is negotiable even though he admits that it contains what he calls inconsistencies? If the peace and stability of Northern Ireland is being undermined by the application of the protocol, then it is obvious that the protocol itself must be renegotiated: how could anyone seriously consider

otherwise? Will my right hon. Friend urge the EU not to give precedence to the protocol over the peace process and the Good Friday agreement, and will he remind it of the 2017 joint report, which included the aspiration that the then backstop would be removed via negotiations and what it calls "specific solutions"? Will he pursue that policy?

The Prime Minister: The problem at the moment is the application of the protocol. The protocol makes it very clear that there should be no distortions of trade and that the Good Friday peace process, above all, must be upheld, but it is being applied in such a way as to destabilise that peace process and applied in a highly asymmetrical way. All we are asking for is a pragmatic approach. I hope very much that we will get that, but if we cannot get that, then I will certainly take the steps that my hon. Friend describes.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Monday's Australian trade deal announcement revealed the Prime Minister's fear of democratic accountability. He has withheld details of the agreement and prevented Parliament from doing our proper job of scrutiny at the proper time. Yet, from day one, Australian farmers will be able to export over 60 times more beef before UK tariffs kick in—that is no tariff whatsoever on up to 35,000 tonnes of potentially low-welfare beef. So, from day one, will he at least commit to an annual assessment of the economic impact of his deal on Welsh beef and lamb farmers?

The Prime Minister: I will repeat the point I have made to many Opposition Members. This is an opportunity for UK farming and indeed for Welsh farmers. The right hon. Lady speaks with apprehension about 35,000 tonnes of Australian beef. We already import about 300,000 tonnes of EU beef. Australian farmers observe very, very high animal welfare standards, and they will only get completely tariff-free access after 15 years. After 15 years, we are going to give people in Australia the same rights of access as we give the 27 other EU countries.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): The recent agreements on cyber defence policy and technological co-operation announced at the NATO summit in Brussels will mean that the alliance remains as strong as ever when faced with new threats. Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister confirm that he remains utterly committed to NATO as the foundation of our collective security?

The Prime Minister: Yes. NATO has protected the world, and particularly the European continent, for 72 years, and it was clear from the conversation around the table that it will continue to do so for decades to come.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP) [V]: Reports emanating from the summit suggest that Monsieur Macron does not seem to understand the constitutional parameters of the United Kingdom, given that he thought that we were part of a different country. Will the Prime Minister take steps to ensure that all our partners know what those parameters are? Will he also take great care in the next few days and weeks not to jeopardise devolution even further in Northern Ireland, as it has been put in jeopardy in the past few days as a result of Sinn Féin's actions?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman. We want to strengthen Northern Ireland and strengthen Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom, and that is what we are going to be doing.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the success of the G7, which I think did Britain proud. May I ask him about the NATO summit and whether there were any discussions about the role for the alliance in the maintenance and protection of energy security and, in particular, about the need to reduce dependence on Russia? Specifically, were there any discussions about the strategic vulnerability being introduced to Europe by the Germans' selfish obsession with the Nord Stream 2 project? If such a discussion did not occur, will he please ensure that it does?

The Prime Minister: I do not think I am giving anything away by telling my right hon. Friend that there were certainly discussions about the vital importance of all of us getting to net zero and avoiding a dependence on hydrocarbons, whether it is strategically unwise or not.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green) [V]: The failure of the G7 to reach an agreement on ending investment in all fossil fuels speaks volumes about the Prime Minister's true climate leadership. Today he mentions coal but again ignores oil and gas. That is not a green industrial revolution; that is business as usual. The International Energy Agency said last month that there must be no new oil, gas or coal developments if the world is to reach net zero, so with the success of COP26 now hanging in the balance, will he heed the call from 101 Nobel laureates for a global fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty, and will he pursue that with G7 leaders and others before the climate summit, or is he happy for that to be judged a colossal failure of his leadership too?

The Prime Minister: When we consider how much some of these countries are dependent on coal, I think it was groundbreaking for the summit to agree not to support any more overseas coal. The commitments on net zero and on making progress by 2030 are outstanding, and it can be done. The hon. Lady's mood of gloom and pessimism is not shared by the people of this country. We know that in 2012, 40% of our power came from coal. Now, thanks to this Conservative Government and the actions we have taken to reduce dependence on coal, it is down to less than 2% and falling the whole time. The whole world knows that, and they are following the UK's example.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con) [V]: It is absolutely right that I congratulate the Prime Minister and all those involved in hosting the G7 summit in my constituency over the weekend. It was an absolutely fantastic event and we in Cornwall feel very proud of the part that we played. I also want to thank the police, who were quite incredible and who travelled from all over the country to help out. I also have an apology for the Prime Minister, because the truth is that we are very proud of the Carbis Bay declaration and I may well mention it once or twice in the years to come. We are proud of the declaration because of the commitments to covid vaccines, to the education of 40 million extra girls, to the global climate change response and to a fairer economic recovery

and job creation. Will my friend the Prime Minister commit to further opportunities for Parliament to understand the details of the Carbis Bay declaration as they become available?

The Prime Minister: Yes. The Carbis Bay declaration is the foundation of the treaty that this country has been helping to prepare, and which we have been pioneering, against any future pandemic. The crucial elements are zoonotic research hubs, the pathogen surveillance network, and the undertaking to share data to prevent barriers between our countries in the export of personal protective equipment, medicines, vaccines and other things. It is the foundation to ensure that the time between a new variant arriving and a new vaccine should be kept down to 100 days, and to ensure that we spread know-how and manufacturing capacity around the world. This is the foundation of a new global approach to tackling pandemics. The UK has been absolutely instrumental in setting this up, to say nothing of the funding that we have put in, and I believe that the Carbis Bay declaration will be seen as a very important step towards the treaty later this year.

Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba) [V]: I thank the Prime Minister for his update on the G7 summit. However, I find myself in the curious position of agreeing with one of my Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath predecessors, who commented on the commitments secured, with the Prime Minister in the chair, as an "unforgivable moral failure".

The agreement is simply not good enough: 11 billion vaccines are needed and 1 billion have been promised; \$50 billion of funding is needed, but only \$5 billion has been promised. The World Health Organisation has said that covid-19 is moving faster than the vaccines, and the G7 commitment is simply not enough. For the aspiration of global Britain is fast becoming a global embarrassment, more indicative of a Del Boy Britain. Will the Prime Minister now show real leadership, and redouble efforts to secure the suspension of intellectual property protections, and further international efforts to prevent new variants from developing? I appeal to his self-interest that none of us are safe until everyone is safe.

The Prime Minister: I am afraid the hon. Gentleman is running down the UK's efforts, as well as what the summit achieved, which is 1 billion more vaccines, on top of the 1 billion that G7 countries have already committed to distributing around the world. This is only six months after these vaccines were invented—it is an astonishing thing! He attacks the performance of Britain and the people of the UK, but let me remind him that we in this country are responsible for one-third of the 1.5 billion vaccines that have been distributed around the world. When will he get that into his head? That is a fantastic record, on top of the 1.6 billion that we have been contributing to that COVAX roll-out. I think the people of this country should be immensely proud of the Carbis Bay declaration and the vaccines contribution that we are making. We are working as fast and as hard as we can, while still getting vaccines into the arms of our own people in this country, and that is absolutely right.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): Communiqués from the G7 and NATO summits speak of increasing challenges and threats from China, be they military build-up,

cyber-attacks, human rights abuses, or the belt and road initiative. Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House that the common values and commitment that we and our partners have to democracy and the rules-based international order will result in the G7 and NATO tackling the malign actions of the Chinese Communist party, whatever form those take?

The Prime Minister: Yes. Nobody at either the G7 or NATO wants to get into a new cold war with China, but on the other hand they see that the opportunities we have to trade more and engage with China must be matched by firmness in our collective dealings with it, particularly when it comes to the Uyghurs, as colleagues have mentioned several times, and when it comes to navigation in the South China sea, and the freedoms and rights of the people of Hong Kong.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance) [V]: The Northern Ireland protocol was a key theme on the margins of the G7 summit. The Biden Administration have made it clear that they want to see the Good Friday agreement upheld, and that while there is no immediate prospect of a US free trade agreement, a UK-EU veterinary agreement would not compromise that trade deal in any event. The Prime Minister has already said that he wants to get rid of checks across the Irish sea. Why is he so stubbornly resisting that ready-made solution, even on a temporary basis, to reduce those checks, ease tensions in Northern Ireland, and indeed help all UK food exporters?

The Prime Minister: I hope it will not have escaped the hon. Gentleman's attention that we have just signed a free trade agreement with Australia, and we intend to do many more.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con) [V]: The Prime Minister knows that treaties can occasionally be negotiated and not quite make it through the House of Commons. In the interests of ensuring that we deliver what we need to deliver at COP26, building on the impressive work in the G7 and NATO statements, as well as on trade deals such as that with Australia, will he commit to ensuring that this House is informed well in advance of COP agreements, so that we can assist, advise, and perhaps even ensure that those agreements pass easily and smoothly through the House, and encourage others to do the same?

The Prime Minister: I will do my best to oblige my hon. Friend, although my experience of the matter over the past few years is that this House is a great legislator but not an ideal negotiator.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab) [V]: The G7 announcement of 1 billion additional vaccine doses for developing countries was, of course, welcome, but the Prime Minister knows that the head of the World Health Organisation says that we need 11 billion doses in total if we are to vaccinate 70% of the world population. Where does the right hon. Gentleman think that the rest of those doses will come from, so that everyone can be safe because everyone is vaccinated?

The Prime Minister: One of the most important things that we agreed at the G7, along with the Carbis Bay principles that I have outlined and that will form part of the health treaty, was that we should work together to

increase vaccine manufacturing capacity and fill-and-finish facilities around the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman that it has only been a few months since these vaccines were invented; we are going as fast as we can, but our ambition is to vaccinate the world by the end of next year.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): The G7 meeting was exactly the face that modern Britain should present to the world: competent and confident. In terms of the substance, the UK commitment to share 100 million vaccines with less developed countries is an extremely welcome first step. Can my right hon. Friend guarantee that the 70 million doses that will be delivered through 2022 will be in addition to our existing aid budget.

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I kept on thinking, all weekend, "Thank God Biden beat Trump." I think that the Prime Minister is nodding.

Following the Carbis Bay declaration, may I urge the Prime Minister to come to Wales to sign a Cardiff Bay declaration? That declaration would include radical extra investment in Wales to do the levelling up that I think he intends, so that every person—whether they live in the valleys of south Wales, in the posher parts of Cardiff or Swansea, or wherever—has an equal chance of getting to work, an equal chance of putting food on the table for their kids, an equal chance of getting on in life and, frankly, an equal chance of having an NHS that is really able to protect them. The problems that we have in Wales are exactly the same as those in England. We need significant extra investment, and the only way we can achieve it is by real, hard co-operation between the Government in Westminster and the Government in Wales.

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course; we have massively increased support for the NHS, for instance, all of which is passported through to Wales. Funding has massively increased, and of course we work very closely with the Government—the Administration—in Cardiff. I think that it would be helpful in delivering great infrastructure for Wales, whether that is improving the A55 or the M4, if there were some consistency of approach. With the M4 bypass, for instance, and the Brynglas tunnels, I think it was crazy to spend £144 million of taxpayers' money on a study without actually doing the bypass itself. I am very happy to work with the Welsh Labour Government if they get their act together.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con) [V]: No fewer than five representatives of the European Union at the G7 tried to hijack the agenda to undermine the people of Northern Ireland with their one-sided and unfair view of the protocol. Will the Prime Minister, who chaired the event well, make sure that goods can flow freely in the UK internal market, given that there are legal ways of doing this unilaterally? Does not the Good Friday agreement require the EU and the UK to respect the needs and wishes of both communities?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is completely right. It was the EU that shocked people in Northern Ireland by invoking article 16 of the protocol in January and trying to put a barrier on the movement of vaccines

[*The Prime Minister*]

between the EU and the UK. We would never have dreamed of doing something like that, but it was that action that undermined people's faith in the protocol.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP) [V]: The recent violence and the loss of innocent life in Gaza and Israel underline the importance of restarting the middle east peace process. Britain has historical and continuing responsibilities in this region, so can the Prime Minister tell us what steps he took at the weekend to raise and progress the restarting of the important peace process in the middle east?

The Prime Minister: As I raise continuously with friends and partners around the world, we remain committed, as do our friends in the EU and in Washington, to a two-state solution for the middle east.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con) [V]: May I first congratulate my right hon. Friend on successfully hosting the G7 after the trauma the world has just been through? He will recognise that the discussion of NATO 2030 at the NATO summit was one of the most forward thinking and important assessments NATO has undertaken in many a decade: reinforced unity; a broader approach to security; safeguarding the rules-based international order. Does he agree that our position on cyber and space defence not only makes us still one of the biggest contributors to NATO, but one of the integral partners of the alliance?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I thank my right hon. Friend because NATO's project 2030, set out by Jens Stoltenberg at the summit, is completely in accordance with, and almost an echo of, the integrated review set out by the Government, with its emphasis on cyber and space defences.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): I have listened to the right hon. Gentleman's statement this afternoon. One of the things I am proud of is visiting my schools in Vauxhall and speaking to young people. Last week, he said that girls' education is the best way that we can lift countries out of poverty and lead the global recovery. I heard his response to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) on the fact that the G7 leaders did not mention the global aid cut. If that is the case, does the Prime Minister agree that his actions show a gaping hole between his words and actions? Will he respect this House by bringing that vote to Parliament and bringing that decision here?

The Prime Minister: Again, what I did hear from leaders around the world was massive, overwhelming support for the objective, which the hon. Member supports, of girls' education. The G7 committed \$2.75 billion, I think, towards the Global Partnership for Education, with the UK increasing our commitment by 15% in spite of the pandemic. I hope the message she will give to pupils in Vauxhall is that we are absolutely committed to that end.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I congratulate the Prime Minister and his whole team on delivering such a wonderful G7 summit. I welcome the

announcement on the replenishment of the Global Partnership for Education. As our economy recovers and we return to the promised 0.7%, will he put at the forefront of his work in his time in Government ensuring that we really boost the efforts to educate every child in the world through UNICEF, Education Cannot Wait, the Global Partnership for Education and, of course, our wonderful UK Girls' Education Challenge?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for her support for female education. I remember discussing it with her many, many times. I know how much she cares about it. The programme we are embarked on will mean 40 million more girls in school by 2025 and 20 million more girls reading over the next five years. We are going to do even more than I was saying to an hon. Lady on the Opposition Benches, when President Kenyatta of Kenya comes here in July for the Global Partnership for Education.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I congratulate the Prime Minister on his recent wedding and the delightful G7 family photos. What is his current thinking on granting amnesty to illegal immigrants? Did he have a chance to discuss that with President Biden, because they did it first there in 1986? The Prime Minister told me here on day two of the job that he was minded to go down the regularisation route, but he was thwarted by predecessors. Was that just an unscripted blurt-out flashback to the 2012, pre-PM, pre-red wall version of himself, or is he a man of his word?

The Prime Minister: We remain committed to a generous and open approach to immigration. This country already does regularise the position of those who have been here for a long time and have not fallen foul of the law. What we will not do is go back to a complete free-for-all and abandon control of our borders to Brussels, which the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) voted for 43 times in the last five years. I dare say that the hon. Member did, too.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con) [V]: I welcome the new climate commitments made by G7 countries to almost halve their carbon emissions by 2030, which will pave the way towards a green and global recovery. Does the Prime Minister agree that it is essential that we build on the historic climate change commitments made at the G7 with even stronger global commitments at the upcoming COP26 conference?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is completely right. This was a good waymark and we made some good steps forward on the road to COP26. There is still a long way to go, but there is a great deal of enthusiasm from other countries because they can see that it creates high-wage, high-skill jobs as well as solving climate change.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The G7 did agree action on tax-dodging corporations, but it was watered down after the Prime Minister refused to back President Biden's original proposal for a 21% minimum global corporation tax rate, which would have delivered £15 billion a year to Britain—enough to fund a proper covid catch-up in education and support

for covid-excluded businesses that are now facing extended restrictions. Why did the Prime Minister put global corporation shareholders above British children and British businesses?

The Prime Minister: That is a great one from the Labour party, because they actually opposed the increase in corporation tax at the Budget. They should try to remember what they have been doing over the last few months. It was a great achievement, after a long time, to get the western world—the G7—to agree to find a way of taxing the multinational giants that make profits in one country and then hook them somewhere else. That was a fantastic thing, and we now have a minimum global corporation tax of 15%—I forgot to mention it in my opening remarks—which was another great step forward at the G7 summit.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con) [V]: As we reflect on the many successes of the G7 summit, the Prime Minister will know that the growing importance of soft power is very much recognised by the G7, yet there remains a £10 million shortfall between the Government's generous package to see the British Council through the pandemic and what it needs to maintain its international network of offices, as defined by country directors in post abroad. If the gap is not bridged, the result will be the largest single set of closures in the British Council's proud 90-year history. Given that the Prime Minister has told me personally that he gets it and that the £10 million can be given as a loan, and given that our competitors' cultural institutes are actually expanding their physical footprint, will he now ensure that Government Departments also get it in time for the ministerial statement due shortly?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and thank him for his continuing campaigning on this issue. We are giving the British Council more support now, because I know it has been very tough for them during the pandemic. On the gap of £10 million that he identifies and the crucial part that he thinks that will play, I will see what further I can do.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab) [V]: The Prime Minister will know that the £100 billion every year for climate change transformation in developing countries is the same £100 billion that was announced 12 years ago, in 2009. He will also know that the £11.6 billion that he has announced today is over five years, and he actually announced it two years ago at the United Nations General Assembly. This is not new money, and nor is the UK's contribution of £11.6 billion over five years enough to be our part of the £100 billion every year that was promised by the G7. If there is going to be credibility in the developing world to play its part at COP26 later this year, will the Prime Minister now give us some details and make sure that the rest of the G7 give those same details about real spending, not recycling?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman should study what all the G7 countries said, because several of them made very big commitments indeed—the Canadians, the EU—to financing the tackling of climate change. He says that £11.6 billion is not enough. I think that the people of this country will think that, in a very tough time, with huge pressure on our resources, to spend £11.6 billion over the next few years to help other countries

tackle climate change is a huge commitment. He deprecates. I remember how people reacted in the UN when I announced that commitment. They were ecstatic and they are quite right.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We still have 30 people who would like to ask questions to the Prime Minister, and around 20 minutes in which to do it. That is probably not possible. But the idea of a statement is that people ask questions; it is not a time for making a speech. If people ask short questions, it will be possible for the Prime Minister to give short answers and then all will be well, because we have a lot of business to get through this afternoon.

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): I congratulate the Prime Minister on a successful weekend in Cornwall and on a very successful summit. Away from the doom and gloom of the Opposition, it is staggering that global Britain was on display this weekend in striking new trade deals. Could he perhaps reassure the House that, when we look at trade deals, they are the floor, not the ceiling of the economic growth that this country will be able to strike now and in the future, as we reach for the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is completely right, particularly about the CPTPP.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Brilliantly brief.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): With coronavirus, none of us is safe until everyone is safe. The world needs over 11 billion vaccine doses to end the pandemic, but the G7 vaccine offer falls well short and leaves billions of people without protection. To ramp up vaccine production needs a temporary waiver on intellectual property, so that all countries can access the technology. President Biden supports that, more than 100 other countries support that, but this Prime Minister is one of the people blocking it. So is not the Prime Minister putting the interests of profit-hungry pharmaceutical companies ahead of the lives of millions of people?

The Prime Minister: For the hon. Gentleman to talk about profit-hungry pharmaceutical companies, in view of the efforts made by AstraZeneca to distribute 500 million vaccines around the world at cost, is utterly disgraceful, and he should withdraw his remarks.

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con): I hugely welcome the Prime Minister's focus on gender equality at the G7, and I note that the Leader of the Opposition, in his opening statement, did not mention girls or women once. Can the Prime Minister, who set some very ambitious targets on girls' education and ending violence against women and girls, come back to the House before 2026 to reassure us that progress is being made on that very important topic?

The Prime Minister: Of course, Mr Speaker; the project will be scarcely off my lips.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am not sure, Madam Deputy Speaker, whether you are more surprised at the Prime Minister consistently giving you a promotion or a sex change, but we will leave it to you to decide that for yourself.

[Peter Grant]

While there are still billions of people across the world unvaccinated, all of us who have been vaccinated remain at risk that a new vaccine-resistant strain could evolve and undo all the work that has been done here and in other wealthy countries. So will the Prime Minister give a simple commitment to the principle that no one can claim to have defeated the coronavirus until the whole of humanity is adequately protected?

The Prime Minister: Of course, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): May I congratulate the Prime Minister on what was achieved at the G7 summit in Cornwall? The west had become a little risk-averse of late, and if the summit achieved anything, it was a recognition that the world is on a worrying trajectory, with new threats, new technology, new power bases posing complex, long-term challenges to our security, our trade, our freedoms and indeed our standards. The rise of China economically, technologically and militarily means that this will be their century, and the need for a new Atlantic charter underlines how frail our global order has become.

Would the Prime Minister agree that the actions that we, the west, choose to take over the next few years in addressing the long international to-do list will determine how the next few decades play out?

The Prime Minister: Yes indeed. I thank my right hon. Friend. These are crucial times, and it was great to see the summit accomplishing so much, so fast.

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): Might I just start by noting that the Prime Minister seems a little irritable this afternoon? I know that it is difficult when friendships break down, but I have every faith he will find reconciliation in due course.

The International Monetary Fund concluded that there would be \$9 trillion economic boost if the world's covid vaccines are provided. We have heard multiple times that while the 860 million at the G7 is welcome, that is not enough. Could the Prime Minister explain to the House why we could not go further at the G7? What were the blockages to getting above 860 million vaccines?

The Prime Minister: We have gone above 860 million vaccines. On top of the 1 billion the G7 is already doing, we pledged a further 1 billion vaccines.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): Did the Prime Minister talk to Chancellor Merkel and Prime Minister Suga about the tremendous success of social care reforms in Japan and Germany? Did he talk to Prime Minister Trudeau about the brilliant innovation in care home villages in Canada? Did he talk to President Biden about the amazing things that older people are doing, including the most powerful job in the world? Did he return to Downing Street refreshed and resolute, and say to his neighbour, "No more international conferences until we fix the crisis at home: it is time to back Boris and get social care done"?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for his continued support. I did actually talk to Angela Merkel about social care, and I will tell him what she said at another time.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): There was widespread disappointment that the G7 did not commit to additional climate finance beyond what has already been agreed. What steps will the Prime Minister take between now and COP26 to ensure that that summit does deal effectively with the challenge of loss and damage in the countries most at risk?

The Prime Minister: We will continue with our efforts—we are 80% of the way there—and we will blow away the clouds of despondency that seem to hang over some Members here today. I think it was a highly successful summit, and we are going to get there.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): In the Prime Minister's statement, he refers to the G7 combining our strength to defeat covid. Would it not be more accurate to say that we need to make sure we can vaccinate the world to protect people, but then we need to learn to live with what will be an endemic virus? Does he share my concern about the things that are going on in Government at the moment, with the warnings about the restrictions coming back in the autumn and the winter as cases rise, and can he rule out that taking place? That would reassure many colleagues on both sides of the House.

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend. I did see something this morning about some paper or other that means absolutely nothing to me. Our objective is to go forward with the road map and bring back the freedoms we love.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): The original Atlantic charter made a commitment to banish from the world "fear and want"—curiously missing from the redraft—but the Prime Minister's ambition to vaccinate the world by the end of 2022 is the right one. The IMF's assessment of the deal done on Monday, however, is that two thirds of the grant financing needed to vaccinate the world is still missing—that is \$23 billion. The question for the Prime Minister is: where is that money going to come from and when?

The Prime Minister: I think that the G7 and the west are making huge progress. These vaccines were only invented six months ago, or a little bit longer. We are making incredible progress in distributing them now. The ambition that we reconfirmed in Carbis Bay was to vaccinate the world by the end of next year, and that is a pretty rapid pace.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): Can I welcome the plans set out by the G7 leaders to invest in global testing and slash the time needed to develop new vaccines? The Prime Minister mentioned just a moment ago that it is little over six months since scientists in Cheshire at the life science industries and AstraZeneca developed these new vaccines. I am sure he will want to join me in congratulating them on the work they have done not just here in the UK, but around the world. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that strengthening global co-operation on health and investing in new technologies is the only way to ensure that we never get a repeat of this health crisis?

The Prime Minister: Of course I congratulate AstraZeneca in Cheshire and everywhere else where it is established in the UK and around the world. It has

done an outstanding job. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to stress the importance of international co-operation, and we must never ever again see countries blockading vaccines and the movement of vaccines from one part of the world to another.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): A new EU-UK food and plant safety agreement would not only alleviate Northern Ireland friction, but remove non-tariff barriers for Welsh exporters created by the current Brexit deal. As the hon. Member for North Down (Stephen Farry) said, the US President guaranteed at the G7 that such alignment would not jeopardise a UK-US trade deal. The Prime Minister could actually have his slice of cake and eat it, if he sees sense. Can he clarify whether reports of reduced checks in the trade deal with Australia, as he mentioned in his reply to the hon. Member for North Down, would prevent such alignment with the EU?

The Prime Minister: Plainly, the free trade deals with the CPTPP, Australia and countries around the world that we are doing and will continue to do make a nonsense of the proposal that the hon. Gentleman outlines.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): Our hosting of the G7 and the reaffirmation of our indestructible partnership with our cousins across the pond—also seen through NATO—sets the scene for a brighter and far more aspirational future for the whole of the UK. Does the Prime Minister agree and can he explain, perhaps in writing if he does not have time now, what this means for the people of Dudley North and the rest of the country?

The Prime Minister: The people of Dudley North and the rest of the country will benefit massively from a new age of co-operation between our democracies; from the security that we are establishing, but also from our global commitment to work together to build back greener, so that we generate hundreds of thousands—millions—of high-wage, high-skilled jobs in Dudley, in the west midlands and around the whole of the UK.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP) [V]: The Prime Minister said that no countries have raised concerns about the aid cuts. Well, I can give him a list as long as my arm of organisations and projects that are going to be devastated by these cuts. Does he not understand that as the only G7 country cutting aid, the UK is undermining any claim to be a soft power superpower and, more importantly, putting thousands and thousands of lives at risk?

The Prime Minister: Absolutely not.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con) [V]: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on a very successful G7 and on his leadership of the meeting; so much was agreed. Will he confirm that global Britain will continue to champion and promote the provision of girls' education right across the world?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend, and I know how much he cares about this; I remember campaigning with him on this myself. We have supported at least 15.6 million children in the last five years or so

to get an education—8.1 million of them were girls. We are going to be spending, as I said, more than £400 million getting girls an education over the next five years.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Every day, we are hearing of more and more horrific experiences of violence against women and the wider Uyghur Muslim community, including the disappearance of children in the Xinjiang region of China. The scale of these atrocities has not been met by the Prime Minister's report of the G7 and, therefore, what discussions did he have about extending economic and trade sanctions, about using his powers under the Magnitsky measures, and about calling for a special meeting at the UN to find a mechanism to hold those responsible for these crimes to account?

The Prime Minister: We did discuss many times over the last few days what has happened in Xinjiang, the suffering of the Uyghurs and particularly the crimes against women that the hon. Lady describes. The difficulty with the UN Security Council approach, as she will understand, is that China is a member.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Cornwall was proud to host the G7. Will the Prime Minister join me in thanking all those who worked so hard to make it a success, including our police, who came from all over the country, Cornwall Council and public health officials, many businesses and volunteers, and the people of Cornwall, who with good humour welcomed the world, despite the inevitable disruption? I know that he is as keen as I am that the G7 leaves a lasting legacy in Cornwall, and I was pleased to show him our ambitions for Spaceport Cornwall. Will he join me in working on and putting the full weight of Government behind enabling us to achieve the ambition of launching satellites from the UK this time next year?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has been a fantastic campaigner for the Cornish spaceport. I was amazed to see what they have already done and the way it is inspiring young people in Cornwall, and I look forward to working with him on getting a launch before too long.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): When we left the EU, we were told that the economic hit would be made up by free trade agreements with the EU and the United States. As the sausage dispute and the rebuke from President Biden show, however, we are miles away from those agreements at the moment. Will the Prime Minister understand that whichever way he goes on the dispute in Northern Ireland, it will inflame the tensions with those two parties again? Is this not quite some dispute, to alienate our two closest trading partners?

The Prime Minister: We have a free trade deal with the EU. It is a fantastic deal, and our trade with the US is growing the whole time.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): The Prime Minister will have enjoyed formal and less formal dialogue with EU leaders at the G7. May I ask him whether any empathy was expressed for the trade frictions that we are currently experiencing with the Northern Ireland protocol at the behest of a third party? Was there any

[James Sunderland]

sense that the EU might acquiesce to unilateral action by this country because of the frankly bonkers situation in which the UK cannot sell sausages to the UK?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend puts the matter very succinctly. There are many ways in which we are seeing the disproportionate and unnecessary application of the protocol. I think our partners understand that, and we are hoping for some pragmatic solutions before too long.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We will manage to get everybody who is on the list in. I thank people for being succinct and the Prime Minister for also being brief. It is wonderful.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): The Prime Minister delivered his statement on the Australian trade deal in his usual sunny, optimistic manner. Like all his statements, however, once we look at the detail, it comes with a nasty after-smell, the source of which will be familiar to many British farmers. May I ask him in detail how this deal will affect the livelihoods of farmers in my constituency of North Durham and across County Durham—particularly hill farmers, who not only produce good-quality British food, but are the custodians of some of the most beautiful land in this country?

The Prime Minister: Farmers in County Durham will have the opportunity to export their wonderful produce tariff-free to a market that is growing the whole time, and that includes the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership. It is a huge opportunity for British produce—beef, dairy, the lot—and I hope that he will champion it.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): I welcome the commitment in the G7's open societies statement to promoting the human rights of women and girls. As co-chair of the all-party group on women, peace and security, may I ask my right hon. Friend to keep in mind that this is vital for the future of Afghanistan, where women and children are under threat at present?

The Prime Minister: May I wish my hon. Friend a happy birthday? I confirm that we see the education of girls and young women as one of the great achievements of the UK presence in Afghanistan over the last two decades. We do not want that to be jeopardised now, which is why we are working with our friends in the G7 and NATO to make sure that we leave a lasting legacy.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Prime Minister talks proudly about our commitment to NATO. That, of course, depends on having a strong military in the United Kingdom. Does he regret his decision to break his election promise and cut the armed forces by 10,000?

The Prime Minister: We are investing another £24 billion in our defence, with the biggest increase in spending since the end of the cold war, and we are one of the few countries in NATO to contribute more than 2% of our GDP to NATO. We are the party that believes in our

armed services. It was only recently that the Labour party was campaigning to put into office a man who wanted to abolish the armed forces.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): My right hon. Friend was right on Monday when he said:

“The peace and stability brought by Nato has underpinned global prosperity for over 70 years”.

Can he assure me that levelling up our military as part of the new NATO 2030 agenda will encompass the potential of our forces across the whole country, including the excellent Royal Marines at the Chivenor barracks in my North Devon constituency—where I believe his grandfather was stationed for a time—so that NATO will continue to be the bedrock of global defence for future generations?

The Prime Minister: My grandfather was indeed stationed at Chivenor. I thank the Royal Marines at Chivenor, who did such an outstanding job of looking after us all during the G7 summit. They will transform into the future commando force that will contribute to a more agile and active NATO alliance.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): At the G7, the Prime Minister and other leaders reasserted their intention to honour the 2009 promise of \$100 billion in climate finance annually to support developing nations, but sufficient concrete financial commitments to make up the shortfall did not materialise. Does he agree that the commitment must be met by the UN General Assembly in September at the very latest, if we are not to risk failure at COP26 in November?

The Prime Minister: UNGA is, indeed, a very important way station, but this was a great start.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Given our shared belief that without the US and NATO there can be no security for the UK and Europe, does my right hon. Friend recall the strain on Anglo-American relations caused by Huawei's infiltration of our critical national infrastructure? Will he therefore ensure that companies with dodgy and dubious links to the Chinese and Russian regimes will be firmly and fully shut out from building or operating our vital data and power pipelines in future?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend knows a great deal about what he speaks of. That is why we have passed the recent legislation to ensure that we protect this country from the loss of intellectual property and the sale of crucial national security businesses to unreliable partners overseas.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Virtually no rationale or assessment has been put forward for the UK Government cuts to international aid that have been confirmed so far. The lack of responsibility taken for the damage that they will do is astounding, especially as the 0.7% commitment was in the Tory manifesto. How does the Prime Minister think that that squares with global Britain? How does he justify these shameful cuts to his G7 counterparts?

The Prime Minister: I repeat that countries around the world are in awe of this country's continued contributions. They know that we are spending £10 billion

during a very difficult time; they also know, because they have long memories, that we are spending more now than the Labour party ever did under Gordon Brown or Tony Blair.

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): The G7 set out plans to lift women out of poverty and build back a more equal world by putting 40 million more girls into school in the next five years—another example of global Britain as a force for good. Does my right hon. Friend agree that investing in women, particularly girls' education, is one of the most efficient ways to create economic growth in developing countries? Can he confirm that the UK will continue to lead the way on girls' education moving forward?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is completely right. I think that investing in girls' education—12 years of quality education for every girl—is probably the single best, most efficient policy that we can support around the world. That is why we are putting another £430 million into the Global Partnership for Education, with more to come in July.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab) [V]: Earlier this month, three civilians were tragically killed in a Turkish drone attack on a refugee camp in northern Iraq—all part of a sustained military action from the Turkish state against the Kurds that has been ongoing since April. We have also learned this month that the Turkish chief prosecutor has sought to expand the indictments seeking to shut down the country's leading pro-Kurdish political party. This is a disgraceful attack on a minority community. Will the Prime Minister condemn the actions of the Turkish Government and call on our NATO partner to stop these attacks on Kurdish communities?

The Prime Minister: The situation in north-western Iraq is extremely complex. We must accept that the Kurdish fighters have done an extraordinary job against ISIS and against the forces of Bashar al-Assad, but there is clearly a long-standing difficulty in their relations with Turkish forces, who themselves are bearing the brunt of a huge crisis of refugee flows. I will none the less study the incident that the hon. Gentleman describes.

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I absolutely applaud the Prime Minister's determination to provide 12 years of quality education for girls. It is something that he has done for many years, but with the FCDO budget being slashed—by 60% to UNICEF, and 80% to family planning, which stops a lot of girls going to school—how does he think that that will be achieved?

The Prime Minister: We are increasing our funding for girls' education to £430 million, which is about a 15% increase and an outstanding thing for this country to do in very, very difficult times. By the way, may I congratulate my hon. Friend because I think that her proposal for banning under-age weddings, which she brought to me, is now being carried forward. I thank and congratulate her on her work in that matter.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement today. Will he outline the steps taken to inform the members of the G7 summit of the constitutional position of Northern Ireland, which seems to have gotten confused? I refer in particular to American President Biden and French President Macron. Will follow-up instructions and information be sent to help them grasp the fact that Northern Ireland was, is—in this centenary year—and will continue to be an integral part of the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I think it is important that everybody understands that, although the media accounts of what took place differ very much from what actually happened at the summit where this was not really much of a topic of discussion. None the less, I think people do understand that Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom for economic and all other purposes.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): I applaud the Prime Minister for the time that he has spent at the Dispatch Box this afternoon in which he has spoken of the importance of increasing vaccine coverage around the world. I very much welcome the 100 million doses of covid vaccine that he has committed to countries with less-developed healthcare systems than our own. Supporting the poorest in this way does need finance from both us and our partners, so may I ask him once again to look at our budget for this most valuable of causes?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that overseas spending should be one of the great focuses of UK spending in the next few years. I repeat what I said earlier about the 70 million doses next year. That will not come out of the existing ODA budget, but clearly funding vaccine technology around the world is one of those things in which this country excels and we will be doing a lot more of it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the Prime Minister and everybody who took part in this session for doing so with alacrity. I shall now suspend the House for three minutes, so that arrangements can be made for the next item of business.

2.8 pm

Sitting suspended.

Economy Update

2.11 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Steve Barclay):

Before I make my statement, I add my appreciation to that of colleagues for Sir Roy Stone and the contribution he has made during his time in the House.

There is little doubt that the four-week extension to restrictions announced on Monday will present additional challenges to thousands of people and businesses across the country. That is why at the Budget we went long and erred on the side of additional support. The package of support from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was designed to accommodate short delays such as this. Indeed, he told the House at that time that we were

“extending our support well beyond the end of the road map to accommodate even the most cautious view about the time that it might take to exit the restrictions.”—[*Official Report*, 3 March 2021; Vol. 690, c. 255.]

Most of our economic support schemes do not end until September or after, providing crucial continuity and certainty for businesses and families—something that was welcomed by business leaders and sector leaders when it was announced. They praised the reassurance provided for the long term.

Let me remind the House of the scale of support we have announced for British households and businesses over the past 15 months: £352 billion. We have protected jobs, with 11.5 million unique jobs supported by the furlough scheme, which will be in place until the end of September. At the Budget, we also extended the self-employment income support scheme, supporting nearly 3 million self-employed people and taking the total expected support offered through the scheme to nearly £3 billion.

Businesses have been supported, too, with tax cuts, deferrals, loan schemes and cash grants worth over £100 billion. Our restart grants, worth up to £18,000 from April, have helped Britain’s businesses to get going, at a cost of £5 billion. Some £2.1 billion of discretionary grant funding has been provided for councils to help their local businesses. Last financial year, we provided an unprecedented 100% business rates holiday for all eligible businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure centres—a tax cut worth £10 billion. This financial year, over 90% of these businesses will receive a 75% cut in their business rates bill across the year to March 2022, and we have extended the 5% reduced rate of VAT for a further six months. The loan guarantee schemes, including the bounce back loan scheme, have provided £70 billion of loans to 1.5 million companies.

We have provided targeted sectoral support, too. At the Budget, for instance, we provided an additional £700 million to support local and national arts, culture and sports institutions as they reopen. That is on top of the £1.57 billion culture recovery fund, bringing our total support for sports and culture to more than £2 billion, with about £600 million yet to be distributed. It is businesses that will create jobs and grow the economy, and we have stood behind them since day one of this crisis.

Just as we have supported jobs and businesses, so have we supported livelihoods too: the temporary £20 uplift to universal credit will continue until the end of September; we increased the national living wage to £8.91 from April and extended it to those over 23; we have increased

the local housing allowance for housing benefit, meaning that more than 1.5 million households have benefited from an additional £600 a year, on average; and we provided a £670 million hardship fund to help more than 3 million people keep up with their council bills. This comprehensive package has helped to protect millions of jobs, businesses and livelihoods, and our plan is working. GDP is outperforming expectations: unemployment is forecast to be much lower than previously feared; consumer confidence has returned to pre-crisis levels; businesses insolvencies in 2020 were actually lower than in 2019; and signs in the labour market are encouraging, with 5.5 million fewer people on the furlough than in April 2020. In fact, figures released by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs just yesterday showed that the number of people employed has risen by more than 400,000 since November. Of course, covid has impacted different sectors in very different ways, and some particularly acutely, but it should be welcome news to everyone in this House that the early signs are of a recovery in our labour market.

This plan has come at a cost, albeit one that has reduced economic scarring that would have been inflicted otherwise by covid. Last year saw the highest peacetime level of borrowing on record—£300 billion. We are forecast to borrow a further £234 billion this year and a further £107 billion next year, and at a higher level of debt the public finances are more vulnerable to changes in inflation and interest rates. Indeed, a sustained increase in inflation and interest rates of just 1% would increase debt interest level spending by more than £25 billion in 2025-26. As a result, at the next spending review, we will keep the public finances on a sustainable medium-term path, maintaining the trajectory established at the Budget, so that we have the resilience we need to respond to any future challenges.

A huge and comprehensive economic shock has been met with a huge and comprehensive response—one that is working. I am pleased, however, to be able to make one further announcement today. Many businesses have accrued debts to landlords during the pandemic. Because of the threat that posed to jobs, we introduced protections to prevent the eviction of commercial tenants due to non-payment of rent. It is the Government’s firm position that landlords and their tenants should continue to resolve those debts through negotiations, and I welcome the various industry-led schemes already in place, and those being developed, to provide resolutions through arbitration. But in recognition of the importance of jobs in the many affected businesses at the heart of local communities, we launched a call for evidence in April on further actions to take to resolve those debts. As a result of that call for evidence, the Government now plan to introduce legislation to support the orderly resolution of these debts that have resulted from covid-19 business closures. We will introduce legislation in this parliamentary Session to establish a backstop so that where commercial negotiations between tenants and landlords are not successful, tenants and landlords go into binding arbitration. Until that legislation is on the statute book, existing measures will remain in place, including extending the current moratorium to protect commercial tenants from eviction to 25 March 2022.

To be clear, all tenants should start to pay rent again in accordance with the terms of their lease, or as otherwise agreed with their landlord, as soon as restrictions are

removed on their sector if they are not already doing so. We believe that that strikes the right balance between protecting landlords and supporting the businesses that are most in need. Based on the successful Australian approach, it sets out a long-term solution to the resolution of covid-19 rent, ensuring that many variable businesses can continue to operate and that debts accrued as a result of the pandemic are quickly resolved to mutual benefit. I thank those on both sides of the issue for their constructive engagement.

Striking the right balance, just as we are doing with commercial rents, has been the key to our approach all along, and it will continue to shape our approach in the weeks ahead.

2.20 pm

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): Five years ago, my friend and colleague Jo Cox was murdered. There is not a day goes by when I do not think of her, and I know that on both sides of the House she is missed dearly.

All the way through this pandemic we have said that the economic and health responses must go together. That means keeping support in place for as long as the public health measures demand it. When the public health restrictions are extended, as they were by the Prime Minister on Monday, the economic support should be extended too; otherwise we risk falling at the final hurdle. Having spent billions of pounds supporting the economy, it would be tragic to see thousands of businesses go to the wall just because the Government withdrew support a few weeks too soon. We are not calling for forever support, but for economic support that matches the timetable for opening up that the Government have set. That is the right thing for business, for workers, and for our economy too.

Let us be clear about why we are here today: the Government's delay in putting India on to the red list has allowed a dangerous new variant to enter our country. That is why we have the highest covid infection rate per person across the whole of Europe—all because the Prime Minister wanted his VIP trip to India. It was vain and short-sighted and has been devastating for public health. As well as the health impact, our assessment, using Office for National Statistics data, tells us that the delay in reopening will cost the UK economy £4.7 billion. That is money that is not being spent in British businesses at a crucial time in our recovery. That £4.7 billion would have been used by businesses to pay commercial rents, to pay people's wages, to invest, to take on new staff, and to pay taxes into the Treasury as well.

Of course I welcome what the Chief Secretary has to say today on commercial evictions, but the truth is that if the Chancellor believed that this economic package was enough, he would be here announcing it himself. Whatever this is, it is not doing "whatever it takes" to support British businesses and our economy. Given that the Government have moved the goalposts, let me ask the Chief Secretary why Ministers have not delayed the employer contributions to furlough, due to start on 1 July. Employers are being asked to pay more when they cannot even properly open for business.

The vast majority of the 1.8 million people still on furlough are in the very sectors most affected by the ongoing restrictions: hospitality, live events and travel. On 1 July, loans to those businesses start having to be repaid. The self-employed and those excluded from

financial support will be worried about their futures. Grants are ending, business rate bills are arriving and furlough is tapering off—all immediately after the Government have announced an extension to restrictions. How on earth can the Treasury justify turning off support and sending businesses new tax bills when the Government are saying that those businesses cannot even open?

On Monday, the Prime Minister told the country that we need to learn to live with the virus. Where is the much-needed plan that would enable us to do that? Where is the plan for greater ventilation in workplaces, including public buildings and schools? Where is the plan to shift contact tracing to a local level, where we know it works best—not in a centralised, Serco-led call centre? Where is the proper support for people needing to self-isolate? Those are all essential measures to save lives and livelihoods, and to avoid the stop-start approach that has characterised the Government's response to the pandemic.

Given the WhatsApp messages from the Prime Minister about his own Health Secretary that have been revealed today—Madam Deputy Speaker, I will use more diplomatic language than the Prime Minister could manage—how can we have confidence in Government Ministers when the Prime Minister thinks that the person in charge of the pandemic response is "hopeless"?

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): Not just "hopeless".

Rachel Reeves: Not just "hopeless". People have given up so much over the last year. We have pulled together and shown the best of our country. People have done everything that was asked of them and much, much more. We should not be in this position today. Businesses and workers do not deserve to have the rug pulled from under their feet at the eleventh hour. We want to see businesses make it through the pandemic and thrive again, because they are an important part of what makes our country so great and they are essential for our economic recovery. We need them and they need us today. That is why the economic support we have should match the health restrictions that are still in place, and that is what the Government have failed to deliver today.

Steve Barclay: May I first echo the remembrance by the hon. Lady and colleagues across the House of Jo Cox? I also pay tribute to the hon. Lady for the work that she has done, including with my friend Seema Kennedy, through the loneliness commission.

Let me turn to the various points raised by the hon. Lady. She said that she is not calling for support forever, but suggested that the Government were withdrawing support. The package announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was designed deliberately to go long, until September. Measures such as furlough were extended to anticipate the fact that there were no guarantees on the covid road map. That was very much designed into the support, so there is no question of withdrawing support; it was in the very plan announced by the Chancellor.

The hon. Lady's question about the delta variant was addressed comprehensively by the Prime Minister during Prime Minister's questions, where he pointed out the timing. One can look back with hindsight now, but the issue was the timing of the delta variant becoming a variant of concern. I will not repeat the points made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

[*Steve Barclay*]

I am grateful to the hon. Lady for recognising the announcement regarding commercial rents. I hope that that is appreciated across the House. I know that it speaks to a very real concern that many Members will have seen through their constituency emails and post bags, and that it will provide some extended support.

The hon. Lady questioned whether the Government are doing whatever it takes. Again, I remind the House that the Government have spent £352 billion to date. By any definition, I think that is a comprehensive package. More to the point, the plan is working. We see that in the plan for jobs, in the fact that the unemployment projections have improved and in the number of jobs there have been since November. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's plan is working. He has done whatever it takes to protect our NHS and public services, putting a further £63 billion into the NHS for covid support measures last year. The plan is having clear benefits.

The hon. Lady asked specifically about the furlough taper. Labour market conditions have improved substantially since the turn of the year and will continue to do so. Indeed, demand for staff has increased at the quickest rate for more than two decades. With unemployment falling in the last four releases, there is clear evidence that the labour market is beginning to recover, but we went long in the first place to anticipate any slippage in the covid road map.

The hon. Lady had a query on business rates. Again, it is worth reminding the House just how comprehensive the support on business rates has been, with 100% business rates relief last year for many businesses, and those businesses now paying 75% over the course of this year. There is a comprehensive package of support for businesses. There is no question but that many businesses will feel strain as result of the further extension, and it is not a decision that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister took lightly, but the package of support announced by the Chancellor anticipated this scenario. It went long in order to provide support and it continues to do so in a way that the evidence and the data shows is working.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I welcome the Minister's statement. He is right: the latest employment and job vacancy figures do demonstrate that the UK economy is now rebounding strongly. I cannot recall a time when so many businesses in my constituency were telling me that they are struggling to hire staff, right across all sectors. Does he agree that we need to take a sober and clear-sighted look at the furlough scheme, because it is the view of a great many employers out there that there are still far too many people being paid to do nothing, which is distorting the efficient functioning of the labour market as well as costing the country tens of billions of pounds?

Steve Barclay: My right hon. Friend draws attention to exactly why the attack from the Opposition is misplaced and why the furlough taper is justified—because there is demand for labour from businesses. He also knows that it is part of the wider package of support. As a former Secretary of State, he has done a huge amount to champion the need to support people looking for work. That is what the doubling of the number of work coaches is doing. We announced a further £2.6 billion of additional support for the Department for Work and

Pensions in the spending review, alongside further specific measures such as the restart scheme, to tackle the situation of those who have been unemployed for over a year. Over 1 million unemployed people on universal credit will have access to that scheme.

This is about a combination of the furlough, which is providing much-needed support but needs to taper, and a wider plan for jobs, including the restart scheme, the kickstart scheme, the tripling of traineeships, and the increase in the apprenticeships incentive to £3,000—a whole package alongside the doubling of the number of work coaches.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP) [V]: My thoughts are also with the family and friends of Jo Cox.

Over the past 15 months, companies in sectors such as tourism, travel, hospitality, events, the arts, the night-time economy and weddings—and their supply chains—have been building up debts and have not even gotten close yet to breaking even. It is shameful that not an extra penny of support is being announced for them today. The debt incurred by businesses could take a decade to pay back and will be a drag on recovery. The Treasury Committee was told last week by the British Retail Consortium and UKHospitality that their estimate of commercial rent arrears alone stands at over £5 billion. The Minister has extended the moratorium today and spoken of legislation, but what is his plan to deal with this debt? He asks businesses to start paying back, but with what?

Under the Treasury's furlough scheme, businesses must pay an additional 10% of their employees' wages on 1 July, rising to 20% in August, before the scheme is due to end in September. When this happened last year, businesses could not cope with the costs and people lost their jobs. Kate Nicholls of UKHospitality has called this situation unsustainable, and the Federation of Small Businesses has called for urgent additional support.

So will the Minister delay the furlough increase, and will he now extend furlough and the self-employment income support scheme for as long as they are required? Will he act to support those like the Blue Dog employees in Glasgow, whose employer's behaviour has meant that they have not received the payments they were entitled to? Will he finally—finally—put things right for the millions unjustifiably excluded from UK Government support schemes, such as those on short-term pay-as-you-earn contracts? Many have faced absolute financial ruin through no fault of their own, and it is high time they got support, and an apology from the Minister. Will he make the VAT cut to 5% permanent to give hospitality, tourism and events a much-needed boost into next year, and extend it to the hair, beauty and personal services sector? Will he keep the universal credit uplift and make an increase to sick pay?

The UK currently has the lowest stimulus package of any G7 country despite suffering the worst economic slump. We now need to boost it like Biden with a major fiscal stimulus of at least £100 billion. There is so much more that Scotland would do with the economic levers if we had access to them—so if the Minister will not act, will he give Scotland the power to do so?

Steve Barclay: The Scottish Government are still not using all the powers available to them on tax and welfare, and I always feel that before they seek further powers it would be useful for them to use fully the ones

they already have. I found it slightly odd that the hon. Lady said that not a penny of support had been announced, because the whole point of the package that was announced was the extensive support going on until the end of September. She seems to be ignoring that and suggesting that everything should start afresh from today.

The hon. Lady mentioned business rates, which I picked up on earlier. This financial year, over 90% of businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector that benefited from the 100% business rates holiday last year will receive a 75% cut in their business rates for the full year to March 2022. Let me just put that in context. In that last year, that tax cut cost £10 billion. This year, it is an additional £6 billion. The hon. Lady says that not a penny has been announced, but there is a further £6 billion of tax cuts on business relief this year in addition to last year. I think it is worth remembering the wider picture of the £352 billion of support.

The hon. Lady mentioned universal credit. We have been very clear from the start that it was a temporary uplift; my right hon. Friend the Chancellor set that out at the time. She also mentioned delaying furlough. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb) mentioned earlier, there are good reasons why it is not in people's interests to be on furlough for extended periods of time if their job has disappeared and is not going to come back and if there are other businesses that want to employ that labour. The furlough has achieved its main purpose in retaining the link between labour and business and allowed businesses to bounce back better as a result. So before asking for new powers, the Scottish Government should be focusing on the delivery of their response to covid and recognising the fact that we have been able to respond in this way because we have the strength of one United Kingdom. It is through this wider resilience that we have been able to put together a package of the size that the Chancellor has done.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): Thanks to decisions made by this Government, recent ONS data shows that UK unemployment is among the lowest in Europe at 4.7%, with almost 200,000 more people in work since April. My families on Ynys Môn desperately need more jobs, and a freeport on Anglesey would create thousands of high-skilled job opportunities. Can the Minister please update the House on what discussions he has had with the Welsh Government about the creation of at least one new freeport in Wales?

Steve Barclay: We want to ensure that the whole of the UK can benefit from freeports, and that is why we remain committed to establishing at least one freeport in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as soon as possible. As in England, a Welsh freeport will be chosen according to a fair, open and transparent allocation process.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): My thoughts and sympathies are with the family of Jo Cox on what must be a very difficult day for them.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has just been patting the Government on the back for what he calls "going long", but does he appreciate that it does not feel that way for all the businesses facing another month of restrictions, during which time many will have to find 10% of salaries for furloughed staff, face increased VAT

in hospitality, retail and leisure, and think about repaying bounce back loans without being able to trade again? When exactly will the Government abandon this piecemeal approach and reveal the long-term strategy for recovery and the extension of furlough and VAT holidays on which so many businesses, communities and families in this country depend for their future?

Steve Barclay: No one is saying that next month those businesses have to repay their bounce back loans. We have already extended the furlough and we have provided a huge amount of support to the businesses concerned. I have addressed some of the questions in relation to the business relief, VAT, the extension of the furlough scheme, the restart grants of up to £18,000 and the £2 billion of discretionary grant funding to local authorities. A comprehensive package of support has been offered, and it is simply not the case that these loans must be immediately paid back or that support has not been extended in line with the road map.

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): Visiting businesses across Barrow and Furness last weekend, I had one clear message from both those who run the businesses and the staff: they are incredibly grateful for the support they have had from the Government, especially the furlough scheme, but they asked for continuity and certainty that these schemes will continue through the delay in the road map. With that in mind, can my right hon. Friend confirm that the schemes will continue through this time and that, if the high street faces future shocks, the Treasury will look sympathetically at what measures it can put in place to support businesses there?

Steve Barclay: One thing my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has shown throughout the challenges of the pandemic is his nimbleness and willingness to respond to changing circumstances, but part of the design of the package of support was that, if there was a delay to step 4, it would be accommodated through the continuation of measures such as the furlough, the self-employment income support scheme, the business grants, the business rates relief and the loans programme. That was part of the design, but throughout the pandemic it has very much been the Chancellor's ethos to respond to changing needs.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): For as long as the health restrictions mean that businesses must stay closed, it is right that the economic support package supports jobs in those workplaces, but that simply is not the case. With the extension of the restrictions and, from 1 July, employers having to make a 10% further contribution to the wages of employees who are furloughed, jobs and livelihoods will be put at risk, including 3,700 jobs in my Lancaster and Fleetwood constituency. Surely the Minister can see how illogical that is, so will he reassess the tapering on the furlough scheme?

Steve Barclay: With respect to the hon. Lady, the number on the furlough has come down. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, there has been an increase in the level of employment since November, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire mentioned some of the challenges around employers wanting to hire and finding on some occasions that the furlough is an impediment to labour moving. Actually,

[Steve Barclay]

I do not think the data bears out the hon. Lady's point. The furlough has been a very expensive but essential measure in order to reduce economic scarring, but it is right that it tapers as we bounce back and more businesses open, and I think the data supports that.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): As the Chief Secretary has mentioned, unemployment is down. It is 2 million people fewer than originally forecast in April last year, and the unemployment rate at the moment is about 4.7%. Does this not show that our plan for jobs is working, and will the Chief Secretary set out how the plan will help people take advantage of the many vacancies that there are across many sectors?

Steve Barclay: I agree with my hon. Friend that the plan for jobs is working. We see that in the furlough data from the end of April, which is the last set of data that we have. There were 3.4 million people on furlough—down from a peak of 8.7 million—which shows the effectiveness of that. Output grew by 2.3% in April, and there was growth of 2.1% in March. Again, one can see the trajectory and the improvement there. Indeed, GDP data so far through 2021 has come out above the Office for Budget Responsibility forecast. There is still much work to do, but my hon. Friend can take comfort from the trajectory, which shows that the plan is indeed working.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): At the weekend, I visited Tip Top Linen Services in Luton North, which is a fantastic part of the local hospitality supply chain, with its roots committed to the community and an ethical ethos to be proud of, but the Government's abject failure means that many of the company's clients now cannot reopen for at least another four weeks. What does the Chief Secretary say to this and other brilliant but forgotten firms, which have taken a hit yet again because of his Government's failure to contain this dangerous new variant and to recognise that the hospitality sector is not just hotels and restaurants?

Steve Barclay: I do not accept that. Looking at the vaccine programme that the UK has had thanks to the huge efforts of our NHS, volunteers and so many people in communities up and down the country, I would not characterise it as an abject failure. Actually, our deployment of vaccines is the envy of many countries, and it is key to the road map.

For Tip Top Linen Services, and businesses across the United Kingdom, we have provided a comprehensive package of support, as I set out in a number of responses. That is key to those important businesses being able to bounce back as the road map moves to step 4.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call Dame Andrea, whom I congratulate on her extremely well deserved honour.

Dame Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. My right hon. Friend will be aware that some people who have been furloughed during lockdown have taken on other jobs. A big hotel and golf complex—a family-owned business in South Northamptonshire—furloughed about 300 staff. When it came to unlocking and it called back

all those staff, around half of them resigned because they already had other jobs at supermarkets, delivery companies and so on. What can my right hon. Friend do, first, to protect the taxpayer from people effectively earning double pay, and also to stop that happening to the huge detriment of this family-run business?

Steve Barclay: First, may I join you, Madam Deputy Speaker, in offering congratulations to my right hon. Friend on her well-deserved recognition? She raises an important and legitimate point. The furlough scheme was designed to operate within the employment law framework. An employee is able to have a second job while on furlough, provided that that was allowed within the terms of their existing employment contract. I appreciate the spirit of the point she raises, and that was not the original intention when someone moved on to another job. It was part of the balance, as we have debated in this House many times, between the speed of the scheme's deployment and how one designed its various features. What is allowed within an employment contract shapes what employees can do while on furlough.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC) [V]: In addition to addressing the public health emergency of covid-19, there is a pressing need for Governments across the world to act decisively to combat climate change. The Climate Change Committee has today criticised the Government's lack of action on climate-proofing our economy and society. Will the Treasury adopt the same urgency in tackling this crisis as it did when tackling the covid-19 pandemic, by allocating the funding necessary to address the recommendations in today's report, and accelerating our net-zero transition?

Steve Barclay: Future spending commitments on net zero will be matters for the spending review, but the hon. Gentleman will know well the Prime Minister's commitment to that agenda and the 10-point plan, as well as the leadership that the UK is providing through COP26. This issue is a key priority of the Prime Minister and the Government as a whole. There is much agreement across the House about the urgency of addressing climate change, but spending decisions on that will be for the spending review.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con) [V]: I thank the Chief Secretary to the Treasury for the £352 billion for jobs and businesses. Will he look urgently at sectors such as aviation, travel agents, and the events industry, which cannot currently trade out of the pandemic? For example, Ace Bar Events in Studham has had very little income and no help since the March 2020 £10,000 grant.

Steve Barclay: As my hon. Friend will know, Treasury Ministers and colleagues across the Government are always keen to engage with him on specific sectoral issues. The wider package of support was designed to work across sectors, and in addition to that I also mentioned specific support for the culture and sport sectors, such as the £1.57 billion announced and the further grant of £300 million. More than £11 billion of support has gone to the aviation sector. There are targeted measures of support for specific sectors, but they fit within the wider package of support such as the covid corporate financing facility, grants on research and development, and the furlough package of support.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP) [V]: People and businesses, especially in the hospitality sector, still need urgent and ongoing help to navigate the continuing covid emergency. The UK Treasury alone can help in three ways: it could continue the VAT cut for the sector or, even better, remove VAT; it could continue furlough at its current rate; or, as less than a fifth of the promised £350 billion for covid loans has been used, it could convert a chunk of it to grant funding. Will the Treasury do all or any of those three things?

Steve Barclay: The support package announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was designed to anticipate any potential slippage in the covid road map. The hon. Gentleman specifically mentions VAT, which has not been raised so far. The package of support in terms of reducing VAT totals £7 billion so far, with the 5% rate being extended to 30 September. Then there is a further transitional period for six months at 12.5%. Again, the narrative that VAT reductions are coming to an end, and that that is out of step with the covid road map, is not the case: the VAT reduction has already been extended to 30 September and then there is a transitional period at the lower level of 12.5%, in anticipation of the situation we face.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): The business rates holiday last year delivered a tax cut worth £10 billion for businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors—businesses such as the Goat's Gate in Whitefield in my constituency, which won my best pub competition. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that 90% of the businesses that benefited last year will also receive a 75% cut to their business rates bill for the full year to March 2022, thus continuing to support vital businesses in Prestwich, Whitefield and Radcliffe?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that businesses will continue to benefit from support. It is about getting the balance right between support for businesses and the cost to the Exchequer. There was 100% support for those businesses last year, and this year it equates to a 75% reduction in their business rates bill across the financial year.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab) [V]: Both the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed and the CBI have this week called for urgent sector-specific support packages; the British Chambers of Commerce and the TUC have urged the extension of the full furlough scheme; and ExcludedUK has reiterated calls to support the millions who have been left without support for over 15 months.

Will the Chief Secretary heed these calls and commit today to outlining urgently updated sector-specific support for industries subject to continuing restrictions, to extending the full furlough scheme for as long as needed and, finally, to ensuring a comprehensive and backdated package of income support for the excluded?

Steve Barclay: We have already covered the point that furlough has been extended until the end of September. As I said in my answer only a moment ago, there are specific sectoral support packages in addition to that. At the same time, we need to get the balance right between that and the very considerable cost to the Exchequer—borrowing £200 billion last year and with

significant further borrowing this year and next. We need to get the balance right between that level of borrowing and the wider package of support offered.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I appreciate that these are complex issues and that the Chief Secretary is being most assiduous in giving full answers, but I wonder if we could go just a little faster now. We have a lot of business to get through, which means people have to ask questions, not make statements.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): Nobody in this House, or indeed in Blackpool South, wanted to see a pause in our road map of easing restrictions. Does my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury agree that this short delay is necessary so that we can proceed irreversibly out of lockdown, build back better from covid and, finally, begin to get our public finances back in order?

Steve Barclay: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. The key is that it will allow time for more second vaccinations, which is key in the step-forward decision on the road map.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): My constituents will be very disappointed that the Chancellor has not bothered to come to this Chamber in such a week as this to answer my question relating to freelancers—particularly but not uniquely in the creative sector—who have been excluded from any package. So to pay for that, will the Minister have an urgent meeting with me and other Members who are worried about those who have been excluded from all packages of support, by the end of this week?

Steve Barclay: It is slightly odd to criticise me when I am literally in the Chamber answering the hon. Lady's question. The point is that there has been a comprehensive package of support for those on the self-employment income support scheme, which has been further extended. Many of those who were of most concern to colleagues on both sides of the House in earlier debates have come into scope of those schemes as we have gone through extensions, and I understand that my colleague the Financial Secretary has met groups to hear representations on these issues.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con) [V]: I welcome the measures announced today to help business tenants resolve any arrears disputes with their landlords. Does the Chief Secretary think that money could be found for a similar scheme for residential tenants who have gone into arrears with their landlords, to help to contribute to clearing those arrears so that tenants can have a fresh start once the pandemic is over?

Steve Barclay: Today's announcement clearly pertains to commercial rents. Of course, colleagues continue to listen to Members from across the House on other issues as they arise. I am very happy to have further discussions with my hon. Friend.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the assistance and tax cuts that he has given to businesses. Unlike Opposition Members, I will not demand additional spending and borrowing: does

[Joy Morrissey]

my right hon. Friend agree that we must come to grips with our level of borrowing and spending? We must have sound financial management moving forward out of the pandemic. Will he confirm that the Government have firm plans to do that?

Steve Barclay: I strongly welcome my hon. Friend's question. She is absolutely right to focus on that. That is why, at the Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced key measures such as maintaining the level of personal tax thresholds until 2025-26 and increasing the main rate of corporation tax. It is important that we take measures to protect the public finances and get them back on to a sustainable path in the medium term. She is absolutely right to highlight that important issue.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): In December, the UK Government provided a quarantine exemption to people flying business class, as if somehow the richest were immune to covid. Despite the bluster, we know that India was not added to the red list quickly enough. In terms of learning lessons, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that financial analysis needs to be undertaken on the cost of protecting borders with full quarantine and supporting the travel and tourism industries, versus the damage in financial impact of the longer imposition of restrictions?

Steve Barclay: Where there is a balance between protecting the unlocking of the wider UK economy versus a tougher approach at the border, the bigger prize economically is the UK's ability to unlock our economy. As the Prime Minister set out in Prime Minister's questions, we should not judge that with the benefit of hindsight when information on variants of concern which were not known at the time subsequently come to light, not least because of the UK's capacity to undertake 47% of current global genome testing. Again, that is a further illustration of the UK-wide capacity that allows us to be more effective in our response.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): At the Budget in March, the Chancellor made it clear that he was taking a long-term approach to the support schemes for two specific reasons: to accommodate any short pauses in the road map, and to provide certainty in planning for businesses and families. Does my right hon. Friend agree that because the support schemes—most of them, anyway—do not end until September, the principle of continuity and certainty is being delivered? Will it continue to be a part of all planning?

Steve Barclay: Very much. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question, and he is absolutely right. That was exactly the Chancellor's design for that continuity and certainty. Indeed, that particular thing was recognised and welcomed by many business leaders at the time.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab) [V]: Nightclubs and live music venues across Birmingham have been busy preparing and selling tickets for events in anticipation of the now delayed reopening. That is a further cost they can ill afford. Is there any further support the Minister is prepared to give them?

Steve Barclay: I have set out the comprehensive package of support that applies to businesses with restart grants and so forth. Of course, I would draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the support through local authorities, including the discretionary grants that are available as well.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I continue to meet businesses in Bosworth, most recently those from the Hinckley business improvement district. They told me they were very grateful for all the support the Government have offered during this time, but they are looking to grow for the future as they come out into the post-pandemic economy, and one of the biggest concerns they have is business rates. I know the Chancellor is committed to a review of business rates. Is the Treasury heeding that call, is the Chancellor committed to bring that forward, and is there a timeline to do so?

Steve Barclay: As my hon. Friend touched on in his question, the Government have committed to conclude the business rates review by autumn 2021. The review is considering the issues he mentions, including the fundamental changes to the administration of the business rates system and indeed the impact that has on businesses.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab) [V]: It is wonderful to see cafés, restaurants, pubs and bars in my constituency reopening their doors. Local spots like Levenshulme Bakery, Mediterranean Café and Coffee Cranks in Whalley Range and the Sanam restaurants in both Longsight and Rusholme are well worth a visit, if the Minister would like to join me some time. Despite doors being open again, the hospitality sector is now facing a mountain of debt. Forcing businesses to pay this back while many are still struggling to turn a profit is unfair and could well harm the recovery, so does the Minister agree that a flexible repayment scheme tied to profits is now necessary?

Steve Barclay: First, I am very grateful to the hon. Member for the kind invitation, and I hope one day to be able to join him in what I am sure are fantastic local businesses to which he is quite right to draw the House's attention. The key is the support that those businesses have had so that they are able to bounce back and to be open now. On the issue of debts carried by business, part of the design of the Chancellor's schemes such as bounce back loans has been to allow additional time for those loans to be repaid so that they do not become an undue burden on those businesses.

Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con): East Devon is back open for business, but step into any pub, café, hotel or restaurant and it is clear that it is struggling with the impact of social distancing. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that social distancing in hospitality must go next month to give these businesses a fighting chance of survival?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the importance of the review of social distancing that the Government are committed to undertaking, and that will obviously shape the approach. We have said that we will have a review, and we are very committed to that. The future beyond step 4 will therefore need to be taken in the round, shaped by the data in that review.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: Last year, when faced with the second wave of covid-19, the Scottish Government called for an extension of furlough as Scotland went into a further lockdown. However, the Tories only extended the scheme when it was clear that the south of England needed to be placed under tighter restrictions. Does the Minister agree that if Scotland is to be treated as an equal partner in the United Kingdom, furlough must be available if and when we need it?

Steve Barclay: The furlough is available—it extends to the end of September—but the hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that it is there almost indefinitely, as opposed to being an exceptional measure in response to the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic. Given the wider fiscal cost, not least the £352 billion spent to date, I do not think that that would be fiscally responsible.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): May I commend my right hon. Friend for the Treasury's response to the immediate challenge of covid, but also for having an eye on the longer-term challenge of inflation? We are now in the 13th year of competitive quantitative easing by the Fed, the Bank of Japan, the European Central Bank and the Bank of England. May I ask for his reflections on its effect on his near-term economic plans?

Steve Barclay: Of course, decisions on quantitative easing are for the Bank of England, which is independent. The last time I looked, I think the initial response to the global financial crisis was approximately £75 billion, and there has been about a twelvefold increase in QE since then, so I understand my hon. Friend's underlying point. Ultimately, what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has been focused on is the plan for jobs and supporting the economic recovery. We can see from the output data that the economy grew by 2.3% in April, as I said earlier, and GDP data has come out of the Office for Budget Responsibility forecast.

However, as my hon. Friend, who takes a deep interest in the matter, well knows, the picture remains challenging. There were 1.9%—or half a million—fewer employees in May than in February 2020, and 3.4 million people are still on furlough. It is a challenging picture, but I think that the plan for jobs is working, and the data suggests that.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): The impact of these restrictions on Britain's pubs has been very tough indeed, but it has been even worse for nightclubs that have been unable to open at all. It seems entirely wrong to me that, from 1 July, a nightclub that is unable to open will be paying a 33% business rate bill and seeing an increase in its furlough contributions. Given that the Government's failure has forced them to extend how long the nightclubs are closed for, will the Chief Secretary confirm that he will consider whether nightclubs should no longer be expected to pay that 33% on their business rates?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Gentleman raises a perfectly legitimate point about how acutely that sector in particular has been affected, as I think everyone in government recognises, but I do not think it fair to say that the Government have not announced any measures that reflect those challenges. Indeed, on commercial rent, he will have heard in my statement today's specific

announcement that applies to the sector. There are also other things, such as the furlough going long, the restart grant and a number of things within the comprehensive package, that are obviously of benefit to nightclubs.

Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): This morning's ONS inflation report highlights the risk we face of rising rates, given the amount of debt that we have incurred during the pandemic. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important we focus on sustainable public finances, and that one way we can help is by mobilising more private capital investment?

Steve Barclay: I absolutely agree, and I think that the importance of securing private investment is a very good note on which to end. My hon. Friend will know that in May, on the consumer prices index, inflation rose to 2.1% and the Monetary Policy Committee judged: "Inflation expectations remained well anchored."

However, with debt at nearly 100% of GDP, we need to pay close attention. To finish on a more sobering note, perhaps, a sustained increase in inflation by one percentage point would increase debt interest spending by £6.9 billion in '25-26, so my hon. Friend raises—as did the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves)—an important point that the House needs to keep under review.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the Chief Secretary and everyone who took part in the statement for getting through it in 58 and a half minutes. That always keeps the occupant of the Chair happy.

I would like to take a second to thank Sir Roy Stone for his extraordinary, long and patient service to this House; I cannot imagine this place without him. I know that we all wish him well.

We come to the result of today's deferred Division on the Draft Climate Change Act 2008 (Credit Limit) Order 2021. The Ayes were 363 and the Noes were 263, so the Ayes have it.

[The Division list is published at the end of today's debates.]

We now come to the exciting annual event of the presentation of Bills, which have arisen as a result of the private Members' Bills ballot. We have 20 such Bills. Contrary to the normal procedure when Members queue up behind the Chair, I hope that all 20 Members are either now in their places, or ready to participate virtually.

BILLS PRESENTED

EDUCATION (CAREERS GUIDANCE IN SCHOOLS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mark Jenkinson presented a Bill to extend the duty to provide careers guidance in schools.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 10 September, and to be printed (Bill 14).

EMPLOYMENT AND TRADE UNION RIGHTS (DISMISSAL AND RE-ENGAGEMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Barry Gardiner, supported by Robert Halfon, Gavin Newlands, Christine Jardine, Caroline Lucas, Sammy Wilson, Ben Lake, Andy McDonald, Dawn Butler,

Darren Jones and Bell Ribeiro-Addy, presented a Bill to amend the law relating to workplace information and consultation, employment protection and trade union rights to provide safeguards for workers against dismissal and re-engagement on inferior terms and conditions; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 October, and to be printed (Bill 15).

MENOPAUSE (SUPPORT AND SERVICES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Carolyn Harris, supported by Judith Cummins, Peter Dowd, Rosie Duffield, Nick Smith, Karin Smyth, Jim Shannon, Tracey Crouch, Jackie Doyle-Price, Tim Loughton and Caroline Nokes, presented a Bill to make provision about menopause support and services; to exempt hormone replacement therapy from National Health Service prescription charges; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 October, and to be printed (Bill 16).

DOWN SYNDROME BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Dr Liam Fox, supported by Ben Lake, Ian Paisley, Dr Lisa Cameron, Mark Logan, Nick Fletcher, Layla Moran, Darren Jones, James Daly, Mrs Flick Drummond and Elliot Colburn presented a Bill to make provision about meeting the needs of persons with Down syndrome; to place a duty on local authorities to assess the likely social care needs of persons with Down syndrome and plan provision accordingly; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 26 November, and to be printed (Bill 17).

MARRIAGE AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIP (MINIMUM AGE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sajid Javid, supported by Mrs Pauline Latham, Robert Halfon, Sir Graham Brady,

Philip Davies, Sarah Champion, Mrs Maria Miller, Alun Cairns, Fiona Bruce, Siobhan Baillie, Mr Virendra Sharma and Ms Nusrat Ghani, presented a Bill to make provision about the minimum age for marriage and civil partnership; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 19 November, and to be printed (Bill 18).

COPYRIGHT (RIGHTS AND REMUNERATION OF MUSICIANS, ETC.) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Kevin Brennan, supported by Ms Karen Buck, Damian Green, Alex Davies-Jones,

Claire Hanna, Sir Greg Knight, Ben Lake, Esther McVey, Abena Oppong-Asare, Jim Shannon, David Warburton and Pete Wishart, presented a Bill to make provision about the rights and remuneration of musicians and other rights holders; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 December, and to be printed (Bill 19).

MEDICAL CANNABIS (ACCESS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Jeff Smith presented a Bill to make provision about access to cannabis for medical reasons; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 10 December, and to be printed (Bill 20).

CLIMATE CHANGE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Colum Eastwood, supported by Clare Hanna, presented a Bill to place a duty on the government to declare a climate emergency; to amend the Climate Change Act 2008 to bring forward the date by which the United Kingdom is required to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions; to place a duty on the Government to create and implement a strategy to achieve objectives related to climate change, including for the creation of environmentally-friendly jobs; to require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament on proposals for increased taxation of large companies to generate revenue to be spent to further those objectives; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 10 December and to be printed (Bill 21).

TAXIS AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES (SAFEGUARDING AND ROAD SAFETY) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Peter Gibson, supported by Daniel Zeichner, Caroline Nokes, Mr Robert Goodwill, Sarah Champion, Sir John Hayes, Ms Nusrat Ghani, Esther McVey, Ms Harriet Harman and Lee Anderson, presented a Bill to make provision about licensing in relation to taxis and private hire vehicles for purposes relating to the safeguarding of passengers and road safety; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 10 September, and to be printed (Bill 22).

PLANNING (ENFORCEMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Dr Ben Spencer presented a Bill to create offences relating to repeat breaches of planning controls; to make provision about penalties for planning offences; to establish a national register of persons who have committed planning offences or breached planning controls and make associated provision about planning applications; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 19 November, and to be printed (Bill 23).

CULTURAL OBJECTS (PROTECTION FROM SEIZURE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mel Stride presented a Bill to extend the protection from seizure or forfeiture given to cultural objects.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 10 September, and to be printed (Bill 24).

PENSION SCHEMES (CONVERSION OF GUARANTEED MINIMUM PENSIONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Margaret Ferrier presented a Bill to make provision about the amendment of pension schemes so as to provide for the conversion of rights to a guaranteed minimum pension.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 26 November, and to be printed (Bill 25).

CHILDCARE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Matt Rodda presented a Bill to enable provision to be made for appeals relating to free childcare for young children of working parents to be settled by agreement; to make further provision designed to increase efficiency in the administration of free childcare schemes; to make provision about the promotion of the availability of free childcare, including to disadvantaged groups; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 October, and to be printed (Bill 26).

GLUE TRAPS (OFFENCES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Jane Stevenson presented a Bill to make certain uses of glue traps an offence; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 19 November, and to be printed (Bill 27).

ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Chris Bryant presented a Bill to make provision about meeting the needs of adults and children with an acquired brain injury; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 December, and to be printed (Bill 28).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (DISQUALIFICATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Paul Beresford presented a Bill to make provision about the grounds on which a person is disqualified from being elected to, or holding, certain positions in local government in England.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 October, and to be printed (Bill 29).

TAXIS AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES (DISABLED PERSONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Jeremy Wright presented a Bill to make provision relating to the carrying of disabled persons by taxis and private hire vehicles.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 14 January 2022, and to be printed (Bill 30).

HARE COURSING BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Richard Fuller presented a Bill to make provision about hare coursing offences; to increase penalties for such offences; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 21 January 2022, and to be printed (Bill 31).

ANIMALS (PENALTY NOTICES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Andrew Rosindell, supported by Sir David Amess, Tom Hunt, Mrs Sheryll Murray, Bob Stewart, Alexander Stafford, Theresa Villiers, Chris Grayling, Miss Sarah Dines, Henry Smith, Bill Wiggin and Joy Morrissey, presented a Bill to make provision for and in connection with the giving of penalty notices for certain offences in relation to animals and animal products.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 October, and to be printed (Bill 32).

BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Rosie Cooper presented a Bill to declare British Sign Language (BSL) an official language of the United Kingdom; to provide for a British Sign Language Council to promote and advise on the use of BSL; to establish principles for the use of BSL in public services; to require public bodies to have regard to those principles and to guidance issued by the Council; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 January 2022, and to be printed (Bill 33).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Thank you. That concludes the presentation of all 20 private Members' Bills, and I wish them well. I will now suspend the House for three minutes in order that arrangements can be made for the next item of business.

3.16 pm

Sitting suspended.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That, at this day sitting, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 16(1) (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union documents), the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on—

(a) the Motion in the name of Secretary Matt Hancock relating to the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps and Other Provisions) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2021 (SI, 2021, No. 705), and

(b) the Motion in the name of Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg relating to Proceedings during the pandemic

not later than 7.00 pm; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments to the Motion referred to in (b) above selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Michael Tomlinson*)

Coronavirus

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): The business of the House motion just agreed to by the House provides for motions No. 2 and No.3 on today's Order Paper to be debated together. The question on each motion will be put separately at the end of the debate.

3.20 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock): I beg to move,

That the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps and Other Provisions) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2021 (S.I., 2021, No. 705) dated 15 June 2021, a copy of which was laid before this House on 15 June, be approved.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we shall debate the following motion:

That

(1) the Order of 2 June 2020 (Proceedings during the pandemic (No. 2)), as amended on 1 July, 2 September and 22 October 2020 and 25 March, the Order of 4 June 2020 (Virtual participation in proceedings during the pandemic), as amended on 1 July, 2 September, 22 October and 30 December 2020 and 25 March, and the Orders of 23 September 2020 (Proxy voting during the pandemic), 3 November 2020 (Proxy voting during the pandemic (No. 2)), and 25 February (Sittings in Westminster Hall during the pandemic), as amended on 25 March, shall have effect until 22 July;

and

(2) the Order of 24 March 2020 (Select Committees (Participation and Reporting) (Temporary Order)) be amended as follows:

leave out paragraph (4) and insert "(4) this Order shall have effect until 22 July 2021."

Matt Hancock: I bring to the House these regulations to change the date of implementation of step 4 of the Government's road map. On 8 December last year, we fired the starting gun on the race between the vaccine and the virus and started delivering a programme that has allowed us to restore so many of the precious freedoms that we cherish. In the space of just six months, we have now given first doses of coronavirus vaccines to almost four in five adults in the UK, and we have given second doses to over 30 million people. We have made such rapid progress through the cohorts that, today, we are able to extend the offer of a vaccine to anyone aged 21 and over.

Thanks to the protection of the vaccination programme, huge advances in treatments like dexamethasone, which was discovered a year ago today, and the resolve of the British people in following the rules that this House has laid down, we have been able to take the first three steps on our road map, removing restrictions and restoring colour to the nation, but we have always said that we would take each step at a time and look at the data and our four tests before deciding whether to proceed. The regulations before the House today put into effect our decision to pause step 4 on our roadmap until 19 July. Before outlining the regulations that will put this into effect, I would like to set out why we made this difficult but essential decision.

Unfortunately, there has been a significant change since we started on our journey down the road map in February. A new variant has given the virus extra legs, both because it spreads more easily and because there is some evidence that the risk of hospitalisation is higher than for the alpha variant, which was, of course, previously dominant in this country. The delta variant now accounts

for 96% of new cases. The number of cases is rising and hospitalisations are starting to rise, too—they are up 48% over the past week. The number of deaths in England is thankfully not rising and remains very low, but, as I told the House on Monday, we do not yet know the extent to which the link between hospitalisations and deaths has been broken, so we propose to give the NHS a few more crucial weeks to get those remaining jabs into the arms of those who need them.

Although we are taking the steps outlined in the regulations today, and I know this is disappointing for many people, we know that science has given us a solution. We must use this time to protect as many people as we can as quickly as we can, because even though the vaccination programme has been going at a blistering pace, there are still people who we must protect.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): Can I just ask my right hon. Friend what we expect to achieve in the four weeks? I think I am right in saying that there are 1.3 million people in priority groups one to nine who have yet to have a second dose of the vaccination. The good point is that that means we have vaccinated 96% of people in those groups, but I just wonder—after four weeks, I doubt that we will get to 100%, so there will still be a significant number of people in those groups not vaccinated with two doses, and at that point, there is still going to be some risk. My worry, and the worry of others, is that we are going to get to this point in four weeks' time and we will just be back here all over again extending the restrictions. That is what we are concerned about.

Matt Hancock: No—on the contrary, that is our view of how far through the vaccination programme we need to get. We are not aiming to eradicate the virus in this country because that is not possible. Indeed, in the parts of the country where it has been tried, it has been found to be not possible. We are aiming to live with this virus like we do with flu. I can give my right hon. Friend an update: as of midnight last night, 1.2 million over-50s and 4.4 million over-40s have had their first jab, but not their second. We seek to get a second jab into a majority—not all, but a majority—of them by 19 July. The estimate is that by taking that pause in this step, we can save thousands of lives. I can tell my right hon. Friend that taking further time and pausing for longer is not estimated to save many more lives, because of the level of protection especially among the over-50s, who are, as we all know, the most likely to die from this disease.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The Secretary of State knows that I broadly agree with what he is doing today. He referred just now to us having to live with the virus as we do with flu. With flu, we do not require people to self-isolate, and we do not ask them to test and trace. My understanding is that the Government intend to keep test and trace on a mandatory, statutory basis all the way through the rest of this year and possibly until the end of March—or am I wrong?

Matt Hancock: With flu, of course, if people have symptomatic flu and are ill, they do tend to stay at home. Of course we have not done that on a mandatory basis before, but it is advisable that if people have symptoms of flu, they stay at home. For contacts, as the hon. Gentleman probably knows, we are already piloting an approach whereby instead of having to isolate as

contacts, vaccinated people go into a testing regime. That is an approach that I am very attracted to for the future, especially as more and more people get vaccinated, because we know that the risk once vaccinated is so much lower.

We are accelerating the second doses, and we are reducing from 12 weeks to eight weeks the time from first to second jab for all those aged 40 and above. In fact, since I came to this House on Monday, I have rearranged my second jab to be eight weeks rather than 12 weeks after my first.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): Me too—I have rearranged mine for tomorrow morning, in line with my right hon. Friend's advice.

Further to the intervention from my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper), it is very clear that the regulations will be passed by the House today. Regulation 2(3) talks about substituting 18 July for 30 June, and the Prime Minister talked about 19 July being a “terminus”. The definition of a terminus is the end point—the end of the line. Would the Secretary of State categorise it in exactly those terms? I think our constituents want to know what 19 July means that 21 June did not.

Matt Hancock: Yes, I would characterise it in that way. Our goal, ahead of 19 July, is to take step 4. On the basis of the evidence so far, I am confident that we will not need more than the four weeks to get this job done and take step 4.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend give us a little more information about the rise in hospitalisations that he mentioned? Of those who are being hospitalised, how many are in the younger age group who were not yet eligible for the vaccine, and how many are above that age—in other words, those who were able to get the vaccine but chose not to?

Matt Hancock: My right hon. Friend makes a really important point. The answer is that the majority are in the younger age group who have not yet had the chance to be vaccinated. Just under one fifth of those going into hospital in the last week have had both jabs, about a fifth have had one jab and the majority have not had any. The majority are under the age of 50 and have not yet had the opportunity to have both jabs. I think there is a material difference when it comes to the state's responsibility to offer the vaccine to all adults. The duty that we have when somebody has not been offered the vaccine is greater than the duty we have when we have offered a vaccine but somebody has chosen not to take it up. There is a material difference between those two situations that I think my right hon. Friend was getting at.

Dame Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): May I just take what our right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) said one step further? If I choose not to have, say, a yellow fever jab when I am going to a place that suffers yellow fever, the Government of the United Kingdom take no interest whatever in my illness status. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State says that he has less of a duty, surely what he means is that he has no duty at all. It is for people to take up the vaccine.

Matt Hancock: Up to a point, and the point is that, should that be taken as an absolute principle, there is a challenge should there be an overwhelming demand on the NHS that would impact on others. Of course, with a communicable disease, there is an impact on others in terms of spreading the disease, so we do have to have an eye to that. That is why I phrased it as I did, but in terms of my right hon. Friend's argument, I think she and I concur on the broad thrust of the case being made.

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): My point is slightly niche. The reason why we developed all the vaccines was that thousands of Brits volunteered to trial them. There are now a number who trialled vaccines that are not yet approved, such as the Valneva vaccine, and who therefore cannot use the NHS app and some other things. Should they go for two shots of another vaccine, or will the Health Department take that into account?

Matt Hancock: Being certified as having had a vaccine includes being on a vaccine clinical trial. The deputy chief medical officer, Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, has written to participants in vaccine clinical trials, who are doing, as my right hon. Friend says, a great service to their country and indeed to the world by offering themselves to have an unlicensed vaccine in order to check that it works. I am very grateful to all of them. We will not put them in a more difficult position because of that.

We will make sure that when it comes to someone proving that they have been certified as vaccinated, being on a clinical trial counts as certified and continues to count as certified during a grace period after they are unblinded, so that if they are in the placebo arm, they can get both jabs and will not be disadvantaged for being on the clinical trial. That is a very important point. I am very glad that right hon. Friend raises it. If anybody from any part of the House gets that question from a constituent, please point them to the comprehensive letter by Professor Jonathan Van-Tam that explains and reassures.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Matt Hancock: Yes, but then I will make some progress.

Dr Murrison: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. May I commend him for the efforts he has put in to keeping colleagues informed and responding to their questions along the way? It has been extremely good. Can I press him on this two-week break point that he and the Prime Minister have referred to? What underpins that? Is it simply a desire to get through a certain number of vaccinations—a figure that he presumably already knows? Or is it uncertainty over the data as it currently exists, because if it is, and given that this should be led by the data, there is every likelihood that in the next few days, we will get some indication as to whether the increase in the delta variant incidence is being translated into intensive care unit admissions and deaths? Can he give me and others considering how to vote this evening any comfort on that two-week point? If we have the sense that there may indeed be a genuine break at that point—if those cases do not translate into deaths or ICU admissions—we will be a little more comfortable.

Matt Hancock: As so often, my right hon. Friend, who is one of the most astute medical practitioners in this House—crikey, I could get myself into trouble

[*Matt Hancock*]

there, because all the medical practitioners in this House are astute, but he is also a public health expert. I will start again. My right hon. Friend's point was a really good one and very astute. He is exactly right about our approach: the two-week review is a data review.

Up to around 10 days to a week before the decision making cut-off for the proposal to take step 4 on 21 June, it looked like hospitalisations were staying flat, despite rising case rates. We did not know whether that was because of a lag or because there was now going to be no cases turning into hospitalisations. That remains the case now for the link to the number of people dying, because the number of people dying each day in England is actually slightly falling at the moment—thank goodness—and there has not been a rise in the number of deaths following the rise in the case rates, which started about three weeks ago. Within a couple of weeks, we will know whether that continues to be flat or whether it rises a little. It has risen a little in Scotland; I just put that warning out there. That is precisely the sort of data that we will be looking at at the two-week point. We have been absolutely clear that the goal on which we hang the decision ahead of 19 July is one of delivering the vaccines, and we have a very high degree of confidence that we can deliver the vaccines that we think are needed in order to be able to take step 4 on 19 July.

I hope that was a clear and comprehensive answer, once I untangled myself from my initial response to my right hon. Friend.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Is not the problem with the two-week checkpoint that it creates another moment of hope for people who still feel even these restrictions very acutely, and that if we create hope and then shift the goalposts again, people will continue to deepen their despair? What will he say to those people?

Matt Hancock: No, because I think people understand that we are putting forward the moments by which we can and then will make assessments according to the data. We have done that throughout. I think people get that and they understood that ahead of 21 June. I think people are smart enough to understand that distinction.

After this four-week pause, we will be in a stronger position—because of the vaccination rollout that we have been discussing—to keep hospitalisations down, and so to live with this disease and take that final step on the road map.

Let me turn to the regulations themselves, which put the pause into effect by amending the expiry date of the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps) (England) Regulations 2021, so that they expire at midnight on the evening of 18 July. To reflect this change, we also need to align the dates on several other covid regulations that are essential for keeping us safe, including: the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings on Public Transport) (England) Regulations 2020; the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 3) Regulations, which give powers to manage local outbreaks by cancelling events and closing individual premises; and the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Local Authority Enforcement Powers and Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020, which give local authorities powers to enforce covid-secure measures for businesses. They will all be extended until midnight on 18 July.

We do not want to extend these sets of regulations a day longer than we have to and have always said that we would ease restrictions as soon as we were able to safely to do so. Even though we have put forward these regulations to pause step 4, we are also putting forward regulations to ease restrictions in some areas, allowing us to remove the 30-person gathering limit for weddings, receptions and commemorative events—subject, of course, to social distancing measures—and to run another phase of our pilots for large events at higher capacity, including some, such as the Wimbledon finals, at full capacity. Even though we have not been able to take the full step 4 as we wanted, the regulations will allow us to make some cautious changes that will bring some joy to many people and move us slightly further down the road to recovery.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): Although the slight relaxing of things such as weddings is to be welcomed, certain other key life events have not been included. I am thinking of the likes of bar mitzvahs and baptisms, which mean so much to so many. Will my right hon. Friend look at those restrictions again, or even look at them at the two-week point, to see whether life events such as baptisms can be subject to reduced regulations?

Matt Hancock: I am happy to look at other life events, although not for the regulations that are before the House today, which are not open to amendment. I am happy to discuss other life events with my hon. Friend.

Let me turn to two other points before I close. First, let us look at the motion tabled by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. The House has been determined to ensure that, even in the worst clutches of the pandemic, we have found a way that democracy can function and this House can perform its vital functions. Like everyone here, I miss the bustle and clamour of the Chamber when it is full. I cannot wait for the moment when we can all cram once more into our cockpit of democracy.

Just as we have extended other regulations, we propose extending the hybrid arrangements for the House until the House rises for summer recess on 22 July.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Matt Hancock: Yes, in a moment.

This will allow for proxy voting to continue along with virtual participation. Crucially, the regulations on the hybrid arrangements fall this summer recess, so when we return in September, we are confident that we can return in full, cheek by jowl once more. I do not know about you, Mr Deputy Speaker—nor, indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone)—but I cannot wait.

Mr Bone: I want to help my right hon. Friend. He cannot wait, so why wait? Why not make this House a pilot, to see what happens? We have the testing facilities, so let us make it a pilot. Say that now, Secretary of State.

Matt Hancock: I would dearly love that, and I will talk to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who, as I well know, is an enthusiast. I would love it if we could make that so—let us see.

Finally, I want to tell the House about the results of our consultation on vaccination as a condition of deployment in care homes. After careful consultation, we have decided to take this proposal forward, to protect residents. The vast majority of staff in care homes are already vaccinated, but not all of them are. We know that the vaccine protects not only you, but those around you. Therefore we will be taking forward the measures to ensure the “mandation” as a condition of deployment for staff in care homes, and we will consult on the same approach in the NHS, in order to save lives and protect patients from disease.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Will the Secretary of State then explain to the House whether visitors to care homes or to hospitals will also require proof of vaccination? Will delivery drivers require it? Will others who provide other services to those care homes and hospitals require the same? Is he not now walking down the road of requiring mandatory vaccination for almost everyone?

Matt Hancock: No, I do not agree with mandatory vaccination of the public, but for those who have a duty to care, in an environment that includes some of the most vulnerable people in the country, I think this is a sensible and reasonable step in order to save lives.

Mr Harper: The Secretary of State will also be aware that staff who provide domiciliary care in people's homes—they potentially provide care to many people, going to many homes during the day—are also caring and present a similar challenge. It would be preferable, in the first instance, if we could get those vaccination rates up by education and persuasion. I am prepared, if that is not possible, and following the precedent we have in the NHS for those who perform operations and have to be vaccinated against hepatitis, to agree to this matter, but there is a real issue here with the millions of people who provide domiciliary care, who are often employed directly. How is that going to work and provide the level of protection required?

Matt Hancock: Yes, we do propose to consult on this point, alongside the consultation on mandatory vaccination as a condition of deployment in the NHS. As my right hon. Friend rightly says, this is a complicated operational matter. The principle of vaccination for those in a caring responsibility is already embedded, as he says; there is a history going back more than a century of vaccination being required in certain circumstances. I think these are reasonable circumstances, so we will go ahead for those who work in care homes and we will consult about those in domiciliary care and those working in the NHS. However, I have no proposals for going, and would not expect us to go, any wider.

Mr Steve Baker: I can understand why we would want especially to protect people in those circumstances, of course, but will the Secretary of State explain why it is not possible to maintain their right to choose not to be vaccinated by instead, for example, requiring daily lateral flow tests for workers in those industries?

Matt Hancock: We already have significant testing, but this is a matter of risk and we know that the vaccine reduces that risk very significantly.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): I will not be joining the Secretary of State in the Lobby later on, partly for civil liberties reasons, but I do agree with what he is saying about vaccination. About four years ago, the Science and Technology Committee looked at the level of flu vaccination in care homes, which at that time was about 20%. Flu, like covid, is a killer of elderly people. Will he be looking to make not only covid vaccination, but flu vaccination a condition of employment?

Matt Hancock: Yes we will, for exactly the reason that the hon. Gentleman sets out.

Chris Bryant: On someone proving that they are double vaccinated, there is still an issue between England and Wales and other parts of the UK. I wonder when that will be solved, because obviously everybody does not live in a hermetically sealed unit.

Matt Hancock: As somebody who grew up right on the Welsh border, I entirely understand that. I am working with Baroness Morgan, the new Health Minister in the Welsh Government, to ensure that we have the interoperability that the hon. Gentleman calls for. That is a significant piece of work that is under way. We need to sort this for vaccine data flows, and frankly all health data flows, across the border, and use this particularly acute need to change the policy and practices, to sort this out once and for all.

The regulations before the House today are there in order to pursue our goal, as throughout, to work to protect lives and get us out of the pandemic as soon as is safely possible. I commend the motion to the House.

3.45 pm

Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab/Co-op): I begin by paying tribute to our much-missed friend and colleague Jo Cox. Jo was an internationalist, and I know that, if she were with us today, she would be rallying support not just across this country but through her international contacts for a campaign to vaccinate the world. She would remind us that we will defeat this virus only through our common endeavour. I think that all of us miss Jo and want to send our best wishes to her family today.

We will support the extension of restrictions in the Lobbies tonight, but we of course do so with a heavy heart. We are guided by data not dates, and we have to recognise the facts before us. The delta variant is 60% more transmissible than the alpha, and even with the current restrictions in place the daily total of positive cases has been rising, with a seven-day rolling average of more than 7,000 per day compared with around 2,000 per day in early May. That is beginning to translate into hospitalisations. With cases doubling every nine days, at the moment it looks like hospitalisations are also doubling. On 4 June, 96 people with covid were admitted; nine days later, 187 people were admitted—almost double. If that continues to double, within four sets of doublings we will be close to the April 2020 peak.

Given that we know that there is always a lag in the figures, we are no doubt likely to see around 250 admissions a day in 10 days' time. We are seeing a third wave in the NHS. We need to do all that we can to stop hospitalisations rising, because this is a time of huge pressure on the

[Jonathan Ashworth]

national health service. We have lost a number of beds over the past 10 years, and because of the need for infection control measures we have fewer general and acute beds open today in the NHS as well. We are facing a monumental backlog in care, with 5 million people on the waiting list, more than 385,000 waiting over 12 months for treatment, and nearly 3,000 now waiting over two years for treatment.

Throughout the crisis, we have said that the NHS was not overwhelmed, but it was not overwhelmed only because of some of the terrible choices that had to be made. To be frank, I do not want to see the NHS forced to make choices between providing covid care and cancer care. That is why we should listen to those NHS leaders who have warned us about the increasing pressures on the NHS. Chris Hopson of NHS Providers said:

“The NHS is running hot at the moment dealing with backlog recovery and emergency care pressures.”

The NHS Confederation said:

“Health leaders are very aware of the damaging effects that prolonged social restrictions could have on the nation’s physical health and mental wellbeing... Yet, according to our survey the majority of NHS leaders are concerned about the risks that lifting prematurely could have on the NHS’s ability to cope”.

Steve Brine: I know that the official Opposition’s position will be to support the regulations today, but I am keen to explore this with the right hon. Gentleman. Would he be happy to see the terminus on 19 July, or would he like to see it maybe at the end of September, when the entire adult population will be double-jabbed, or at the end of next year, when the G7 thinks that the rest of the world will be vaccinated? What would his instinct be?

Jonathan Ashworth: Of course I want to see terminus day on the 19th, although I am not sure if we are going to see terminus day on the 19th. The hon. Gentleman, who is always well-informed, will no doubt have read the explanatory notes, which indicate that this four-week period is to assess the data, and the four tests will be applied at the end of that four-week period. That is not quite the terminus day that the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State have indicated.

Chris Bryant: It is wholly misleading to call it a terminus date anyway. Even if we were to implement cessation of some of the measures on 19 July, there will still be lots of other measures that will exist, including test and trace, maybe for quite proper reasons. To mislead the nation by constantly going on about freedom days and terminus days is just a mistake.

Jonathan Ashworth: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Of course I want to see terminus day. I want to see freedom; I want to get back to doing the things that I enjoy—although I am quite happy to sit in a group of six in a pub; I am not sure that I have more than six friends, Mr Deputy Speaker, so it has suited me in many ways. But more generally—[*Interruption.*] I see you have one less friend today, Secretary of State.

I am keen to see terminus day. But interestingly, although the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Secretary of State have tried to hint that restrictions are coming to an end by

using the new phrase, “We have to learn to live with the virus like we live with flu,” the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister have not outlined to us what that means. They are trying to suggest to us that it is all going to go back to normal, but actually we put in place mitigations to deal with flu year by year. The hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) was a Public Health Minister. He was very much involved in the flu vaccination campaign. We vaccinate children to deal with flu. We put infection control measures into care homes when there is a flu outbreak. There will have to be mitigations in place when we go back to living with this virus, but the Secretary of State must explain to us what those mitigations are. Will we continue wearing masks?

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): No!

Jonathan Ashworth: Well, the Secretary of State needs to explain whether we should or not. Will we be supporting the installation of proper ventilation systems? We have known about the importance of ventilation in dealing with respiratory viruses since the days of Florence Nightingale. Countries such as Belgium are now providing premises and buildings with CO₂ monitors to improve their air quality; will we be doing that?

The other thing about this virus is that, even when we vaccinate people—of course I want to see us meet the various vaccination targets—we know that some people will still be at more severe risk than they would be from flu. There will be people who will develop long covid symptoms. For some people, those symptoms are beyond achiness and tiredness. We have seen people lose hair, lose teeth. In some people it presents as depression, anxiety—even psychosis in some circumstances. So Ministers must explain exactly what “living with this virus like flu” means.

There is something else that they should explain to us. What are we going to do in the winter? It did not come up in the earlier exchanges; I thought that it might. Perhaps the Secretary of State, or the Minister in responding to the debate, can tell us whether the Secretary of State, the Minister or departmental officials are putting together plans for restrictions this winter, and whether the Secretary of State has developed or discussed those plans with any colleagues in Whitehall. I shall be grateful if the Secretary of State or the Minister would tell us about that.

Mr Harper *rose*—

Steve Brine *rose*—

Jonathan Ashworth: I will give way first to the former Public Health Minister, and then to the former Chief Whip.

Steve Brine: The right hon. Gentleman is right: we had a battle royal with influenza in the first year that I was in the job, but the difference was that we did not have any non-pharmaceutical interventions. Our interventions were about the take-up of the vaccine—yes, for children as well as for adults, especially the vulnerable. One of our chief advisers, the deputy chief medical officer then, one Professor Chris Whitty, never suggested masks, let alone closing schools—just a really good roll-out of the flu vaccine. We lost 22,000 people that year. Never were those numbers rolled on BBC News; never did we know the R number, but there was a point where we accepted an element of risk in society. I guess

that was the point of my earlier intervention on the hon. Gentleman: what element of risk is he prepared to accept? Because that is what it comes down to—our own mortality is part of the human condition.

Jonathan Ashworth: We do accept it but we do not glibly accept it, because year by year we are looking for improvements in vaccinations, therapeutics and medicines to push infection rates down as low as possible. Even though we are grown-up enough to be aware that sadly some people will die from flu and pneumonia, we do all we can to avoid it. That is what we will have to do with this, but I do not want to see it done by some of the wider restrictions and lockdowns that we have heard about. That is why I would be interested to know whether the Department has developed plans for restrictions this winter and whether the Secretary of State has been discussing that with Whitehall colleagues.

Mr Harper: On the point about the restrictions, I know that those discussions are going on because I have seen documents from within Government with very detailed suggestions about what measures may continue. I asked the Secretary of State about this when he was in the Commons earlier this week, and he did not rule out bringing in restrictions this winter. That is partly why some Conservative Members are very concerned and why we are not going to vote for these regulations today. However, I want to take the right hon. Gentleman back to his comments on what Chris Hopson said about the fact that the NHS is very busy at the moment. There is a danger here. I am very sympathetic to colleagues who work in the NHS, who have done a fantastic job, but we cannot get to a point where we restrict and manage society in order to manage NHS waiting lists. That is not the right way round. The NHS is there to serve society. If we need to enable it to do that, we have to think of a way of doing it other than putting restrictions on the rest of society. That is not a sustainable or a desirable position, but it is the logical consequence of what Chris Hopson was saying earlier this month.

Jonathan Ashworth: Even though we will find ourselves in different Lobbies this evening, I think there is more in common between us than perhaps one might expect. I do not want restrictions to remain in place for any longer than they need to. I want to move to a system where we are trying to push down covid infection rates by, yes, rolling out vaccination as far and as fast as possible to everybody, but also putting in place the proper framework so that those who are ill or a contact of someone who has been ill with covid is able to isolate themselves.

We still have a culture in this country of soldiering on; the Secretary of State has referred to it in the past. I dare say that it is true of many of us in this Chamber. I have certainly done it in the past 20 years of my working life. I have gone into work with a sore throat or feeling under the weather, thinking I will just have some paracetamol and get on with it. Things like this have got to change, because although that sore throat may well have been fine for me, we now understand in great detail that it could have been very dangerous for others. We have to change our attitudes. However, there will still be a lot of people who have to go to work because they cannot afford to stay at home, so we need decent sick pay sorted out. One of the things that was revealed in

this morning's Politico email was the leak of a Government document that said that the isolation system is still not effective. That is because we still do not pay people proper sick pay. This is going to become more of an issue because presumably Test and Trace is to stay in place for the next year or so, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) indicated. People who have had two jabs and are asked to isolate themselves will ask themselves, not unreasonably, "If I have had two jabs, why do I need to isolate myself?" This is going to become much more of a challenge and we will need proper sick pay in place.

Let me finish dealing with the point made by the hon. Member for Winchester. I want us to control the virus by doing things such as proper sick pay, proper ventilation support, and investing properly in public health systems and local primary care systems. One of the things we know about this virus is that, like flu, it disproportionately hits the poorest and the disadvantaged because they are the people who have to go to work or the people in those communities where significant long-term conditions such as diabetes and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease tend to cluster. That often makes those people more vulnerable to these types of respiratory viruses.

Dr Murrison: On the subject of the poorest and most disadvantaged, what does the right hon. Gentleman then make of the recent observation by the chief medical officer on the annual toll taken by the ill effects of smoking? He said that because he wanted to compare and contrast the number of people that we are losing, sadly, to covid with those we lose every single year to the ill effects of smoking. We have been prepared to countenance some swingeing restrictions on all our liberties for the past 15 months; banning smoking, for example, would be far less restrictive by comparison. It is smoking that is driving up health inequalities, but I have not heard him comment on that yet.

Jonathan Ashworth: I have not commented on it in my remarks so far, but I have commented on it in the past and I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. We need to do more to drive down smoking rates, we need to do more to deal with alcohol abuse and we need to do more with the fact that too many of us eat food that is high in salt and sugar. I am prepared to work with the Government to be more interventionist on these matters. I would look at levies and taxes on tobacco companies, and I would invest more in anti-smoking and public health facilities locally, some of which have been cut back, sadly, because the public health grant has been cut back. So yes, I completely agree with the right hon. Gentleman.

Dr Murrison: With respect, the right hon. Gentleman has missed the point. Perhaps I did not make myself clear enough. The chief medical officer was introducing that because he was trying to explain that we are going to have to live with some level of risk. We need to have a discussion about the public's appetite for risk if we are to live with covid. The reason he cited smoking and the figure of 90,000 a year is that it approximates to the number of people we have lost from covid so far in this pandemic. Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree that we need to have a discussion about where we are prepared to pitch this? Is it 22,000, which is the figure for a bad flu year? Is it 90,000, which is the number we lose every single year from the ill effects of smoking?

Jonathan Ashworth: I understand the point that the right hon. Gentleman is making. It is in some ways similar to the flu point. We do not just glibly accept smoking. We take measures in society to try to push down rates. I do not think the House would want to go as far as to ban smoking outright, despite what any of us might feel as individuals about smoking, but we do what we can to push down smoking rates because we want to reduce the poor health outcomes from smoking. That is what we will have to do with covid. We will have to put measures in place to mitigate the negative effects of covid, which I would argue is about allowing people to isolate themselves with proper sick pay, doing things around ventilation, giving local authorities more responsibility, perhaps to inspect premises without proper ventilation standards in place, and obviously resolving some of the issues around contact tracing that still have not been resolved 15 months on. So I do understand the point that the right hon. Gentleman is making, and he makes it well, as always in this place.

Before I was taken off course, I was quoting some of the health organisations. The point is that, given where we are now in our response to the virus, I believe that we should listen to those health professionals and take into account what they are saying. Delaying the road map by four weeks will hopefully relieve the pressures on hospitals, which is why we are prepared to support the restrictions tonight in the Lobby. I fear that lifting all the restrictions now could be akin to throwing petrol on a fire, so we will support the Government. But, of course, we should not be here. We are only here because over the last eight weeks we have failed to contain the delta variant and have allowed it to become dominant.

I have always tried to keep our dealings with the Secretary of State civil in public and private, but that is not so, it seems, for the Prime Minister. The right hon. Gentleman is now forever branded as “hopeless” Hancock by his own leader. Our constituents watching the news tonight will know that the Government have failed to protect our borders, that they have allowed this variant to take off and that restrictions are being extended, and I have no doubt that many of them will repeat the Prime Minister’s expletive-laden sentiments about the Secretary of State tonight.

We are being asked to endorse these restrictions because the Government failed to prevent this variant from reaching our shores. Rather than red-listing the delta variant when that was needed, they gave it the red carpet instead. Let me remind the House what happened. On 24 March, India’s health ministry warned about a so-called double mutant variant. On 30 March, *The BMJ* warned that India’s cases had taken a sharp upward turn since March and that India had the third highest number of confirmed cases and deaths from covid-19. On 1 April, the original B1617.1 was designated as under investigation. By 2 April, the Government had put Pakistan and Bangladesh on the red list, but not India. By this time, cases were running at close to 100,000 a day in India and thousands of people were returning to the UK from India. The Secretary of State justifies his position by saying that he did not have the data, but he should have acted on a precautionary basis. When he could see that the virus was raging, with 100,000 cases a day in India, he should have immediately put India on the red list, because the one thing that we know about the virus is that if we do not get ahead of it, it quickly gets ahead of us.

The House is being asked to extend these restrictions, but there are a number of pressing issues. First, many of us have been contacted by business people in our constituencies who are deeply concerned about the extension of these restrictions. For my constituency in Leicester, which has been living under a form of restrictions more severe than other parts of the country, other than perhaps parts of Greater Manchester, this has been particularly devastating. I hope that the Government will be putting in place full support for businesses such as mine in Leicester and Greater Manchester and elsewhere.

The second issue, which we have touched on a little bit, is whether these restrictions will ever end, or whether the Prime Minister has trapped us in Hotel California, where we can never leave. He has talked about 19 July as the terminus date, but the explanatory notes themselves say that the four tests will apply on 19 July, and that these four weeks will be used to gather more data.

Even with the vaccination programme going ahead and going further—I, like the Secretary of State, have had my second jab rearranged and am looking forward to it in a couple of weeks’ time—there will still be a large proportion of the population who have had one jab or no jab and who will still be vulnerable to catching the virus, and the virus can still exploit that opportunity to transmit.

It was the Secretary of State himself who said some weeks ago that

“Delta can spread like wildfire”

among those who have not had a jab. That will mean further disruption to people’s lives, more people needing to isolate and more people suffering from long covid. When I put these points to him on Monday, he said that the logical conclusion of that is that restrictions remain in place forever. On the contrary, the logical conclusion of that is that we put the other measures in place that will allow us to push down infection rates. I am talking about basic infection control measures such as sick pay and isolation support. A total of £38 billion has been allocated to testing and tracing, and yet the numbers using lateral flow tests have gone down six weeks in a row. This is because we do not have proper sick pay for people. Moreover, anecdotally, we are also hearing that more people are deleting the app from their phones.

We will support these restrictions tonight, and we hope that the Secretary of State or the Minister can give us a commitment that they will come to the House in two weeks’ time and give us an update on that data. We hope that the Secretary of State will give us a commitment to put in place the other measures that will help push down infection rates, but the sad truth is that we have to push forward these restrictions again for another four weeks, because the Secretary of State was indeed hopeless and failed to contain the delta variant.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We will have a four-minute limit immediately, but I think that that will be reduced later on. We have had a few withdrawals, so please do not assume that everybody is here on the list. Of everybody contributing, there are only four contributing virtually today, so everybody else is physical, which is very pleasing for the Chair. The four-minute limit is for Back-Bench contributions only.

4.8 pm

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): I never believed that it was proportionate, even from the outset, for Ministers to take such liberties with our liberty. I always thought that it was wrong for them to take our freedoms, even though they believed that they were acting in our best interests in an emergency, but by any measure that emergency has now passed and yet freedoms are still withheld and the Government will not allow us to assess for ourselves the risks that we are prepared to encounter in our ordinary, everyday lives. The Government do not trust the people whom they govern.

Many members of SAGE—a misnomer if ever there was one—have been out busily undermining public morale. One of them even shared her dystopian vision that we must all remain masked and distanced in perpetuity—a shocking, horrible prospect. The fact is that once the consequences of this virus in terms of their financial and health impacts have long been addressed, the moral impact will remain. The Government have set a disastrous precedent in terms of the future of liberty on these islands. I could understand it if we were a communist party, but this is the party that inherited the true wisdom of the Whig tradition. This is the party of Margaret Thatcher, who said that liberty was indivisible. This is the party that only recently elected a leader whom we believed was a libertarian. There is much on which we are going to have to reflect.

4.10 pm

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): I will be relatively brief, recognising that the public health motion relates to English covid public health regulations, and address most of my comments to the second motion. However, I think it is worth noting and picking up on a number of the comments made by the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) and other Members in relation to the outlook beyond covid.

Next week, the Scottish Government will publish a paper setting out what they hope life after covid will look like as we get back to something like normal and the remaining restrictions begin to be removed. None of us wants to see the restrictions in place any longer than they have to be, but while there is a risk to public health, we need to be very careful. The Scottish Government have been very, very minded to focus on the data, not the dates. I have to say that there seems to be quite a marked difference in the approach between the two Governments, given such a focus on freedom days and terminus dates all having to be attached to a particular date, rather than just looking at what the data actually tells us. As I say, none of us wants to see restrictions any longer than we need them, but while there is still a risk we must continue. The vaccine roll-out has been spectacular—nobody can deny that—but there are still so many people we need to continue to protect.

Turning to the second motion, I very much welcome the inclusion of the motion to extend virtual proceedings. It would have been unreasonable, when there is an extension for the general public, not to have extended such provisions in this place. Many times over the course of the past year and a bit, we have heard how we need to make sure that this place keeps step with the general public. I suggest that keeping step with the

general public also means that we continue to look at what steps we can take to enhance that ability in this place as we go forward, as workplaces across the country will be doing. They are looking at different ways of working, and at adopting new and different ways to encourage participation from all. I fear that at some stage we may again be at a place where we are disenfranchising some Members. With this extension, we have perhaps given ourselves the opportunity to re-examine some of the points on medical proxy voting. There are some Members with very particular medical situations that are unique to them where a case could very strongly be made that a proxy vote would be appropriate on a longer-term basis than has been outlined. I am not saying that we should be putting in place something that makes it easier for a Minister to be given a proxy to be able to avoid a vote just because it suits. This is about a very particular set of situations where a specific number of Members have unique circumstances, and we need to take account of them.

I raised this point yesterday when the motions were presented. Given the variability in the virus and the changes of circumstances that can happen, and by the nature of the fact that we have had to have an extension at this point, I fear that having an end date at the start of a recess and effectively coming back in September with no opportunity in advance to consider what may or may not need to be done at that stage puts us in a slightly unusual situation. Should the situation arise in September where we need to do something else, this place will have to return in full numbers to effectively decide whether or not we want to have any further restrictions. I urge caution on that and ask for consideration as to how that could be managed, because I think that would be a particular anomaly. As I say, workplaces across the country are looking at how they can adapt, so why would we not? I think it is appropriate. Given the number of Members looking to speak in the debate, I will restrict my comments to that.

4.14 pm

Sir Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): I wish to try to be constructive about how we can improve SAGE. As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, SAGE has huge power over our lives. It has power over whom we hug and hold. It has power over which businesses open and which businesses close. In essence, it has power over who keeps their job and who loses their job. We, too, in this place have great power, but our power is matched by accountability.

Accountability is very important in the exercising of power, so I want to suggest some reforms to SAGE—some quite technical reforms. First, there is a need for greater financial transparency from members of SAGE in line with that expected of Members of Parliament. For example, I think when we look at SAGE members, we should be able to see what their annual income is—not only from their substantive job, but from their pensions accrued or the pensions they might well be in receipt of. This is something that is freely available for all Members of Parliament. I think we should also know and constituents should know if they have any significant shareholdings in companies, in the same way that our constituents know if we have significant shareholdings in companies. We could also look at whether they get other forms of income—from rent, for example.

[*Sir Charles Walker*]

I am not suggesting for a minute that this would include the spouses or partners of members of SAGE in the same way this does not include our spouses and partners, but given that they are making huge decisions that have huge financial consequences for tens of millions of people, it is important that our constituents know whether or not the people making these decisions are sharing the pain or are insulated from the pain. For example, in the case of young people, many SAGE experts say that young people should be working from home. We know that young people are now tied to their small kitchen table or in their bedroom in miserable environments—the new dark satanic mills—and working endless hours in appalling circumstances, because people with nice gardens and comfortable homes think that is what they should be doing.

There should also be far greater personal accountability. There should be no more, “Here is Sir Mark Walport—of SAGE, but here in a personal capacity”. Nonsense! He is there because he is a member of SAGE. We should also have elections to SAGE, so we could see Sir Mark Walport, Professor Susan Michie, John Edmunds and regular talking heads in our TV studios challenged by people with a different perspective—people such as Professor Karol Sikora, Professor Paul Dolan, who is an expert on human behaviour and quality of life, and Professor Ellen Townsend, who has a huge interest in the welfare of children and adolescents who are now being plagued by anxiety and eating disorders.

Mr Steve Baker: My hon. Friend is making a great case, with which I largely agree, but does he agree with me that experts are only human and to an extent we have been asking the impossible of them? They are risk averse—they do not want to be blamed for a disaster—and they will choose to give advice that is cautious. Would he join me in recommending to the Prime Minister the reform that I have put forward, which is to have competitive multidisciplinary expert advice with red team challenge?

Sir Charles Walker: I think that is a fantastic and plausible suggestion. We need a diversity of voices, but of course if we had elections, we could get people elected from Independent SAGE, and we know what they want—harder lockdowns, tighter lockdowns and a permanent end to freedoms.

But there is an alternative to elections and to financial disclosure, which is that the Prime Minister could say to members of SAGE, “Here it is: you can either advise me or you can advise the “Today” programme, Sky and Channel 4, but you can’t do both. You can either be a serious scientist at this moment in time advising your Government or you can be a media talking head building a career outside SAGE, but you can’t do both”. I think that is a perfectly legitimate thing to do. We would not expect our generals to give a running commentary on a war, undermining politicians. It is just not acceptable. It is just not acceptable, Mr Deputy Speaker. Can you imagine if the Clerks who advise my Administration Committee were going out and briefing what they would like to see my Committee do and pushing us into a corner all the time? It would not be tolerable. It would not be tolerated in this place, and it should not be tolerated by No. 10.

So here it is: full financial disclosure from members of SAGE and full elections, or they advise the Government, and if they do not want to do that, but want to advise TV studios, they do that, but they do not do both.

4.19 pm

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): As ever, it is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Sir Charles Walker). On his interesting point about SAGE, we could do with full disclosure from the Government about all the facts that they have available to them on covid. In the Science and Technology Committee this morning, we were told that vaccinations have saved 14,000 lives. I have no doubt that that is an accurate figure, but there are many figures that have not been given. As we said the last time we debated this issue, only one side of the equation is given. Let me ask this question: how many lives have been lost in order to save capacity in the NHS? When it comes to looking at people untested and untreated for cancer, heart disease and other diseases, we will find that the figures are of a similar, if not greater, magnitude than the number of people who have died from covid.

We should have transparency and open declarations of what really happened with the 26,000 deaths in care homes, where untested people were sent from hospital. We should have disclosure about all those people who were triaged by age and who were not treated, and all those people in care homes who were not allowed into hospitals because they were not taking people from care homes. There is a great deal more information that we require in order to make a rational decision about whether the lockdown should continue. I agree with the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) that what we have here is the Government asking for emergency powers when there is no longer an emergency.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way; we were in the Science and Technology Committee this morning. Does he share my disquiet at the fact that the vaccine effectiveness numbers that Public Health England has published—96% effectiveness against hospitalisation from two doses of Pfizer, and 92% from Oxford-AstraZeneca—are much higher than the numbers that have been plugged into the models used by Imperial and the London School of Hygiene and Medical to underpin the data that the Government are relying on?

Graham Stringer: I agree completely that those sorts of numbers—the real numbers, as opposed to model numbers—are the numbers that should have been plugged into that model. They would have given a different scenario. The hon. Gentleman makes my point: in order to come to rational decisions about what risks we should take as a country and what risks individuals should take, we should have all the information up to date and available. The Government have refused on a number of occasions to give out that information. They have run a campaign to scare people into accepting their decisions.

To go back to the comments of the hon. Member for Broxbourne, who was talking about elections to SAGE, at least the behavioural psychologists who advise the Government have made a public apology. They say that

they have undermined their professional credibility by joining the campaign of fear. I wish that the Government would not only put out more information, but apologise for frightening people. They should not frighten the electorate, and they certainly should not frighten people in this Chamber into taking people's liberties away.

One of the things that has annoyed me most in the last 15 months is when the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care say, "We instruct you"—meaning the population—"to do various things," when there is nothing in the legislation that would give the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister the ability to instruct individuals. We live in a liberal democracy in which we pass laws that are enforced by the police, and then the courts make a decision if there is a prosecution, not one in which the Secretary of State acts like some kind of uniformed Minister of the Interior.

I will vote against the regulations today. We need a more direct debate on the issue and we need what Members have searched for—a straightforward comparison, with real statistics, of what risks everybody faces.

4.25 pm

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): For over 800 years, this House has been making decisions on risk, be it sending men and women to war, providing financial support or instigating reform in trade or even laws, and tonight's vote boils down to an assessment of risk. Essentially, there are three options: we open on the 21st, we delay or we close and put more lockdown measures back in.

If we accept the premise that we cannot get rid of covid, we can disregard the reintroduction of lockdown rules on the basis that it is too risky to the economy, non-covid health and education. I do not think that even a tiered approach to deal with regional variation would be stomached by the public. That leaves us with two options: open as planned or delay.

I checked the data on the dashboard this morning, as many Members have, and it shows that the seven-day increase of cases, the average, is 38.8% and hospitalisation is increasing by 22%, but we also know that we have vaccinated 79% of the population with one dose and 57% with two doses. We also know that no measure is 100% effective, that no mask is 100% effective and that no vaccine is 100% effective, but we know that putting those measures together mitigates the risk.

That is all against the backdrop of a delta variant that is 50% to 70% more contagious than the alpha variant at Christmas, which in turn was 50% to 70% more virulent than the original variant. This House is therefore being asked to make a judgment call: carry on opening as we are, risking further spread and increased hospitalisations, or buy time, see the trend, get more people vaccinated and reassess but, of course, at the expense of businesses and freedom.

This is another Sophie's choice. I know from my constituents that they will not thank this House for a four-week delay, but they will not forgive this House if further lockdowns return. I will vote to support the motions today, but they still leave certain sectors as zombie industries: not officially closed but not open, because there are not enough customers. For the travel, events and wedding industries, and for the night-time economy, I urge the Government to consider sector-specific support.

Some might mistake my words for the sound of a risk-averse man, or a doctor who thinks too much about health. In my day job, my entire career has been spent managing risk, from dealing with people's cholesterol to working out whether a headache is stress or a brain tumour. I do that openly and frankly with my patients, and now it is what we need from the Government: a debate on the acceptable level of covid risk.

There were 1,500 deaths and 25,000 deaths or serious injuries on UK roads last year. As a society, we accept this risk. We could ban all road travel and stop all deaths, but of course we would lose the economic benefits and our freedoms. During the next month, I urge the Government to bring forward a debate on the risk this House is prepared to accept from covid. After all, as I said at the start of this speech, the House has been deciding this for 800 years. Why should it change now?

4.29 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I am sorry that the Secretary of State is not in his place, because he is a Chester lad and I was hoping to offer him some Cestrian solidarity after the criticism of him as "totally f***** hopeless"; I give him an assurance that I would never have used "f*****" myself. He needs a bit of support here, because he clearly does not have very much on the Conservative side.

The announcement today and the process leading up to it have been typical of the Government's handling—chaotic and totally lacking in clarity. One Minister says one thing, then the same day another Minister says something slightly different or even wholly contradictory, and the announcements drip out inconsistently in a series of leaks and pre-briefings. I think it was just announced this afternoon that we have the highest number of cases since February, so actually people would understand the Government's position if they would only level with them and be more honest. The reason they are not being honest is the serried ranks of hon. Members from the libertarian Covid Recovery Group wing on the Back Benches behind them who are putting undue pressure on them. It is understandable, but Ministers need to stand up to that instead and be a lot more open and direct with people.

The other thing that we need is an end to the Prime Minister giving his usual bluff, bluster and bombast, which creates false hope. He uses the phrases such as "terminus day" and "freedom day" that my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) spoke about to build people up, when he does not know that he can deliver them—and then conveniently forgets that he said them in the first place. It does not help the process.

In Cheshire west and Chester, we have gone into "enhanced measures"; I am not quite sure exactly what that means, because it can mean anything that people want. Again, that is because of a lack of clarity from the Government: they "request", "suggest" or "advise" that perhaps people should not meet indoors. What it does mean is that, because there is no instruction, there is no support for businesses, for the night-time economy or for the visitor economy that is so important to Chester.

I was contacted by Jamie Northrop from Alexander's Live, a brilliant small venue in Chester. He has been working his socks off just to keep afloat during the

[*Christian Matheson*]

pandemic. In common with everybody else, as hon. Members will know from their constituents, the hospitality sector and the pubs have been doing everything asked of them to meet restrictions and just try to keep afloat, but often that has not happened. Jamie talked to me about the Music Venue Trust's six-point plan for support, which includes measures to:

"Extend the moratorium on Commercial eviction"

and:

"Cancel the introduction of Business Rates from 1 July".

He points out that the delivery of three of the measures in the plan is in the Government's direct control. I urge Ministers to look very carefully at that.

It is all well and good asking, advising and cajoling, but if we are to extend the restrictions there has to be support, because so many businesses will have planned for the relaxation that will not now take place. We need to give them the extra support to get over that final hurdle. The hon. Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) talked about the "zombie" sectors that are alive, but not quite alive—a fantastic phrase that absolutely pins the problem down.

Other sectors will not be able to pick up straight away because by their nature they face a time lag. They include aviation, travel and tourism, and aerospace; I chair the all-party parliamentary group on aerospace. There has to be consideration for longer-term support for them, because they will not be able to pick up straight away.

My final point is that Cheshire west and Chester does not seem to be getting enough physical supplies or doses of the vaccine, compared with other areas. Could the Minister please look at that? We do not seem to be getting our fair share.

4.33 pm

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I refer the House to the declarations that I have made relating to the Covid Recovery Group.

No one can deny the brilliance of the Government's—the NHS's—vaccination programme. By mid-April, the over-50s and the vulnerable had had their first vaccination, and overwhelmingly they have now had their second. That is reflected in the Office for National Statistics antibody data, which shows extraordinary levels for anyone over 50. Antibodies are there in that population, which is vulnerable to the disease.

That brings me to the best case that the Government could make for the regulations before the House, which is that the ability of the NHS to provide other healthcare could be compromised by admissions from a younger population, because a small percentage of a big number is still a big number. But the huge problem with that is that it concedes the point that our liberties can be used to manage the capacity of the NHS. I cannot concede that. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) said, that is not the way in which we should be going as a society. If the restrictions that we are extending had been proposed for that purpose in the past, we would never have accepted them.

In Wycombe, people have of course been dutifully washing their hands, covering their faces and keeping social distancing rules, yet early in this pandemic,

I remember one dear, sweet, older lady was beside herself with anxiety at the thought of having to go about her ordinary life with her face covered, and look at us now, taking it for granted. This is not normal. This is the dystopia that I stood here and forecast on the day we went into lockdown.

Thousands of pubs, restaurants and theatres have struggled by—if open at all, then hardly breaking even. We have been told by UK Hospitality that they are still making a loss. The truth is that the Government do not have a systematic way of showing us the cost-benefit of the measures that they propose. One of my colleagues earlier mentioned Professor Paul Dolan. I have done a lot of work with him and I will write to Ministers with a paper from him. He shows how to look at not just the splash of policy, but the ripples. We really need to get this sorted out and embedded in a new public health Act, together with reform to modelling and some changes to expert advice, which I raised in an intervention.

One of the most important things that we have learned from Mr Cummings' leaked WhatsApp messages is that it seems that the Government have been significantly influenced by polling. I fear we have had a real doom loop here between polling and policy making, which has driven us into a disastrous position. We now must not tolerate lockdowns being perpetually on the table. We must not tolerate a situation going on where we and the police are unclear about what the law is and how it should be applied. Imagine that you can hug but not dance—what madness is this? We cannot tolerate a situation any more in which a Government social scientist told the author of the book "A State of Fear" that the Government had used unethical techniques of behavioural science to deliver a policy which he said, in his own words, "smacks of totalitarianism".

We have transformed this society for the worst. We have put in place a culture and habits that will take years to shake off and that distance people from one another and diminish their quality of life and the quality of relationships that they have with one another. High streets are in danger of becoming haunted alleyways. We are in danger of hollowing out and destroying the entertainment industry—much of what makes life worth living. Today's vote will go through—it is a foregone conclusion—but as my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) implied, if the Conservative party does not stand for freedom under the rule of law, in my view, it stands for nothing. We have got to have a turning point. We have got to recapture a spirit of freedom.

4.37 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): It feels a little like groundhog day—another month, another debate on covid regulations—yet we really should not be here having this debate today. For people and businesses up and down the country, this four-week delay to fully restoring our freedoms is a huge and very costly blow, yet the sacrifices that continue to be demanded of the British people are not being coupled with the support that they need to do the right thing. That is why Liberal Democrats will not be voting with the Government tonight on the public health provisions. While we support the motion on continuing the hybrid proceedings in this place, I gently ask the Minister why the Government think we as Parliament need to continue meeting in a

hybrid way whereas councils up and down the country have been forced to meet in person, often at great cost when they are already under huge pressure.

As my Liberal Democrat colleagues and I have been saying for the past six months, the way to restore our freedoms must be three-pronged: vaccination; test, trace and isolate; and robust border controls. The point has already been made countless times that the reason we are here is that Ministers undoubtedly failed completely on the last of those three points by putting India on the red list far too late, for political reasons, allowing the delta variant to be seeded into the community. Even once the Secretary of State recognised it as a variant of concern, we know there was a 17-day delay in designating it as such, which meant that surge testing commenced far too late. That cannot happen again.

The situation we find ourselves in was avoidable. Ministers must take full responsibility for having to delay the lifting of restrictions next week, and part of that responsibility is to support people to do the right thing. With businesses on their knees, jobs are at risk and many of the self-employed have yet to get a penny of support. The hospitality, events, weddings, culture, tourism and travel industries are on their knees. Even after domestic restrictions are lifted, we know that the travel sector will have to continue to bear the brunt of restrictions, given that the biggest threat to our full reopening in the UK will be variants brought back in through international travel, so the complete lack of a bespoke package of support for those industries beggars belief.

If we want to restore our freedoms fully next month, as the Prime Minister has promised us, and allow our economy to thrive again, it will be critical to test every potential case, trace every contact and support self-isolation. Experts have been calling for better financial and practical support for the past year, and finally the penny dropped earlier this month for the former head of Test and Trace that supported self-isolation was the missing piece. Even so, there has still been no comprehensive package announced to pay people their wages to self-isolate, provide accommodation if necessary and support those with caring responsibilities. That is the way to break chains of transmission and stop new outbreaks in their tracks, and it is an awful lot cheaper than blanket restrictions.

Learning to live with this virus, as I believe we absolutely must, requires a proper strategy and an action plan—not hoping for a fair wind. It means bringing together the UK's world-leading genomic sequencing capability with traditional public health test and trace at a local level, coupled with the right support. Our public health directors up and down the country are crying out for that. They will continue to be our frontline in managing this virus as we learn to live with covid. Let us give them the tools they need and not be back here again in a month's time asking for a further delay—or, worse still, be asked to reintroduce restrictions months down the line.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call Dame Andrea Leadsom—congratulations on your well-deserved recognition in the Queen's birthday honours list.

4.41 pm

Dame Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Is it not wonderful to see so many colleagues in the Chamber having a proper debate? It is really interesting to hear what colleagues have to say. I have to add my own deep concern about any restrictions on people's liberty. Frankly, if we were not already in step 3 of lockdown, I cannot imagine that with the current data, anyone in this place would today vote for four weeks of restrictions on businesses, on weddings, on church congregations and, yes, on young people's end of school year celebrations. Nevertheless, I am going to disappoint some colleagues in this place by saying that I will, with a very heavy heart, support the Government, trusting that the Government are determined—as we have been assured by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health—that, if possible, those restrictions will be lifted after two weeks and not four. I urge them to do that.

I want to use these short remarks to raise a few specific questions on behalf of my constituency and others. First, many businesses in the hospitality sector are open but unable to make a profit because of the social distancing rules. Can those rules be relaxed a bit in these last few weeks? Surely we can do that.

Secondly, many employers in hospitality and other sectors are now desperately trying to recruit staff through jobcentres, yet I am told by businesses in my patch that many people are not responding to offers of interviews. I do not know whether colleagues are also finding that, but businesses in my area are concerned that the long period of enforced lockdown and enforced inactivity is leading to an issue of motivation. Sometimes it is just easier to stay at home rather than getting back out there again. What are we going to do? Many colleagues have talked about the success of frightening people into staying home. Surely we are going to need something to help people feel motivated and want to get back out there to work, to get our economy going again and to help themselves to recover from this difficult period.

Thirdly, my constituency is home to Silverstone and the British grand prix, which is due to take place from 16 to 19 July. Can my hon. Friend the Minister assure me that this iconic, world-famous event—surely, one of the best of British—can go ahead with a capacity crowd, albeit subject to covid testing?

Fourthly, I am pleased that the Government have listened to wedding businesses and the many couples who are looking to tie the knot, and have agreed to let weddings of any size go ahead, subject to social distancing. As colleagues have said and as my hon. Friend the Minister will appreciate, for many couples, if they can hug but not dance, if they cannot have a band and they have to socially distance, that will not be the kind of big day they wanted for themselves and their families. Will he reconsider that?

Finally, my hon. Friend will realise that school and university students are now faced, for the second year in a row, with no end-of-year celebrations. No parents' days, no prize-givings—in other words, none of the rites of passage that mean so much to so many people. Can we look at that again in these last few weeks? It has been such a long haul. As I have said, I will reluctantly support the Government, but I do urge the Front Benchers to show more flexibility during these final few weeks so that some of the joys of summer can light up people's lives once again.

4.44 pm

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): What a mess: a hopeless border policy, a hopeless promise of “freedom day”, and a hopeless Government left ducking for political cover. We may have grown used to it by now—yet another let down by this hopeless Government during this pandemic, which at times has seemed endless. We have been here before with the Prime Minister, yet it still hurts every time.

Businesses in Luton North that still cannot reopen are now left without any hope. Families are still separated after months and months, and young people are not able to do the fun things that young people should be doing. It is just like when the Government let us down in December. Yet again, it is all beginning to look a lot like Christmas. An offer of freedom is dangled in front of people by a gung-ho, hopeless Prime Minister, only for it to be pulled away from us at the last minute, when his bumbling and blustering gets the better of him. “We’ll turn the tide on coronavirus in three weeks”, he said, “it will all be over by Christmas...June 21st will be our Freedom Day.”

People in Luton North understand that this delay is necessary to slow the spread of the delta variant, but it is a bitter, bitter pill to swallow for those couples who have to rearrange their wedding plans, for the missed birthday celebrations, and for those with loved ones abroad who will have to wait even longer to see them. All people wanted all along from the Prime Minister was for him to be upfront and honest about the difficult situation our country is in. At times of crisis the country is not looking for a funny best mate; it is looking for a leader. Instead, we have a Prime Minister who is too scared to tell it how it is.

It did not have to be this way. Labour Members have been warning about the hopeless situation at our borders for more than a year. Last week the Health Secretary admitted to the Health and Social Care Committee that a strong border policy has to be part of planning for any future pandemics. It is time for the Government finally to get a grip on the border, and stop new and dangerous variants delaying our freedoms. They must stop over-promising and under-delivering.

Let me finish by returning to that word: hopeless. We now know that the hopeless Prime Minister thinks he has a hopeless Health Secretary. It is now obvious that at points in this pandemic when people were getting sick, families were losing loved ones and businesses were going to the wall, this hopeless Health Secretary, the hopeless Chancellor, and the hopeless Prime Minister were more focused on playing politics in Downing Street, and struggling to contain all those egos in one room, than they were on the priorities of people in Luton North and across the country.

When doctors and nurses were on covid wards in bin bags because there was not enough PPE, and when families had to have Christmases, Eids, and new years separated from the people they love, or when they were grieving the loss of loved ones, Downing Street was in chaos and the Prime Minister was not focused on them. Instead, he was focused on slating the Health Secretary on WhatsApp. I expect that from squabbling teenagers, not from supposed leaders. People in Luton North and across the country deserve better than that. For this to be the final delay on our road back to freedom, the Government must finally get a grip on themselves and

on this virus. The British public have done their bit, but this hopeless Government have been found wanting again.

4.48 pm

Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): May I join you, Mr Deputy Speaker, in congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom) on her well-deserved honour? She is a marvellous example of a Dame, and I am pleased to call her my right hon. Friend.

My right hon. Friend and I know that the art of government, and the art of being a Minister, is balance. It is about taking conflicting lobby and interest groups, analysing and assessing them, and working out what is the right decision to take in the interests of the country. That includes money that the Government can spend—it is taxpayers’ money, not our money—but it also includes where the resources of the Government must go. It is a difficult job. Competing interests come to explain why their interest is the one that matters; they are not interested in whether someone else’s interests will be affected by their interest. Actually, Ministers are probably doing quite a good job if nobody is terribly happy, because it probably means that they are catering to all interests a little.

I have had a fear throughout the whole sorry saga of the pandemic. I pay tribute to the work that Ministers have done. They have done an incredible amount of work and acted in the best interests of the country, but “follow the science” has become the mantra and sometimes simply following the science is not enough, because the science is looking for one outcome and one single thing. It is really reassuring to have heard Ministers over the past few days say that we will have to accept that this is an endemic virus and learn to live with it, because there was a time when all we heard is that we would eliminate it, which we simply cannot do.

I ask that Ministers think very hard about not just the science but the interests of people. We have been told for so long that we must do just essential activities. For a long time that was merely sleep, eat, drink and possibly go out for an hour for exercise. Well, life is more than that. Life is so much more than the essentials. Life is those weddings, with dancing and greeting loved ones. Life is being able to see loved ones in hospital when they are sick, something that we have been unable to do throughout covid. Life is about attending the British grand prix and many other occasions. Life is about the joy that we can get from such occasions and events. We are constantly being told that we cannot have that joy because it will have an impact on the science.

The Government have to start to celebrate and take advantage of the vaccine programme. We have the most successful vaccine programme in the G7—something that I am sure the Prime Minister reflected on last week. I am very proud that in the north Staffordshire clinical commissioning group, which I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell), we have the highest level of vaccinations anywhere in the country. We need to start to reap the benefits of that vaccine programme.

With a heavy heart, I say to the Minister that I cannot support the Government this evening, because I cannot find a way to explain to my constituents why the things that they are looking forward to getting back to doing

have to wait. I understand how it will have been put to the Minister—"If you do not do this, Minister, it will cost lives"—but we have to accept that we cannot save every life. I might have been persuaded if the Government were able to support businesses that are unable to open, but that support is simply not there for the weddings industry, the hospitality sector and nightclubs. With a heavy heart, I will not be able to support the Government, although I will on procedural matters.

4.52 pm

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Like the right hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley) I will not support the Government this evening, but it will not be with a heavy heart; it will be because I have a real conviction that what is being done and the approach that the Government have taken on this issue is wrong. We have heard again today, as we heard yesterday from the Prime Minister, that the very basis of pushing and promoting the policy is to instil fear into the hearts of people across the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister yesterday said that we have to delay because the new variant could kill people in ways that we cannot foresee, or do not understand. It is the same old message: "If you do not obey the restrictions, you are in danger—either of dying yourself or of your relatives dying. You can't put your nose out the door. You can't do the things you want to do in normal life, because there's a real danger you'll die." Of course, the statistics show that of those who contract coronavirus a very small proportion, less than 0.3%, actually die. Even the World Health Organisation has said that many of those deaths may not even be attributable to coronavirus anyway. If someone has been tested for coronavirus 28 days before they die in a car accident they still qualify as a coronavirus death. So the statistics themselves have even been used in a way to try to reinforce the message of fear.

I wish to make two points today. The first is that if we follow the logic of what we have heard from the Minister and the Prime Minister in the past two days, we will never get away from the restrictions we are living with at present, because the Minister has admitted that we will have to live with coronavirus, and we know that it will mutate, so we will get different versions of it. If we get different versions, we will be told, "This version is different from the last version. It is more dangerous. It is more contagious. It leads to more deaths. It leads to higher infection rates." And so on and so on. We will be told that there is therefore a justification for keeping the restrictions in place.

Indeed, we heard from the Minister today not only about the current restrictions; we know that we are going to have further restrictions in the future. Those who work in the care sector are going to be forced to have a vaccination. He did not answer the question, but I assume that people visiting anybody in a hospital or care home are going to have to prove they have had a vaccination. Are peripheral workers going to have to have the vaccination? We can see already that the Government are thinking that people have accepted these restrictions and there will be other things in the future that are going to be forced on them.

Let me come to my second point. The Minister said he was going to follow the data, so let me tell him about some data: unemployment in my constituency has gone up by more than 100% as a result of restrictions.

Businesses are going under. Between now and "terminus day" many people will find their employment terminated, their business terminated, their livelihoods terminated, and for those reasons, I will not be voting for these restrictions.

4.56 pm

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): Throughout, this process has been heartbreaking, debilitating and wearing, so to be here again talking about a further four-week extension is the worst possible outcome for so many of us—it is so, so disheartening. However, I say that knowing that I will be supporting the Government tonight. Unfortunately, my constituency neighbour the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) is no longer in his place, but he made an eloquent speech talking about why he could not support these measures on the grounds of civil liberties and I wanted to remind him that about a quarter of his seat is in the city of Salford, where I was a councillor for a while. The city's motto is, "Salus populi suprema lex" or, "The welfare of the people is the highest law". The infection rates in Greater Manchester are some of the highest in the entire country, with Manchester and Salford having the highest rates. His seat straddles those areas, so he cannot say that he is putting the welfare of the people in his constituency at the highest level.

I wish to turn to something that was brought up by the hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) when she was talking about getting the politics out of this issue. I completely agree with that, which is why it was so frustrating yesterday that in the *Manchester Evening News* the lead member for health in Rochdale Borough Council was dismissing the vaccination programme as a gimmick and a slogan, and was hinting that the Government were withholding vaccines from certain areas. Anybody with the slightest idea about how logistics work knows that the programme is rate-limited purely by supply. I say to Members: we have four weeks to nail this down. We cannot have another extension. We cannot keep going through this process. We are going to have to work together. We are going to have stop sniping at each other and trying to make little jibes to score a little point here or there. There are people who are depending on us to do the right thing now.

4.58 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): This extension is, sadly, necessary, so I will vote for it. However, once again, this Government's failures have meant that longer restrictions have become necessary, just as there has been more economic harm and more human suffering than should have been necessary. Time after time, the Government have got it wrong. Let us think back to last summer, when we had very low case levels. The experts said it was a chance to crush the virus, but the Government did the opposite and cases spiralled out of control. In the autumn, as cases rose again, the Government locked down far too late and released far too early, leading to tens of thousands of avoidable deaths. When warned about the risk posed by new variants, the Government refused to close the border, all because the Prime Minister wanted to go to India to pose with Prime Minister Modi.

The Government claim that only hindsight can spot this pattern, but that is simply not true. The Government were warned time and again. They ignored the warnings. In the words seemingly put into writing by the Prime

[Richard Burgon]

Minister, it has been effing useless, but it is not funny—it is not a joke. So many people have lost their lives and it is now necessary to elongate the misery further because of the Government's unnecessary failures.

The Government are now saying that we should, and I quote, “live with it”. I do not agree. We should be suppressing the virus. That does not mean more lockdowns. To tackle this virus, the Government should finally put in place the basic public health measures they have refused from day one. Alongside the vaccine, we need decent sick pay for people who need help to isolate. We need to kick out the profiteers from test and trace. We need to invest properly in local health teams to do effective tracing. The failure to sort out these public health measures has led to more than 100,000 needless deaths. It has prolonged economic suffering, and it has prolonged the curtailment of our lives.

If we do not suppress the virus now through test, trace, isolate and support, we risk hundreds of thousands more cases and many thousands more hospitalisations, with huge pressure on our national health service. Many more will suffer from long covid—400,000 already are. It creates conditions for new variants, perhaps even those invulnerable to the vaccine.

I call on the Government today to finally sort out sick pay at real living wage levels. Government Ministers claim—this is very interesting—that the reason they refuse to properly financially support people to isolate when they have covid is that they believe that people would abuse the system. It is no wonder, given how they behave, that they think so little of other people. Just because the Tory party is gaming the system to help its super-rich donors with covid contracts, it does not mean that working people should stoop to their level, and working people would not stoop to their level. The Government's failure to support people with covid is a moral outrage, and it is creating a public health crisis of which this Government should be ashamed. I am voting for the extension tonight because it is necessary, but without Government failure it would not have needed to happen.

5.2 pm

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): I am afraid that the previous speaker will be very disappointed, because we are going to have to live with covid, like we have to learn to live with every other infectious disease that exists in the world. Yes, we have tried to suppress it. Yes, we tried to deal with it, but we will have to learn to live with it. Viruses, the hon. Member may be surprised to know, have been around for 400 million years—a lot longer than us. Guess which one is winning the Darwinian race.

When we do have to make decisions, I think one thing is very clear. Up to this point, the aims of the medical profession and the Government's advisers and the aims of the Government have been broadly similar, but they will have to diverge at some point, because the medical profession will always want to see the rate of infection brought down to the smallest level possible at whatever cost, but the Government have different considerations. The Government need to ensure that the rest of the health service is able to operate properly, that the economy is moving and that the social and wellbeing aspects of the population are looked after. That is why the aims are different.

While I am at it, on a private note, I am sick to death of the Government's so-called advisers coming on TV and giving their individual views, rather than giving advice to the Government on a confidential basis. If they want to be stars of Sky News, let them leave SAGE and carve their own path.

On what basis will we decide when we have this divergence? The first thing to say is that the variant will not be a reason for keeping lockdown. The variant may be more transmissible, but that is irrelevant if it is not causing more hospitalisations or more deaths. We have already heard from Public Health England that the two vaccines—Pfizer and AstraZeneca—can cope as well as with the new Indian variant as they can with the Kent variant. We do not need to hear about the variant argument, because I do not think it holds water.

What matters is who is being hospitalised, and where. Are the hospitalisations young people who have not yet had the vaccine, who may be at risk because of the increased transmissibility of the new variant, or is it people, as we have seen in some parts of the country, who have been offered the vaccine, but for one reason or another have chosen not to get it? We cannot have the country being held to ransom by any groups who have been offered a vaccine but have chosen not to take it; that is utterly unacceptable.

It seems to me that the essence of the Government's case—if the Minister for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), wants to, he can intervene to confirm it—is this: the Government's strategy was based on a single vaccine strategy, in the belief that, if enough people got it, the efficacy would be high enough that we could unlock at that point. However, the evidence published by Public Health England yesterday showed that the Pfizer vaccine is 94% effective against hospitalisation after one dose, but that AstraZeneca is only 71% after one dose and takes the second dose to get up to 92%.

It seems to me that the Government are telling us—I wish they would be clear about this—that they need a little more time to get people, especially those on AstraZeneca, to the second dose so that there is the level of protection against hospitalisation that we see with the Pfizer vaccine. If the Government presented their case in that way, it would be an awful lot easier for the rest of us to give the Government our support, because that would be a clear rationale.

We also need a clear assurance that the two-week review point is not a ploy to buy support in the House of Commons, but a genuine review of the data, whereby we will see within a couple of weeks whether the hospitalisation rate is increasing or not. If the Government give us a clear assurance that the two-week point is a real review and that we can achieve the full relief of the lockdown at that point, the Minister might be able to buy a little support from his own Benches this evening.

5.6 pm

Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba) [V]: It feels like we have entered yet another episode of “Hancock's Half Hour”, but unfortunately it is laughable for all the wrong reasons.

The first motion under debate today is indirectly relevant to Scotland and to my Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath constituency. Without independence, Scotland will continue to suffer the consequences of the UK Government's

hapless leadership on covid. Travel agencies in my constituency have another month of pouring money down the drain and another month with no tangible support from the Government. The first motion is England only, so Alba Members will abstain on that principle, but to those who have suffered loss of life and bereavement, the Government's response of repetitious, braggadocious claims at every juncture must be disheartening. It is more indicative, as I said earlier today, of a Del Boy Britain: "Everything will be fine because we're British." But it is precisely why we find ourselves in this position.

This Government have put political priorities over public safety. There was a lack of action on border control at the start of pandemic and with the identification of the delta variant. They have allowed new variants to enter and seed, and the weekend's failure by the UK Prime Minister to lead the G7 to invest in vaccines and cash in line with the World Health Organisation's identified need is absolutely unforgivable.

There has been an unwillingness to listen, to learn and to respond; chaotic messaging; and the abandonment of testing in March 2020, instead of using that nadir of the pandemic to expand testing. The Secretary of State has continued with his overconfidence in in-the-field lateral flow test devices, and the chaotic education policy has only made things worse. There are continued huge gaps in support, driving poverty and disadvantage in the face of repeated warnings. These are not just my concerns; many have been raised in the prestigious *British Medical Journal*.

Not every misstep can be mitigated by the effective work of Kate Bingham's vaccines taskforce. Recently, the Secretary of State supported my calls for surveillance across a range of indicators to beat the virus, but vaccines are not foolproof.

The G7 chair opportunity was an unforgivable moral failure. Vaccines, cash, but also robust international surveillance, are urgently required. The Government's growing propensity to ignore scrutiny of Parliament is absolutely staggering, and now the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) derides scrutiny of experts in the media. It has been never clearer than with their vote-dodging reduction in overseas aid and that will not be forgiven.

This is a global and dynamic challenge. The completely inadequate response from the G7 summit risks the development of ever more virulent variants. In the light of that failure in leadership from the Prime Minister, can we get some straight answers—probably not? What action is the Secretary of State taking to secure our public health by working to meet those WHO targets for vaccines, cash and surveillance? Any return to normality will happen only when we are all safe.

Dr Fox: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Would it be possible for you to convey to Mr Speaker that, while we are still operating under the restrictions that we have in Parliament, we need to try to find ways to intervene on contributions that are being made on video? Otherwise, we are unable to challenge the views of the Scottish nationalists, who claim that the problems that they suffer from in the covid pandemic are a result of the United Kingdom Government's actions, when they themselves have the same powers to deal with them in Scotland, had they chosen to do so differently, but they have not.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I will make absolutely certain that the right hon. Member's request is presented to Mr Speaker and I am sure that he will respond in his usual fashion.

5.11 pm

Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): The pandemic has been a massive challenge to the British Government. I happen to think that, given the uncertainties that they have faced, the Prime Minister and senior Ministers have done a pretty good job. In terms of the vaccination programme, they have certainly proved to the world that Britain can go it alone and do a lot to safeguard its population when it uses its science and its ability to get things done.

When the road map was unveiled, I thought to myself, "At least that stops me voting against the Government again"—until we get to the point when the Government have delayed opening up. I do think that this is a matter of balance and judgment. My view is that most of the senior Ministers who took this decision need a damn good holiday. If we look at the data and at what is happening in the country, the restrictions are totally out of kilter with the sense of the problem.

Let me take the south-west of England. There are 5.6 million people in the south-west of England.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Sir Robert, can you please face the Chair? Your voice is not being picked up by the microphone and *Hansard* cannot hear you.

Sir Robert Syms: There are 5.6 million people in the south-west of England. There are 23 people in hospital. There are two in ICU. In Dorset, where there are nearly 1 million people, we have one person in hospital. Yet there are hundreds of couples who want to get married, businesses that want to be viable, and people who want to get their lives back in order. I just think that the balance is wrong. Most of the population have now been vaccinated. We may not totally break the link with people going into hospital, but there are more than 100,000 beds in the NHS. One per cent. are taken by covid patients. Now it might go up to 2%. We already have experts on TV saying, "In order for the NHS to catch up, we may well have to keep restrictions for longer." I think that is unacceptable to the British people. As a Conservative, I am perfectly willing to accept restrictions when hundreds and thousands of people are dying and we are dealing with a virus that we do not understand, but we have sort of got to the point where we have won the battle. There will be variants. There will be challenges, but we have to get on with normal life.

The points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) are perfectly right. If it is simply that we need to get second doses in—if that had been explained—we might be a little more relaxed. If we look at the explanatory notes, though, we will see that we have a review of data in two or four weeks' time, and not necessarily a release date. We need to get people's freedoms back. We cannot save everybody, but what we have done is save thousands and thousands of lives. Now we need to safeguard employment, safeguard businesses and safeguard people's personal relationships.

I began by saying that the Government have done a pretty good job and that the vaccine programme is outstanding, but we have to now take the dividend from

[Sir Robert Syms]

that to get people back to normal life. When they queued up with their enthusiasm to get that jab in their arm, they thought that that meant that things would get back to normal. They did not expect that they would be in further restrictions which would go on and on and on. I think we should have lifted all restrictions on 21 June. I hope and I pray that, in two weeks' time, the Government will look at the data again and set people free.

5.14 pm

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab) [V]: Like many areas with some of the highest infection rates during this pandemic, my constituency of Stockport has been in a lockdown of some form for more than a year, along with the vast majority of Greater Manchester. Although the people of Stockport have worked tirelessly to keep our community safe, they have been repeatedly let down by the Government. As a result, thousands of workers risk losing their jobs as businesses struggle to survive, with insufficient financial support packages and an endless cycle of lockdowns and restrictions that has pushed our high streets to breaking point.

I want to hear the Minister tell the House why, 15 months into this pandemic, the Government have failed to take any meaningful action to help businesses, schools and leisure facilities improve ventilation, when we have long known that covid is an airborne virus. He will no doubt tell me that the Treasury has spent billions on furlough payments and support schemes, but businesses know the reality—namely, that measures such as furlough payments are little more than a drop in the ocean when it comes to their bottom line and ability to plan for the long term in order to survive this pandemic. Far more needs to be done if we are to avoid our economy nosediving and millions of people across the UK ending up unemployed. I have heard today that the Government have also repeatedly failed my constituents, and millions of others around the country, on the issue of healthcare. Indeed, we have already heard what the Prime Minister really thinks of the Health Secretary—perhaps it will be the only time in the House that I admit to agreeing with him.

We are witnessing a crisis in our healthcare system, and the Government cannot simply blame the pandemic. Indeed, in the months before the covid crisis began, a source at Stepping Hill Hospital in my town told the *Manchester Evening News* that patients were “stuck outside in ambulances” and that:

“Every corridor is full of patients on trolleys.”

Many were forced to wait up to 24 hours to be seen for treatment. That is not the fault of NHS workers, who have performed heroically throughout this pandemic. The blame must be laid squarely at the Government's door, following a decade of chronic underfunding of our health service.

The latest set of official NHS figures has revealed that record numbers of people are on hospital waiting lists across Greater Manchester. Stockport clinical commissioning group, which covers my constituency, has more than 37,000 people waiting for vital hospital treatment. That is the highest level in the region, which is completely unacceptable, and it is compounded by the fact that most people have to wait at least 18 weeks for treatment.

My constituents are not alone. Across the country, more than 5 million people are now waiting for routine treatment such as hip and knee operations, which is the highest level on record. Covid is of course a factor, but the reality is that this crisis has followed years of chronic underfunding by this Conservative Government, and we are now unfortunately having to reap what they have sown. A further contributory factor to the rising number of infections is the scandalous lack of sick pay for workers who are forced to self-isolate, who feel unwell or who take time off to look after loved ones who are ill. They are being punished for following Government guidance, and in many cases they are left with no alternative but to continue to work while potentially infectious due to the lack of available support.

A Unison North West survey recently revealed that 80% of care workers will continue to receive just £95 per week as statutory sick pay if they are ill or following the Government's advice to self-isolate or shield themselves or loved ones. The right thing to do would be to give them full pay. Does the Minister accept that his Government's failure to introduce proper financial support for people to self-isolate, and proper sick pay, has contributed to our failure to keep on top of the delta variant and has led to the delay in lifting lockdown restrictions?

As the Prime Minister's former senior adviser recently said:

“Fundamentally, there was no proper border policy, because the Prime Minister never wanted a proper border policy.”

Our workers, businesses and most vulnerable in society are now paying the price for this wanton disregard for our nation's health.

5.18 pm

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): I do not think anyone envies the tasks and decisions that this Government and this Prime Minister have to make. We have a vaccination programme that is the envy of much of the world, with 30 million adults now having had two jabs, which offer 90%-plus protection against hospitalisation from the delta variant. We also have a road map that is clear and is linked to the success of that same vaccination programme, but against that backdrop, we are being asked to approve a further delay today.

I spoke to local health leaders in Cumbria and in Barrow and Furness over the past few days, and the message from them was clear: they support this delay. Our director of public health was stark: because we are trying to cover and backfill 5 million people on an NHS waiting list, even a small fraction of covid-19 patients going into hospital risks the NHS being overwhelmed. On that basis, and on the basis of the rationale advanced by the Secretary of State, I support these measures as one final push—one last heave—before we return our freedoms.

However, we need to be absolutely clear about what this delay means. It extends impositions on our liberty, our livelihoods, people's health and the future of young people. While the state has a duty to protect its citizens, our objective cannot be zero deaths. As my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Miriam Cates) so eloquently wrote this week—I apologise for bastardising her words—“We don't live to avoid death; we live to enjoy life,” and it has to be on that basis that we make the final judgment to unlock next month.

Mr Steve Baker: I am listening carefully to my hon. Friend, and it is a good argument for voting for these restrictions, of course it is, but has he considered the possibility that, very sadly, the NHS will now be under pressure for years, dealing with the backlog?

Simon Fell: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I am making the judgment based on my local knowledge and that of my director of public health, but we all have to make that decision in this place today.

We cannot afford for schools to close again, for young people to miss any more of their lives, or for any of our businesses to close as a result of further impositions, so it has to be one more heave, to protect more people, and then we have to accept that, in the face of a virus that we are not going to get rid of, and which will continue to mutate and challenge us while we are on this Earth, we must vaccinate as many people as possible and then give people back their freedom.

There is a more fundamental issue at play here—public acceptance. We made a delicate compact with people over the last year. We restricted their liberties to keep them safe, and already we are seeing compliance with that law beginning to fray. We must accept that people expected their liberty to return as vaccinations were rolled out, but as we vaccinate more, acceptance of that compromise falls. If we cannot maintain that compact, our response to it has to change.

So I hope and expect that after this final surge of vaccinations, we will return on 19 July to a society where people are able to make their own choices. It is easy to sloganise about freedom. I, for one, am deeply uncomfortable about living in a country where we dictate to newly married couples whether they can cut their wedding cake or not.

I believe that this Government have acted honourably and with good intentions throughout this horrible pandemic, so I am giving them my support tonight for one last heave to finish the job, and then we must return all of our freedoms on 19 July.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether you could help me in regard to social distancing. There is not a single Labour Member on the Opposition Benches. There are no SNP; there are no Liberal Democrats; there are no Plaid Cymru. Of course there are the DUP. Would it be appropriate, because the Conservative Benches are packed, for half of us to move over to the other side of the House to improve social distancing?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I think, Peter Bone, if you look around, even on the Conservative Benches there are a few green ticks, so please stay where you are. I call Jim Shannon.

5.23 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Mr Deputy Speaker, I would be very happy for the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) to come over here and join us on our side if he wishes to do so. I know that we are together in many things anyway.

I believe that we have to live with covid-19. Just as I get a flu jab every September or October because I am a diabetic and that is the way it is, in the same way we will

get a covid-19 jab come that time as well. It has been a long, hard road to recovery and I want to place on the record very clearly my thanks to the Government, to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and to the Northern Ireland Health Minister Robin Swann, for all that they have done to keep us safe over this period of time. It is important to put that on the record.

I understand that weddings are an issue for many; they certainly are for me, and for my constituents in the hospitality sector. Wedding attendance is calculated based on the risk assessment of the said venue. Self-distancing is absolutely critical to making that happen. So many wedding venues can accommodate extra numbers because of their scope for self-distancing. Weddings are the most significant day for couples and there is nothing more heartwarming than seeing one's guests smile with joy. Self-distancing has made that happen.

May I make a plea to the Minister for churches? I do that because I am a regular church attender, but also for everybody else who attends church or would like to do so. We know that we must self-distance and wear a mask in church, and we understand that. However, are we getting to the stage where we can attend church and do not have to wear a mask, while adhering to social distancing? When we go to a restaurant, we do not have to wear a mask, and perhaps the same rules should apply for churches. I request easement for weddings in churches as well. I understand that not every church has the capacity for self-distancing to have a wedding, but there are many that would, and I believe there is a way forward to do that.

Tourism is a crucial sector for our economy where the restrictions are blurred and many are left confused. I again request the Government to address the issue of tests and passenger location forms discouraging people from booking holidays, not to mention the fact that Portugal was taken off the green list. I do not say that as a criticism, but just to make the point that perhaps we need more clarity in relation to that. The focus needs to be on making travel more accessible and efficient to encourage those who travel, even if it is within the United Kingdom.

A constituent of mine recently left for work in the EU, where he was charged £85 for a PCR test, not to mention the test requirements when he comes home. Is it possible to review this approach to allow the lateral flow tests that are acceptable in our schools to be acceptable for travellers? This would instil more efficient travel where travellers can save money and travel with less hassle. I also make a plea for tour operators and buses. We know all the problems with buses. People cannot self-distance on a bus and so these services cannot be viable. If we are going to have this for another few weeks, as we are, can we make sure that those businesses are protected and that jobs are secured?

Live music is crucial to many aspects of life for us personally but also for venues, for the hospitality sector, for weddings and for concerts. I appreciate that there is always a risk in singing. When I sing, the rain usually comes on. The Bible says, "Sing, make a joyful noise". When I make a joyful noise, it is never melodious but it is always joyful. It is always loud as well. I would love to be able to sing in church again, but it is not happening and it is not likely to happen in the near future. I understand that for those who are involved in this, there is a real need to have it.

[Jim Shannon]

I make the plea that as we move forward together over the next four weeks, we can ensure that these businesses can be protected and have the support that is needed through the furlough. I understand that the vaccine roll-out is a part of any moving forward, and I support that. I welcome younger people getting the vaccine. To me, this signals being able to move forward safely, which is what we need to do.

I fully appreciate that the Prime Minister and the Government are being careful and cautious, and I support that. To use a saying that we often use in Northern Ireland, it is better to be safe than sorry, and it is better to be safe than sorry today. I will support the Government in both votes on what they are putting forward because I believe that it is right: we can do this for another four weeks and that will be the end of it. As there are more people with the vaccine, confidence will be restored, and if confidence is restored, then we must all be in a better place. I know that is not the opinion of some, but it is certainly my opinion and that of others in my party as well. I want to ensure that the Government are supported and I will support them tonight.

5.28 pm

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): I want to discuss two sides of the science—science as the liberator and science as the captor. We have seen through this process that new vaccines have been created using messenger RNA of a completely new type that will, I am sure, serve us well globally into the future. We have rapidly created them, tested them and rolled them out, and that is all to the good. We have repurposed existing drugs such as the very cheap steroid, dexamethasone. We have used antivirals that were used before, remdesivir being just one, and we have discovered new treatments such as monoclonal antibodies. We have created a testing regime that enables us to rapidly test vast numbers of the population for their covid status.

These were the new tools that I had hoped would prove science as the liberator, and the results are extremely good. Let us look at those facts again. We have heard them many times, but I think they are worth putting on record once more. With just one dose of any of these vaccines, protection is good. With two doses, it is truly exceptional at over 90% protection against hospitalisation. Even those who do find themselves in hospital after vaccination are generally not finding themselves dreadfully unwell. We have seen hospitalisations reduced. We have less than 1,000 people in hospital, or 1,000 or thereabouts, which is just 1% of NHS capacity.

I am sure Ministers would respond to that by saying that this is the way they want to keep it, but I am afraid that argument will never end. We have a death rate of about 10 deaths per day out of a background death rate in the country of 1,100 per day, which is currently under the usual average. However, let us look at those 10 deaths per day within 28 days of a positive covid test. They are husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, parents and friends. Each is a tragedy, each is a family loss and each is a dreadful event. But surely with such low levels we should now be provided with the data as to why: what were the deeper underlying reasons behind those deaths? I certainly hope that Ministers have been provided with that information. There is a world of difference, and a

difference of interpretation that this place would make, between the death of a young, fit person and that of somebody with comorbidities, perhaps in a hospice with life-threatening conditions.

Let us examine science as the captor. Our ability to sequence the genome is incredible. The UK is a world leader. Hundreds of variants have been discovered, and doubtless once the delta variant has passed through, just as the alpha Kent variant has been and gone, we will discover more. Will it be a Californian one, a Buenos Aires one, or the epsilon or the zeta? I am sure we will simply run out of Greek alphabet over the coming months. However, each one causes hysteria, and the media go berserk. With the scientists, it is like having the decorator in your house: you get sucking of teeth and shaking of head, and you know there is bad news around the corner. We have seen the modelling. The five key modellers have come up with a road map, published in February, which the Government understood, and it led to the road map we are on, but every one of our figures are better than that, and that makes this statutory instrument so unintelligible.

I would rather trust the people. What if we were to go for freedom on 21 June? What would I do, because I think I am pretty normal? Would I be throwing away my mask in the supermarket? I very much doubt it. I carry sterilising gel in my pocket, and I can say to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that more alcohol goes through my hands on a daily basis than on a night out with George Best and Oliver Reed. Would that stop? No, it will not. The public outside this bubble have already moved on. They have broadly given up on these pettifogging rules. We should trust the public, and I will not be supporting the Government this evening.

5.32 pm

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): The Government assert that they do not have a zero covid policy or a zero covid strategy. If I accept that that is the case, it does seem as though it is a 0.1 covid strategy: it is almost zero, but not quite. At the same time, the Government accept that the disease is endemic. This is a very curious position, in which it is endemic, but the Government are still trying to get the disease as close to zero as possible. I would suggest that that requires pretty robust action from the Government for the long term.

The original lockdown was to flatten the curve and protect the national health service. Even though the Nightingale hospitals were soon mothballed and then closed, that was not enough. Lockdown was then intended to enable test, track, trace and isolate to get up to speed, and it must surely be there by now, but again, that was not enough. Then it was to vaccinate the most vulnerable—the over-50s or the most frail in our society. This was when the narrative was that the first dose would provide the vast majority of the protection required—far better than the influenza jab—and the second jab, at that point, was only really to give longevity to the resistance to covid that would be required. The expectation, at that stage, was that this would cut the overwhelming majority of deaths and hospitalisations, and this is the case, but still that was not enough. Then it was to have everyone given the second dose. That has almost been achieved, but as the Secretary of State announced a short while ago, the roll-out of vaccinations has now extended so that 21-year-olds can sign up to get them. Again, that seems not to be enough.

In Bolton, we have been through a very difficult time—there has been an amazing amount of good work and hard work from so many locally—but with this new Indian variant, or variant of concern, we have coped. The impact on our health service was far less than during the peak in January. The NHS held up, and I believe that it is quite clear now that the link between transmission, hospitalisation and death has been severed. Again, that is not enough to find our lockdown terminus.

The narrative seems to have shifted in recent weeks. It was initially about dealing with the Indian variant and seeing how risky and dangerous it was to the country. I think that the evidence available at the moment shows that we can cope with it, but the position now seems to have shifted from dealing with the Indian variant and trying to understand it to offering the first dose to every adult of 18 and over. As night follows day, that will still not be enough.

Earlier this week, the Health Secretary was to some extent downplaying the value of the first dose and promoting that of the second. Should we now anticipate a shift later in the year to every adult being offered the second dose as well? That would take us well into September and perhaps a little beyond. We can see the rolling of the pitch for child vaccinations and for compulsory vaccination of certain care workers and perhaps others.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): Could my hon. Friend and Greater Manchester neighbour reflect briefly on his experience in Bolton and the declining case rates?

Chris Green: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that important point. Transmission in Bolton is clearly on the way down. That demonstrates the actions taken and the effect of the particular variant of concern, which had more impact in Bolton than almost anywhere else in the country. It should give reassurance to the country that we can cope without a further extension of measures that are having such an impact on so many people. For example, the waiting list of 5 million for hospital treatment would be far longer if people had better access to GPs to get those referrals.

The G7 is suggesting a global vaccine programme. Would we have to wait until that has been delivered, because until everyone is safe, no one is safe? When the Prime Minister refers to a terminus, I fear that he does not mean the end, but that he is thinking more of a bus terminus where we end one journey to start another—and that there will be another vehicle to impose another lockdown extension.

5.38 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): When I have confronted these votes over the past nine months, I have done my best to look at the entire health needs and entire health case of all the nation, not just of those who have unfortunately been struck down with covid. When it came to the 10 pm curfew last year, I felt that it did not make sense from a health perspective for everyone to be leaving the pub at the same time, so I voted against, whereas when it came to the decisions towards the end of last year and into January, I could see the hospitalisation cases and the need to get the vaccine rolled out, so I supported the Government.

Where are we now? Let us look at the hospitalisation cases. We were at 35,000 covid in-patients, and clearly the NHS was struggling to cope. When academics at Imperial College modelled what a freedom day on 5 July would look like in hospitalisation numbers, it came up with a figure of 7,000; Warwick University came up with 1,750. The figure for covid in-patients is currently under 1,000—better than expected. In the combined county of Sussex, with 1.6 million residents, there are six covid in-patients, and in my own county of East Sussex there are two of the six. Interestingly, they did not present with covid or get admitted because of it; they were just tested while being admitted, found to have covid and included in the numbers. The hospitalisation numbers are looking much better, and the NHS now has resilience. What is striking to me is the number of people who are waiting to have their lives enhanced by elective treatment. In England alone, 5 million people are waiting for surgery. Over 400,000 of them have been waiting for more than a year; prior to covid, that figure was 1,600. That demonstrates the wider health impact of restrictions. Those people deserve a life, too, and they deserve to be looked after. There should not be an apartheid system when it comes to our health service.

What about the vaccine? What a great success! We should be basking in the vaccine dividend that this Government have delivered. In East Sussex as a whole, we have double dosed 85% of cohorts 1 to 9, which account for 99% of mortality. We know that the vaccine is effective against all known strains. We are there, but the difficulty is that we are not willing to confront the concept of living with covid. Ministers say that we have to live with covid, and yet we are given another month on top. The arguments that Ministers use as to why we need that extra month will still be there in a month's time, and at that point we will have to decide where we are going to jump.

I have spoken to a very senior NHS lead, who has university-age children. He said to me—I wrote it down:

“Too many of us making decisions have forgotten what it feels like to be a 20-year-old or how miserable it is to be a 20-year-old right now.”

Those young people have made great sacrifices to help cohorts 1 to 9, and they need to see the return of their lives this summer.

Although Ministers say that just a few restrictions remain, we will not start tackling the backlog in NHS waiting times on elective surgery and we will not start tackling the mental health crisis that young people in particular are suffering, with such great detriment. We need to tell the people of this country that we have turned the corner thanks to them and thanks to this vaccine dividend, and we are now ready to accept the risk and move on. It is about everyone's lives, not just certain lives.

5.42 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman). Like him, I have followed a journey of sometimes voting with the Government on these restrictions and sometimes voting against. It is unusual to be able to say that I agree with the previous speaker, because the previous speaker is nearly always from the Opposition, but, of the 51 speakers in this debate, only five are Labour Back Benchers. This is one of our most important debates. It is about the freedom and liberty of the British people.

Sammy Wilson: Does the hon. Gentleman find rather odd not only the absence of Opposition Members, but the fact that the Government are comfortable about getting the restrictions through only because they have the support of the Labour party, and yet most Labour Members who have spoken today have condemned the Government for their actions?

Mr Bone: I could not agree more with the right hon. Gentleman—may I call him my right hon. Friend from across the aisle? He has, of course, been here for the whole debate.

This debate is about the liberty of the British people. We are taking away something that is our right. For instance, I am due to go to a wedding, but I cannot have a group of friends round to my house beforehand because there would be too many of us. When I get to church, I cannot sing. I cannot sing anyway, but I am not allowed to sing. Then I cannot dance at the wedding—*[Interruption.]* I cannot dance, either. More importantly, as the evening drags out, I cannot then go to a nightclub to boogie the night away in celebration. The following day, I cannot go for a park run to run all these problems off, so I might need to call a doctor, but I cannot go and see a doctor because they will not do face-to-face appointments. This is withdrawing our very liberty.

I am a great fan of the Prime Minister, and I think most Conservative Members are. He came to lead the Conservative party at the end of the Bercow Parliament, when Parliament was in chaos. He took us through a general election, he won a mandate, he delivered Brexit, he dealt with the awful covid pandemic and he has led the world with the vaccine programme, yet tonight, unfortunately, I cannot support him. I think every Member has to put their country first, their constituency second and their party third. On very many—indeed, most—occasions, all those three are in line, but this time I do not think the Government have made the case for putting off unlocking.

With apologies to Mark Twain, there are lies, damned lies and covid statistics, and the Government have been using an extraordinary propaganda machine to take certain statistics to try to prove their case, but if we look at other statistics, we can see that the total number of deaths at the moment is running below the five-year average. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle said that he had very few cases in his area. In Northamptonshire, thankfully, our two hospitals have zero covid patients and we have not had a death due to covid for five weeks. The Government made their own original forecasts for what would happen on 17 May when we did the major unlocking, but we have done better than their best prediction of the situation, so why have we now gone into this doom and gloom?

I have no doubt that if we were in opposition, our Benches would now be packed and there would be this blond guy, fairly chubby and a bit scruffy—well, as scruffy as me—jumping up and down and making the case for getting rid of these restrictions. I know it is a balance and I know people have to make a choice, but we, as Conservatives, believe in personal responsibility and common sense. Going back to my original example, of course I would not go into a busy nightclub, and of course I would not have 100 friends round, but that would be my decision, not the decision of the state. So

unfortunately, as much as I like the Prime Minister, I think he has got this wrong, and I will vote against the regulations tonight.

5.47 pm

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as chair of the Covid Recovery Group.

Before I turn to the matters before us, I would like to put on record my thoughts about the loss of Jo Cox five years ago. Sadly, I remember that day very well. Madam Deputy Speaker, you and I were both in different roles at that time, and it was our joint responsibility—in my case as the Government Chief Whip and in yours as the Opposition Chief Whip—to ensure that the House was able to be recalled for appropriate tributes to the paid to Jo Cox and her memory. I know that, in your position, you are unable to speak often in the House, but it was a great pleasure working with you on that very sad occasion to make sure that a fitting tribute was paid. Sadly, I remember that day very well.

On a happier note, in one sense, I would like to put on record my thanks to Sir Roy Stone for his 44 years of service in the civil service, which will shortly come to an end, although I am told he is not retiring; he is going to turn his attention to other things. He was a fantastic principal private secretary to me when I was Government Chief Whip, and I know that his loss will be felt across Government.

Mr Steve Baker: May I take this moment to put on record my apologies to my right hon. Friend, who was Chief Whip during a period when I was leading various rebellions? I also want to offer a great apology to Roy Stone, who will have had to put up with the trouble that I caused my right hon. Friend. I am very grateful for the things that my right hon. Friend has said.

Mr Harper: My hon. Friend reminds us all how we can have different roles in this House. It is worth noting that, as a former Government Chief Whip, I do not find not supporting the Government a particularly comfortable place to be. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) said, sometimes we have to put what we believe to be the interests of our country first, and that is what I feel I am doing.

I want to draw attention to what my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) said, because he is right. There are documents with Government—I am not saying that these have been agreed by Ministers, but certainly this advice is being given to Ministers—that Government should aim to have a very low prevalence of covid. That is not zero covid, but it is not a great distance away. If Ministers were to agree to that strategy, it would mean restrictions going on for the foreseeable future, and that is one of the things that we are very concerned about.

I note, at this point, what my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough said: the Labour Benches are somewhat empty—the Back Benches are completely empty—and it is colleagues on the Government side of the House who are holding the Government to account. I accept that the Government may occasionally find that uncomfortable, but it is our role as Members of Parliament.

I always find it helpful to draw attention to the documents actually before us. For those who do not know, we have an explanatory memorandum, which explains what it is we are voting on today. It has been prepared by the Department of Health and Social Care and it will have been approved by a Minister of the Crown. It is very clear, and it is worth reading. Paragraph 7.3, bullet two, makes it clear that the Government will “likeliest be able to offer a first dose”

of vaccine

“to all adults...by July, but the vaccinations”

themselves will probably not take place until August “due to supply constraints.” We know that it takes two or three weeks until those vaccinations are effective, so those adults will not actually be protected until later in August, so that means that this delay is therefore pointless, or alternatively, that we are not going to cease these restrictions on 19 July if vaccinating all adults is the goal.

If we then turn to the review dates and whether this is indeed a terminus, paragraphs 7.4 to 7.7 are very interesting. There is a review required by the Secretary of State every 35 days. The first review, according to this, is not due until Monday 19 July. There is no mention here of an earlier review after two weeks—

“the first review due by Monday 19th July 2021.”

It says that

“England will remain at Step 3 for a further 4 weeks (subject to further review).”

It also says that the primary purpose of extending these regulations is

“to gather more evidence that the...tests can be met”—

not that these rules will expire after four weeks never to be reintroduced, but to gather evidence for tests to be met and then for a decision to be taken about whether these restrictions are to continue. The second reason given is to

“allow more people to receive vaccinations...further reducing these risks”,

as Ministers have said, but as I just pointed out, the first doses are not going to be delivered until August, so that makes no sense. Something does not add up here, and we are concerned that these regulations are not going to end on 19 July.

Chris Green: In the context of timetables and how things are going to pan out in the near future, it is now the Government’s intention to ensure the vaccination of a very large number of care workers. That is presumably going to take legislation and a period of time for them to have a vaccination, and perhaps a second vaccination, and to deal with all the other problems. If this is a requirement for the Government to be able to deliver an exit from lockdown, how long will that take?

Mr Harper: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, and it is part of the reason why we are concerned. If this was genuinely going to be the end of it, that would be one thing. I have listened carefully to the Members who have spoken and a number have said that they will support the Government on this occasion, but this is it. I am afraid that we have heard that before and it has turned out not to be true, and I am afraid, just from reading the documents in front of us, that that is why I have some scepticism.

The final thing I will say—I hope the Minister who will be winding up the debate, who I have a great deal of respect for, can clarify this—is that I am not quite sure

what is going to happen at the end. The review of the evidence that has been gathered about whether the tests are met is not due to be done until 19 July, so I am not clear about when Ministers are going to come to Parliament to set out whether those four tests have been met. Is it going to be on 19 July, or is it going to be before 19 July? I am not clear whether they are going to give that one week’s notice—all the way through the road map so far, we have had four weeks, then a week’s notice. I am not quite clear about the timetable, and this is important, because, as has been said, people’s lives will now be reoriented around that new date, including weddings, family events and people’s plans. It is important that our constituents know what to expect. When can they expect a decision? When can they expect to know what their life will look like? It is because of concerns about whether the regulations really are the end that I will, I am afraid, vote against them this evening.

My final point is on the motion about proceedings in this House. It is my strong view that, although it has been welcome that we have been able to have Parliament meet through a pandemic, and thanks should go to all the parliamentary staff who have made that possible, it is, I think, indisputable that this Parliament, in its current form, is not as effective in holding the Government to account and enabling us to do our job as Parliament should be. I think that we should get back to as normal as possible in this House as fast as we can. For that reason I will also vote against the motion to continue these proceedings effectively until we return in September.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind words about how closely we worked together after the tragic murder of Jo Cox. I much appreciated the work that we did together at that terrible time. I also echo his words about Sir Roy Stone, who I saw this afternoon to say how much I had always valued the advice that he gave to me when I was Opposition Chief Whip.

We now go to Sir John Redwood.

5.55 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con) [V]: It is time to trust people more. It is time to control people less. I would like to praise Ministers and officials, and particularly all the scientists, medics and researchers, who have worked so hard to ensure that the UK is a leader in vaccines—supplying one of the best vaccines in the world, getting it out early and making it available for all of us, and ensuring that we had bought in other vaccines that became available so that we were in a position to protect our population well and relatively early compared with other countries. I pay tribute to all the work by the NHS and the medics to understand how to treat the disease better and how it is transmitted so that we can take better actions to give people greater security.

I say now to all those experts, the NHS and the Government, “Share what is relevant with the rest of us—the public—and let us make more of our own risk assessments.” We are now saying to people that there are two major ways in which we can all protect ourselves against the possibility of getting this disease, or a bad version of it. First, we are making two jabs available to all adults who want them, and the figures so far show that that gives them a much better probability of not catching the disease at all and very strong protection against a serious case of it, which is what we are mainly

[John Redwood]

worried about, as we are trying to stop people dying or struggling in intensive care, and to stop that pressure on the NHS and all the suffering that it produces.

We are also saying to people, “If you’re still worried about the residual risk or if you really don’t like vaccines, you can self-isolate.” I hope that the Government will continue, as an employer and as the Government, guiding others in the economy to say that we should be generous and supportive of anyone who really does feel that they need to protect themselves against the virus by self-isolation, but I think that we are now well beyond the stage where we have to isolate practically everybody else to some extent when so many people now have protection, are making their own risk judgments, and want to get on with their lives.

In the room, when assessing the data, it is important that we look at all the data about jobs, livelihoods, incomes, family stress and mental health pressures, because this policy is creating all of those. The Government can do more. They should be helping the private sector to manage air flows, air extraction, ultraviolet cleaning and so forth to make it safer for many more social contact businesses to reopen and have a reasonable number of people enjoying their services. I think that more could be done on ensuring that all our health settings have really great infection control, because we do not want any more slippages from health settings themselves.

I urge the Government to think again about an idea they looked at early on but did not develop, which is in the large populated areas, particularly the conurbations, to have isolation hospitals that deal with covid and other variant infectious diseases well away from general hospitals. We add to the pressures and the likelihood of cross-infection if we have a general hospital taking in a very infectious disease.

There is now huge scope to get a really good economic recovery to save jobs, create new jobs and get pay up, to have many more transactions in the economy. To do that, however, we need to relax and to trust the people more. I think my constituents are ready to make decisions about their own lives again and many are very frustrated that they are not allowed to. We have all this great advice and knowledge. Let us not get too gloomy and let us not lock everybody up again.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): As colleagues will be aware, there have been quite a few interventions, so after the next speaker I will have to take the time limit down to three minutes in order to get everybody in.

6 pm

Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con): I will be supporting the Government this evening, but on this occasion my support is heavily qualified. Like many of my constituents, I am disappointed that stage 4 of the Government’s road map for reopening has been pushed back to 19 July. However, like—I believe—the majority of my constituents, I understand the reasoning for the four-week delay. The Government have consistently stated that the road map marks 21 June as the earliest opportunity to end restrictions, not a date set in stone. It is clear, however, that the delta variant has changed the race between the virus and the vaccine. If we faced only the alpha variant, then the extraordinary level of first doses that the NHS has

delivered would undoubtedly have been enough for us to be fully reopening next week, but two jabs are needed for the highest level of protection against the dominant delta variant. Understandably, I believe, this means that the NHS needs more time to vaccinate more people fully before ending restrictions.

However, I share concerns that one more short delay may in fact lead to many more. There is a risk that the Government’s decision-making process is becoming too cautious in the face of the next wave of coronavirus. If that happens, we may miss our chance to fully reopen in the summer before the trickier autumn and winter months. I believe my constituents can stomach a short delay, but the Government must provide assurances that this delay will be the final hurdle. Coronavirus is not going anywhere. We will have to learn to live with it and the risk it poses to public health, just as we do with the flu.

The Government must hold their nerve and let the vaccines do their job. They should not be afraid of their own success. The NHS vaccination programme has been a resounding triumph. In my constituency of Orpington, nearly 100,000 people have been vaccinated thanks to the tremendous effort of the local NHS staff and volunteers. Almost 60,000 of those jabs have been administered in the Orpington Health and Wellbeing Centre, which marks six months as a vaccination centre this week. Data shows clearly that the vaccines we have available are successful in combating all known variations of the virus. As vaccine numbers continue to increase, it will therefore be impossible to explain any further delay.

This delay has serious economic ramifications, especially for small businesses. For example, the 100% business rate relief for retail, hospitality and the leisure sector is due to end on 30 June. Employer contribution changes to the coronavirus job retention scheme are due to take effect on 1 July. Many businesses that are not able to reopen fully are now faced with paying their bounce back loans. The Government therefore need to set out what support businesses can expect as a result of this delay. We also need to know what proportion of people need to be vaccinated to sever the ties between cases and hospitalisations. How many more adults, therefore, need to be fully vaccinated? The Government need to plan to deliver those vaccines in time, so that we can reopen on 19 July.

If the Government can provide that detail, it will go a long way to calm worries that restrictions will go on and on, and never be lifted. That is why I hope the Government will now set out in detail what needs to happen in the next five weeks so that we can, finally and fully, reopen on 19 July.

6.4 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): As has been noted by my colleagues, there are very few Labour Back Benchers taking part in this debate, a point made in particular by my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone). Our Labour colleagues are not bad people; they are not lazy; but they are not as interested as we are in freedom. This whole debate is a mortal threat—a mortal threat—to the Conservative party. This is proven by history. When we had wartime regulation and a controlled economy between 1939 and 1945, it led to a Labour landslide. People get used to controls and at the end of July—the motion will go through today, obviously—there must be an entire re-set of the Conservative Government.

We must be talking about freedom, civil liberties, trusting business not subsidising business, and low taxes. That is what the Conservative party is about.

Let us look at the data. In Lincolnshire, sadly, we have had one death in the past month. We have a population of 651,000 adults, 504,000 of whom have had their first jab, and of those, 400,000 have had their second jab. Some 95% of over-70s in Lincolnshire have had two jabs, as have 75% of the over-50s. There is no reason for Lincolnshire to be under any restrictions at all. I accept that we are one country, but if we must have controls I do not know why we cannot have regionalised controls.

The Government must act according to reasonable proportionality. Our job as Back Benchers is to scrutinise the Executive, but how can we do that if we do not know what the Executive's goal is? There has been too much shifting of goal posts, and too many fatuous rules based not on science but on populism. Our society should be free and open, and there is a real danger that the public will increasingly ignore the restrictions. The Government will be a Government of the emperor without clothes. Of course the public in large part support the further controls, but what about business? Business is being driven into the ground. We do not support businesses with endless subsidies; we let business get on with business.

This will never end: at the end of this month there will be another variant. It will come from darkest Peru—the Peruvian variant—and Paddington Bear will be arrested at Paddington station and put in quarantine. It will go on and on and on. It is a bit of a cliché, but we are never going to eradicate this disease. It is like no other disease. It will constantly vary and constantly attack us, and we have to learn to live with it. We must not base our policy on the number of infections, which will rise and fall, and probably keep rising with every new variant. Our policy is to save the NHS. Our policy is to protect the NHS and stop it falling over. Only one policy makes sense at the end of July: is the NHS in danger, and are hospitals in danger of becoming over-full? That should be our policy.

6.7 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Happy Sussex day, Madam Deputy Speaker. Like every good, horny-handed son and daughter of Sussex, I am afraid I “wunt be druv” into the Government Lobby this evening.

The hashtag #i'mdone was the overwhelming message on social media on Monday when independence day, so tantalisingly close, was again cruelly whipped away from my constituents. Madam Deputy Speaker, I'm done with making excuses to my constituents about when their lives might get back to some degree of normality.

We are constantly told that these decisions are about data, not dates—quite right—but we have the imminent dates by which the vaccination programme will have achieved effective herd immunity, which is well ahead of what was imagined when the lockdown road map was designed. Now, 80% of adults have had their first dose. We have data showing that the Pfizer vaccine is 96% effective against the delta variant after two doses, and that the AstraZeneca vaccine is 92% effective. We have data showing an average of nine deaths a day at the moment, and 136 hospitalisations—a world away from where we were at the start of the road map. We have data from Public Health England that only 3% of the delta variant cases have received two vaccinations.

We also have dodgy data from three modelling studies by the University of Warwick, Imperial College, and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. They show widely different scenarios, with the most pessimistic warning that the UK could experience a further 203,000 deaths by next June, which is around 50,000 more than the first and second waves combined. Yet how can that be when we know the vaccine works, and the data show a likely 90% take-up rate?

Those doomsday models by largely anonymous wonks with no remit for considering the impact of further lockdown on life at large seem to trump all the other data, and the Government put them on a pedestal above all others. They are confusing modelling for scientific forecasts.

Mr Bone: Is my hon. Friend saying that the scientists are concentrating on one thing and ignoring everything else?

Tim Loughton: The trouble is that there are lots of different scientists and they do not agree with each other, yet only certain scientists seem to have an impact on the Government. Usually, it is the most doomsday of those scenarios.

Where is the data that shows that allowing six people inside a pub has increased infection rates, and by how much? Where is the data that shows how much faster an infection has spread because up to 30 people have been able to meet outside since the original journey out of lockdown? Where is the data showing that the NHS is being overwhelmed, not by covid patients, but by a huge increase in children and families suffering mental illness, including many worrying episodes that we have seen as constituency MPs, or by the surge in advanced cancer cases that could not be diagnosed and treated early? Where is the data showing how many businesses, particularly in the hospitality sector, cannot wait a further four weeks to be profitable and are likely now to fail, with the accompanying impact on people's jobs, livelihoods and wellbeing? Where is the data showing the impact on the wellbeing of children now denied sports days for another year and school proms? Students are again being denied graduation ceremonies for a second year, having missed out on so much of their university experience. Where is the data on the impact of domestic abuse, which has risen so much, as we have seen? Where is the data showing the continued impact on babies? The problem is that the only data considered seems exclusively to be the worst-case scenarios about the spread of covid, regardless of the current single-figure average death rates.

No covid strategy is risk-free, but a further delay is by no means a victimless decision. It is time that we trusted people to live with covid just, as the Prime Minister announced in February, in the same way that we “live with flu”: we do not let flu get in the way of living our lives. The Government promised at that stage that we would move to personal responsibility. My fear is that if the Government continue to try to nanny people, they will just not take any notice and no amount of retained rules will make any difference. People are already increasingly making their own risk assessments. As somebody tweeted the other day:

“I had Covid. I have antibodies. I have had both jabs. I've worn a mask. I've sanitised to within an inch of my life... But now, #ImDone no more. It's over.”

[Tim Loughton]

My fear is that this will become a much more widely held view if the Government just keep delaying freedom day, without the evidence to back it up.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I really do not mind interventions taking place, but we have 13 people to get in before I start the wind-ups, so every intervention means that somebody is not going to get in. I urge people to speak for fewer than three minutes if they can.

6.11 pm

Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): In all the difficult judgments the House has had to make during the pandemic, this is perhaps one of the most difficult, and I entirely respect the argument of those who have spoken in this debate and come to a different conclusion from me. As ever, this is about a balance of risks: between the delta variant and the risks of ongoing restrictions, which are not insignificant. We have to ask ourselves: what has changed since the last time we looked at the road map and at its end point? The Government's strategy has not changed; it remains to vaccinate, prioritising the most vulnerable. That cannot require everyone to be vaccinated. That is neither scientifically necessary, nor practically achievable. The significant change is what an effective response to the delta variant now seems to require: two doses of vaccine, not just one. I see the significance in that of the difference between the 57% of the adult population with two doses now and the 76% we should reach by 19 July. That argument allows me, just, to support the Government tonight, but I wish to make two other points.

The first is that the logic of this extension is to protect the NHS from a significant increase in hospitalisations from covid-19, and this protection comes at a high cost to the economy and to the rest of society. So we need to take full advantage of it, whether in reducing the backlog of treatments for other medical conditions or in giving NHS staff a break before what may be another difficult winter. It would help if Ministers could explain what we are doing with the time and space this extension is buying us. The second point is that I am extremely concerned, as others have been, about what our recent decision making tells us about our collective tolerance of risk. Scientists and Ministers alike have told us that we are going to have to live with covid indefinitely, but we do not know what that means, if not the acceptance of ongoing risk of illness or even death. We do not understand what tolerable risk looks like. The road map had four stages, no more, and if the logic of this extension to the last stage is to allow greater vaccination, when that is achieved we must be able to say that the restrictions will be lifted, so that businesses and individuals can, at long last, start to plan with certainty. Anything else will move us from risk management to risk aversion, and risk aversion has consequences broader than the management of the pandemic. Appetite for risk, for example, is a crucial ingredient of innovation and invention—ironically, the things that have delivered the vaccines and the progress we have made against covid so far.

Despite my reservations, I will support the Government tonight, but I want a commitment to use that period of extra restrictions wisely and a firmer commitment to end restrictions on 19 July.

6.15 pm

Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con): This great country is the cradle of freedom. For over eight centuries, at least since the time of Magna Carta, this mother of Parliaments has protected the rights and liberties of the British people. I, together with many others in this place, have been deeply troubled by the temporary restrictions that we have asked the British people to observe and the sacrifices we have asked them to make. I have supported every covid decision to date with a clear sight of the need to tackle the virus that was rampaging through Gloucestershire and the UK, when hospitalisations and covid deaths were a serious daily threat. My heart continues to go out to everybody who has lost loved ones.

However, we are in a very different situation now, and I cannot support a confused further delay of the road map in these circumstances. Now is the time to trust the British people, and we have heard that a lot tonight. We must trust them to continue acting with caution, and we must trust them to make choices to protect the health of their friends, family and loved ones.

I am proud of how the people and businesses of Stroud, the valleys and vale have supported their neighbours. They have volunteered in their thousands and put themselves forward for vaccinations, all to regain their historic freedoms, to stay well and to get back to some form of normal. In Stroud, we have 87% of people vaccinated for the first time and 55% fully vaccinated. Thankfully, only three people are in hospital in Gloucestershire with covid, and I pray for their swift recovery.

At a time when our hospitals are nowhere near overwhelmed by covid and we are told we need to learn to live with the virus, it is only right that we now look to protect the others from the impact of restrictions. To dismiss this delay as only being four weeks is disrespectful. These weeks are crucial for many, but not least for businesses that invested money and hope in being able to trade viably next week. For those in the hospitality, entertainment, weddings, exercise and travel sectors, these summer weeks follow a lost summer last year, and they cannot be made up over the autumn and winter months.

Being involved in the negotiations for the wedding industry has also led me to this position. Months of work, evidence gathering and sensible suggestions were swept aside by health officials at the last minute without explanation and against a backdrop of thousands of people hugging at the football and the cricket, which I loved by the way. Why reject testing, like we have in sporting events, and then make a father wear a mask walking his daughter down the aisle? He will eat a maskless dinner with her later that day. What have we come to when the Government are banning dance floors? I am equally confuzzled by banning singing in churches. Our predominantly double-jabbed congregations just want to sing to God—let them sing.

These are not easy decisions. The difficulties facing our Government are extraordinary, and I sincerely respect those on both sides of the House who have different views. I have the utmost respect for the Prime Minister and the Health Secretary, and I do not mind saying out loud that this was a difficult decision, but with the welfare of Stroud firmly in my mind, I praise the courage and sacrifice that the people of this great nation have shown, and I say that now is the time for us to trust the people and give them their freedom day.

6.18 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): What on earth is happening to our country? Muzzled, acquiescent and fearful. Having fought and defeated one Project Fear, I never thought we would experience another. Sadly, unlike the first, the polls suggest that the majority of the population has succumbed to the second. Armed with that information, the decision makers feel they can creep out with their shovels and move the goalposts at will. Personally I am not surprised that the nation has been beaten into submission when, day after day and hour after hour, we are deluged with dire warnings of doom and gloom by Government advisers of one kind or another.

A section of the press and media must take responsibility for their role in creating this near Orwellian nightmare. Do not get me wrong; I have never underestimated the threat that this pandemic poses. Every death and illness is deeply regrettable, but surely there comes a time when, for the greater good of the majority, a sense of proportion must be adopted. This is not easy to do when graphs and statistics are presented to support this one-month extension, despite those far better qualified than I questioning their methodology, presentation and even accuracy.

So much that was predicted has not come to pass, and the so-called third wave is not killing or hospitalising anywhere near the numbers affected in waves 1 or 2. Why? Well, it is due to the remarkable vaccine rollout, for which the Government Front-Bench team and the NHS must take huge credit. From the initial promise of regaining our freedom when the vulnerable had been inoculated, I can understand the Government's reluctance to give it back. First, it is easier to say no. Secondly, let us not forget that there is a public inquiry hanging over the Government like the sword of Damocles. The revelations from Dominic Cummings and the accusations that followed them were no doubt a sobering taster to Ministers of what is to come. However, fearing an inquiry and variants are not reasons for delaying freedom day.

Mistakes have been made. That was inevitable given the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, but it does not mean being risk averse now. We desperately need a confident Government to take a proportionate stand in the face of the evidence. For months, the Government's cry was, "Protect the NHS". On Tuesday, the organisation's chief executive said that only 1% of hospital beds are occupied by covid patients. We know that admissions are rising in the north-west, but not on the scale seen during the second wave. Yes, totally unlocking is a risk, but it is a proportionate one when considering the appalling damage being done to the risk takers—those who create our prosperity and jobs—and the continued successful rollout of the vaccines.

As for this place, I have been here long enough to know that, when there is agreement across the majority of the House, something is fundamentally wrong.

6.21 pm

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): Over the past few months, I have repeatedly called for an end to restrictions at the earliest opportunity and I believe that the success of our vaccination programme gives us that opportunity. We are all aware of the pain that has been inflicted on so many: leisure, tourism, hospitality, aviation—the list goes on. This has manifested itself in the loss of

jobs and livelihoods, and although the Government have done much to mitigate the fallout through their generous support schemes, they have just scratched the surface when what people really want to do is to return to normal.

When we walk down the voting Lobby, it is never a binary choice; no decision is clear-cut and there are bits of every motion that we agree with and bits that we do not like. Any self-respecting politician with the best interests of constituency, country and party at heart just hopes that the stars do align. I have mixed feelings about the extension to the current lockdown rules. On the one hand, creating a wall of immunity among all in the adult demographics seems sensible so that we can move forward, but by the same token the ongoing restrictions on how we live our lives is killing businesses and people all over the UK. Not only is the cost to the taxpayer immense; there is also a cost to our hopes, dreams and mental health. The sooner that we can smash through lockdown, the better.

However, I have also been unequivocal that any policy decision needs to be driven by the science and it remains a fact that the delta variant is causing real concern, with infections, hospitalisations and deaths spiking alarmingly. Aside from all the disappointment, the Prime Minister could not have been clearer in his stated position at the weekend.

It may just be that our younger generation have an expectation of being vaccinated against the killer disease before all restrictions are lifted. It may be that cases are growing by 65% a week, and that hospitalisations are increasing by 50% a week across the UK. It may be that the NHS needs and deserves four more weeks to complete its job. Therefore, in the light of the evidence presented to me and the decisions that have been made in good faith, I will be supporting all Government motions this evening.

I would like to raise two final points. First, my central plea is that, when the list of authorised pilots is released, it must include flagship global events such as the Euros, Wimbledon, the British Grand Prix, the Chelsea Flower Show and the Goodwood Festival of Speed. I am afraid that the alternative would be cataclysmic.

Lastly, I am increasingly concerned by the dichotomy between the unprecedented success of our vaccination programme and the ongoing risk aversion of the Government. As a military man, I am comfortable with risk and feel that we all now need to live with covid in a way that has not been achieved so far. Using military parlance, given that we cannot transfer or terminate it—and lord knows we have tried to treat it—it is now time to robustly tolerate covid. I have a feeling that all good will will be exhausted if the Government do not honour their promise of 19 July.

6.24 pm

Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con): Following the science is an attractive and even comforting idea in a time of uncertainty. But—I say this as a scientist—we can no more follow science than we can follow history. Science gives us knowledge and understanding, but it cannot give us wisdom, and it is wisdom that we need to make what are essentially moral and political decisions about how we balance the short and long-term best interests of our whole society. I am saddened that we have lost—I hope only temporarily—that sense of balance.

[*Miriam Cates*]

Preventing death from covid seems to have become the principal purpose of our national endeavour, no matter the cost to our way of life. We have placed insufficient emphasis on the terrible long-term consequences of lockdown—poverty, unemployment, lost education, debt, undiagnosed cancer, loneliness, hopelessness and fear—and focused far too narrowly on just one set of metrics: the daily covid data. Even the most hardened libertarian would accept that, in a national emergency and in the face of significant threat to life, restrictions on our freedoms have been necessary and right, but with all vulnerable people having now been offered vaccination, the balance of risk has shifted.

Covid is no longer a substantial threat. The average covid mortality so far in June is seven deaths a day—seven out of around 1,500 daily deaths that we could expect in normal times. The number of people in hospital now stands at 1,177—some 37,000 fewer than at the peak in January. Thanks to the incredible efficacy of our vaccination programme, it is hard to comprehend how our hospitals could quickly become overwhelmed. The idea that we are still in a state of emergency is not supported by the evidence, yet significant legal restrictions on our basic freedoms are to remain, even dictating how many of our family and friends can visit us in our private homes. The restrictions we face are now out of proportion to the threat, so extending the measures sets a dangerous precedent.

We must learn to live with covid in the way that we live with so many other risks. Vaccines will never be 100% effective, just like seatbelts, smoke alarms or contraception, but it is vital to our autonomy and our identity as human beings that we are able to make our own choices and evaluations of everyday risks, as has been the norm in our country for generations. I have the greatest respect for Ministers, who have had to make unimaginably difficult decisions over the past year, but now is the time to restore a sense of balance, proportion and fairness, and to make a return to life in all its fullness.

In my final seconds, I want to say this: childhood should be a time that is care-free. Testing our children twice a week, making them wear masks when they are not at risk, and constantly reminding them that they may be a danger to people whom they love, is damaging them psychologically, and we have to stop.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): If everybody now takes two minutes, everybody will get in. I am sure Dr Kieran Mullan will lead the way.

6.28 pm

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have listened carefully to the contributions this afternoon and we have done a good job at articulating the challenge we face. Basically, what is it reasonable to do to stop coronavirus spreading, infecting and killing enormous numbers of people and overwhelming the NHS? The answer to that asks us to consider what the costs are for doing something, and what the costs are for doing nothing.

There has been a cost to freedom from lockdowns, but freedom is complex. What freedom would people aged 50 years and up have had to venture out of their homes when coronavirus ran rampant and left them with at least a one-in-200 chance, or worse, of dying if they caught it?

There has been a cost to businesses, particularly those in hospitality and other businesses that people have been prevented from visiting. I am certain that had our NHS been overwhelmed, had one in 200 people aged 50 started dying en masse, and had the news shown patients being turned away from intensive therapy units, the impact on those businesses would have been similar to, if not the same as, that of lockdown.

There has been a cost to children's welfare. Which parent would really have carried on sending their children to school, knowing that there would be no help if there was an outbreak of meningitis or measles? How traumatised would the nation's children have been when one in 200, or more, of their grandparents died in the space of a year or two?

There has been a cost from lockdown to people with illnesses such as cancer. Where exactly would cancer patients have gone after their operations when ITUs were full? Which immunocompromised patients having chemo would have risked visiting their local hospital for treatment and catching covid? It is wrong for critics of lockdown to think that they alone care about freedom, hospitality businesses, children and those suffering from other illnesses; we all do. I do, but I just took what I thought was a rational choice in weighing up the costs across the board. I must take issue with people today who have talked about our freedoms not being used to support the NHS, as if that were some kind of abstract concept. What we are talking about is supporting the patients, their friends and their family who would have been prevented from accessing the NHS if the restrictions had not prevented the NHS from being overwhelmed.

It was always inevitable that, over time, these judgments would have become more finely balanced, as they have done, but I will not be told that I am not capable of continuing to make these finely balanced judgments. It is right that the next phase means a new discussion. Like others, I find these types of restrictions—restrictions that stop us living out our fundamental desires to mix, socialise and spend time with each other—a heavy, heavy price to pay. I have no doubt that the public will be willing to pay a similarly heavy price to remove most, if not all, of them. That is not to say that people will not mind wearing a mask on the tube, for example.

We have some tough decisions ahead of us, and I welcome the recognition of that from the Government. It is now time for the Government to state more clearly and starkly what these choices are, so that the British public can decide together what sacrifices we are and we are not willing to make.

6.30 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): As MPs, we are asked to take fundamentally political decisions, balancing the certainty of harm done to people's livelihoods and wellbeing, which is caused by restrictions, with the imminent risk to people's lives and the ability of our health services to cope if the pandemic were to spiral out of control. We can only do so on the basis of the very best medical and scientific advice that is available.

Two weeks ago, I was sure that there was no reason why step 4 should not go ahead on 21 June. Within days, that certainty looked foolish. The advice now is clear that pressing ahead on Monday would lead to massive increases in admissions that would leave our hospitals with more covid patients than at any of the

worst points of last year. Given that and given the clear guidance from our local NHS leaders of the impact that this would have on their ability to treat people in need, the only responsible course of action is to pause. However, that does not mean that we should not question and test that advice.

Unlike some, I do not believe that the advice has been manipulated to secure a specific outcome. This is not another 45-minute dossier. None the less, some of the modelling does look strange. Some of the assumptions could be questionable. The effectiveness of the vaccines are estimated at 89% and 90% in the modelling, whereas Public Health England data put it at 92% and 96%. The difference between 89% and 96% might not sound huge, but, if we flip it around, the difference in the ineffectiveness rate between 4% and 11% is enormous and clearly would have significant policy implications.

The models project 2,500 hospital admissions a day within eight weeks. That suggests a rate of increase of 40% a week, which is much higher than we are currently experiencing. If that increase was actually 30%, the admissions would be closer to 1,400 a day. If the current rate of 22%, which was seen in the past week, were to continue, then it would reach just 800 after eight weeks. Surely those differences would lead to different policy choices. That is why this two-week break point is important and why it is vital that Ministers take it seriously.

I will back the motions tonight, but if, over the next two weeks, the data do not bear out the hypotheses in the models, we must rethink.

6.33 pm

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): I have been contacted by many constituents who are concerned about the extension of these restrictions, especially when cases and hospitalisations are still at an absolutely low level. I also represent a central London constituency, and central London is suffering badly, as a result of people still being encouraged to work from home and our having very few international business visitors and residents, with the result that unemployment in central London is looking very bad.

However, I acknowledge that, clearly, with two shots of the vaccines, there is no question but that there is better resistance to hospitalisation. I will support the Government tonight for one final heave over the line, but I urge them to make sure that we do not lose the benefit of two vaccines. For instance, why are we still encouraging people to work from home when they are double vaccinated, and why are we asking people to quarantine at home if they have been in contact with a case when they are double vaccinated? We need to refine and perfect all these features, because this is having a meaningful impact on people's lives. I will support the Government, but we have work to do and we need to get out of these restrictions.

6.35 pm

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): I have supported the Government throughout on coronavirus measures, but today we have come very close to the point, for me personally, at which the line has been breached. I have listened to some very persuasive speeches from colleagues who have come to that point today, such as my hon. Friends the Members for Stroud (Siobhan

Baillie) and for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Miriam Cates). I myself am sticking with the Government on this occasion for the reasons that my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) gave—the same reasons, in fact, that the Health Secretary gave me in the Lobby earlier—including the need to get those second jabs into people who are still at risk of hospitalisation.

However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) recently said, we must take the two-week review seriously, because there is evidence even today that we are starting to bend the curve of exponential growth and that the R rate is starting to fall on cases in England. We know there is a 10-day lag to hospitalisations, but we have also seen the hospitalisation percentage falling. It was 8% of cases turning into hospitalisations in the autumn, and it is down to 4% now. If that continues to drop, the case that the Government are making will get weaker and weaker.

I would like briefly to pay tribute to the Health Secretary not only for all his work on this and his assiduousness in coming to the House, but for helping me with a major public health issue in Newcastle-under-Lyme—a landfill—which he has been incredibly engaged with. I think the Health Secretary has done a fantastic job throughout this pandemic, and I welcome what he said today. He himself obviously has his reservations, but this is the right decision for the country at this time.

As I serve on the Procedure Committee with my right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley)—its Chair, who spoke earlier—let me say very briefly that I will be supporting the other motion as well. As we have said in the Committee, I think it is absolutely fundamental that we align what we do in this House with what we are asked in the country to do.

6.36 pm

Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate—one that I know is of huge importance both to this House and to the country. In West Dorset, we have had one of the lowest numbers of cases and of deaths across the whole country. As it stands today, in the whole of Dorset we have just one person poorly in hospital. We have not lost anybody from this virus for around two months, so it is with great regret that I have to tell the Government that I find it very difficult to support their line and will not be doing so in the Lobby this evening.

The vaccination scheme—which has been a source of national pride and I think many if not all of us have now received a vaccination—has brought great reassurance to many people across this country. But we now have to help everybody in the nation, particularly those who, as in my constituency, where 97% of our businesses are small or micro-sized, are feeling this so painfully. We need to be able to give them the summer as the opportunity to get their business back not just for the short term, but for the long term. That is why, as the Member for West Dorset, I must make it clear to the Government that I am afraid I am unable to support them in the Lobby this evening.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): We now go to Neil O'Brien, whom I have also asked to stick to two minutes.

6.38 pm

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con) [V]: None of us wants these restrictions to go on for a moment longer than they have to. All of us are proud of our world-leading vaccination effort, and I pay tribute to everyone involved in delivering it in Harborough, Oadby and Wigston. However, when we see that cases are doubling roughly every 10 days and that within a week or two we will be back to the same number of cases every day that we had at the start of the November lockdown, we can see why there is real cause for concern. That is why it is right to go for the delay that we will vote for this evening. We know that getting a second vaccination dose gives people a lot more protection against this dangerous new variant. We know that many more people will be fully vaccinated as a result of this delay and that will potentially save thousands of lives, so it is the right thing to do.

My pleas to Ministers are as follows. The first is that we use the time that we are buying tonight to really drive vaccination rates among that last 4%—perhaps 1 million people—among the most clinically vulnerable groups. As the number of cases accelerates, those people have a target on their back, and it would be a tragedy for them to die of fear, ignorance or simple lack of knowledge at this stage, at the very end of the pandemic.

My second plea to Ministers is to continue to improve our ability to detect at an early stage and close our borders against dangerous new strains. While the Indian variant is very dangerous, as this thing bounces around the world, one day there will potentially be something worse, and we need to be ready for that. Last but not least, we must improve our ability to nip future pandemics in the bud. I believe that involves reappraising our attitudes to things like challenge trials, so that we never have to go through this again.

It is the right to delay ending the restrictions for a few more weeks. It is a difficult decision but it is the right one. We need to put in place all the right measures to ensure that we are never in this position again, and that when we abolish these restrictions, we abolish them forever.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): No. 47 has withdrawn, so the final Back-Bench speaker is Shaun Bailey.

6.40 pm

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is always a little bit trepidatious coming in at this stage of the debate.

The debate has been very finely balanced, and the difficulty is that after so many great contributions, one feels as though one is repeating oneself a bit. This is a difficult decision, and I do not envy the Government in the position that they find themselves in. We must tread a nuanced, balanced path, ensuring that we protect the most vulnerable while safeguarding those liberties that I am sure all of us in this House want to ensure that we and our constituents can enjoy.

The pandemic in my communities, in Sandwell, has been different, because we have not been able to work from home. The majority of my constituents have had to go out to work in the factories or in other places. They have had to be there. I want to dispel the notion that we can all carry on as normal—that we can all

work from home. It just does not happen, I am afraid; it is just not reality. An important point that was raised by many hon. Members from both sides of the House this evening is that we must use the time that we will now have as a result of the regulations—because they will pass this evening—to ensure that we plan properly, to tackle the issues and the challenges that we are faced with in our NHS.

I want to talk about primary care, because that is a big thing for my constituents—no more so, at the moment, than in one of my communities, in Tividale, where my constituents struggle to get a GP appointment. One constituent who contacted me today had had to call the surgery 150 times to try and get in to see someone. It is not acceptable; it cannot carry on. I have had really positive discussions with the Minister and his team in the Department of Health, but we must find a solution. And we must use this time, not just on short-term matters, but to flesh out a long-term plan to deal with these issues, going forward. Because our NHS has done a fantastic job during this pandemic, now we must be sure that the issues that have come to light as a result of the situation we find ourselves in, are dealt with for the long term, so that the legacy of the pandemic is that we ensure that we pay back those NHS heroes who have saved so many people.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): As no. 49 has withdrawn, I call the shadow Minister, Justin Madders.

6.42 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): May I start by associating myself with the many Members who have paid tribute to Jo Cox? As we have heard from the tributes, she transcended intake and party in bringing people together, and my thoughts are with her family at this time.

There have been many excellent speeches from both sides of the Chamber. People who will be voting different ways often made many similar points. I believe that shows the disappointment that we all feel that we are here once again, grappling with many overlapping and multiple considerations.

There were some particularly thought-provoking Opposition speeches, by my hon. Friends the Members for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer), for City of Chester (Christian Matheson), for Luton North (Sarah Owen), for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) and for Stockport (Navendu Mishra). I particularly enjoyed the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North and her repeated use of the word hopeless—a word that I am sure is on many people's lips at the moment. She was right that we have been here before—at Christmas, with the Prime Minister dangling the carrot of freedom before pulling it away at the last minute. It is the hallmark of a Prime Minister who struggles to deliver bad news to the public.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East made the similar point that there is a pattern here of the Government making the same mistakes over and over again. He also rightly highlighted the continuing failure to provide adequate financial support for those who self-isolate—a point that was also made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport and is particularly apposite today, when a

Government report has reached the news which states that the current self-isolation policy has “low to medium” effectiveness and that there are “barriers” to self-isolation. That is a point that we have been making since the start of the pandemic, so it is about time the Government listened to us and to their own advisers and fixed it.

It would be remiss of me not to highlight the fantastic contribution from my neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester, who drew attention to how the announcement came out, once again, via the media. He also raised an important point about the enhanced measures that a number of areas, including our own county of Cheshire, have been put into this week. Unfortunately, we have seen a surge in cases, but there is apparently no prospect of our getting a rise in vaccines.

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): When I spoke to my fellow healthcare professionals in my local hospital vaccination centre weeks ago, many expressed their concerns about the delta variant and its possible impact on the local NHS and on delaying the end of lockdown. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government need to do more to prevent workplace burnout by providing more workplace support to our fellow healthcare professionals, who have spent the past 18 months supporting the Government through their incompetency?

Justin Madders: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We owe a great debt to those in the NHS and to those who have worked on the frontline during the past 18 months. Last week, the Health and Social Care Committee released a very important report on burnout; I really hope that the Government address it, because without the workforce, the NHS is nothing.

To return to the issues in Cheshire, we have not had the increase in vaccines that the surge in cases requires and that the Government’s own scientific advisers say is the best way to deal with such an outbreak. Our constituents are being sent far and wide to get their first jabs. We have fantastic volunteers and NHS workers ready, willing and able to deliver those jabs, but we need the Government to match that ambition by increasing supply. That will be where we can make the most difference.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester also made a very important point about how we are now in the worst of all worlds with the new guidance that was issued at the same time that the regulations came into force. We are now advised not to meet indoors: again, that diverts people away from the hospitality sector, which was just opening up again, but without a penny more in financial support for it. As he mentioned, other sectors have also been affected by the regulations and are still not getting any additional financial support in recognition of the change in policy.

On the issue of guidance and law, I hope that the Minister will look at last week’s report by the House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution, which stated that the use of guidance had

“in some instances undermined legal certainty by laying claim to legal requirements that do not exist. The Government does not have, and must not assume, authority to mandate public behaviour other than as required by law. The consequence has been a lack of clarity on which rules are legally enforceable, posing challenges for the police and local government...and potentially undermining public compliance and confidence.”

If living with covid means living with guidance rather than laws, I really do urge the Government to read that report before they proceed down that road.

Will the Minister clarify whether the Government are still making decisions based on data rather than dates? As the shadow Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), pointed out, the Prime Minister was pretty clear that the 19 July was the “terminus date” for restrictions, yet paragraph 7.4 of the explanatory memorandum accompanying the regulations states that the delay is

“to gather more evidence that the...tests can be met”

under the road map in the light of the delta variant. There would be little point in gathering that data if it were not used to inform future decisions, so that rather implies that 19 July might not be the end date after all.

As the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) pointed out, there is no mention in the explanatory memorandum or the regulations of the two-week point at which things will be reconsidered. Of course, we all hope that 19 July is the end date, but we have been down the road of false promises many times in the past 18 months, and I do not think it unreasonable to be a little sceptical about what the Prime Minister says and what actually materialises, given his record to date. Any clarity that the Minister can shed on the precise reason for the delay would be much appreciated.

Of course, it did not have to be this way. The delays to our unlocking that we are debating were not inevitable; in fact, they were totally avoidable. The British public have been magnificent throughout the crisis—they have followed the rules and played their part. Yet when they see world leaders ignoring social distancing at a barbecue but are told that the rules cannot yet be relaxed for them, and when they see thousands of people attending football matches but are told that they cannot attend their own children’s school sports day, they grow frustrated at what they see as a lack of consistency from those who make the rules. That frustration grows into anger when they see a Prime Minister who has thrown it all away by keeping the borders open and letting the delta variant run wild through the country. As a result, the delta variant now makes up 96% of new infections. That did not happen by accident, and, as the chief medical officer said on Monday, we would be lifting restrictions now if it were not for the delta variant. All that good work and all the benefits of the vaccine have been blown because the Prime Minister was once again too slow, just as he was too slow with the first lockdown, the second lockdown and the third.

I know that the Government will say that they acted as soon as they could on the information that they had, but the explanation for why they did not act sooner on the delta variant has changed in the last few days. We were initially told on multiple occasions that the data did not support putting India on the red list earlier because the positivity rates of the new variant were three times higher for Pakistan, but now we are told that India was not put on earlier because the variant had not been identified as one of interest or concern.

Neither explanation stands up to scrutiny. The only published data on the Indian variant does not show a positivity rate three times as high for Pakistan, and the idea that action was taken shortly before it was designated as a variant of concern does not explain why Pakistan

[Justin Madders]

and Bangladesh were red listed weeks earlier. The only credible explanation I can therefore find for treating India differently is that the Prime Minister did not want to scupper his trade visit and photo opportunity with the Indian Prime Minister.

Instead of excuses, we should be getting an apology. It is beyond doubt that the Prime Minister's incompetence, dithering and vanity have cost this country dear, and that is the only reason why the full unlocking of this country is not going ahead next week. Having heard today via WhatsApp from Dominic Cummings what the Prime Minister thinks of the Health Secretary, I wonder whether the Health Secretary has at any point in the last few weeks had similar feelings towards the Prime Minister. If he has, at least that is something we can both agree on.

6.51 pm

The Minister for Health (Edward Argar): At the outset, I associate myself with the shadow Minister's remarks in respect of our late colleague, Jo Cox. As we stand at this Dispatch Box, we can see the coat of arms above the Opposition Benches. I pay tribute to her and to all the work that she did while she was in this place, and before.

I would much rather I were not standing here today urging and encouraging colleagues to vote for this motion. I know that colleagues would wish that it were not necessary, but I regret to say that it is. We have made huge progress—progress that has been made possible by our phenomenal vaccine roll-out programme. The tribute for that goes to the scientists who developed the vaccine, those who procured it, the NHS, all the volunteers, the charities, the military, *The Sun's* jabs army and everyone who has played their part in helping to deliver this programme. That progress has also been made possible by the incredible efforts of the British people, and by the dedication of everyone who works in our health and care system. I know the shadow Minister will join me in expressing our joint gratitude to them all.

As the Prime Minister set out on Monday, this vaccine remains our route out of the pandemic. With every day that goes by, we are better protected by our vaccines, but the delta variant has made the race between virus and vaccine much tighter. Cases continue to grow rapidly each week in the worst-affected areas. The number of people being admitted to hospital in England has begun to rise, and the number of people in ICUs is also rising, but the vaccine remains our way out.

Data published this week shows that two doses of the jab are just as effective against hospital admission with the delta variant, compared with the alpha variant, and indeed they may even be more effective against the delta variant. That underlines the importance of that second jab and the need for more of us to have the chance to get its life-saving protection.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) put it far more effectively than I dare say I will be able to do. He was absolutely right to highlight the crucial importance, over the next few weeks, of getting those second jabs—particularly the AstraZeneca vaccine—into people's arms. He is right to highlight that after one jab, the Pfizer vaccine is highly effective, but we need

two jabs of the AstraZeneca vaccine to provide that level of protection. It is important, in that context, to remember that the AZ vaccine is the workhorse of our vaccination programme. More than 30 million people have now received their second jab, and in one month's time that number could stand as high as 40 million. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State highlighted in his remarks an important factor in getting those second doses into people's arms. There are still 1.2 million over-50s who have had their first dose—they are not declining the vaccine; they have had the first dose—but who need the second dose to provide that high level of protection. Similarly, there are 4.4 million over-40s who need their second dose. With the delta variant now making up nine in 10 of the cases across the UK, it is vital we bridge the gap and get many more people that life-saving second jab.

This extra time will allow us to get more needles into more arms, getting us the protection that we need and enabling us to see restrictions fall away on 19 July. In that vein, I would remind colleagues of the quote from the Prime Minister on Monday, when he was very clear:

"As things stand, and on the evidence that I can see right now, I am confident that we will not need more than four weeks and that we won't need to go beyond 19 July."

Sarah Owen: The Minister just said that the Prime Minister has given assurances about another four weeks, but we have had this time and time again. Why should the British people believe the Prime Minister now?

Edward Argar: The short answer is that the British people do believe the Prime Minister now.

We face a difficult choice, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) set it out extremely clearly. It reflects the underlying debate about risk. I am clear that we must learn to live with this disease, without the sort of restrictions we have seen. We cannot eradicate it. I have to say that, rather than relying on the views of the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon), I am inclined to rely on the views of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset, who made that point very clear. Those who advocate zero covid must realise that that is impractical and unachievable, and I consistently do not subscribe to the logic of those who argue for that course.

I am sure the House will agree that, to get to the point where we can learn to live with this disease, an extra few weeks are a price worth paying. I therefore urge the House to support these regulations today. No one can fail to be sympathetic to those who will be affected by this delay, including those couples who want to start their married lives together but have had to change or delay their plans. This weighs on me greatly, as it will on all hon. Members, and in this case I was pleased that we could ease the restrictions on weddings. Equally, I am mindful of those whose livelihoods will be affected by any delay in our road map. I urge the House to support this motion. It provides a short-term delay that significantly strengthens our position for the longer term.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr Harper) raised a couple of specific points which I will try to answer here; they relate to each other. He mentioned paragraph 7.7 of the explanatory memorandum and his concern that the first review date was on 19 July. I can clarify that the first review date is due by Monday

19 July and will be in advance of that point. That is a legal end point. I would anticipate an announcement coming probably a week before that on the decision and the data. I hope that gives him some reassurance about people having notice of what is coming.

In closing, I wish to express my sincere thanks to all those who have contributed to today's debate. I am sorry that so few on the Opposition Benches chose to take part, but I pay tribute to those who did and to those on this side of the House for the sincerity, the strength of feeling and the integrity that they have shown. I hope the House recognises that I have a deep-seated respect for all the views I have heard this afternoon. Hon. Members all want the same thing, which is to save lives and to see us exit these restrictions and return to normality as soon as possible. Difficult as it may be, I urge hon. Members across the House to vote for these measures to give ourselves that short extra time to vaccinate more people—crucially, with that second dose—and take us forward to the stronger, more confident future that we all seek, which I know is just around the corner and which I am confident the Prime Minister will take us to. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 461, Noes 60.

Division No. 28]

[6.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Betts, Mr Clive
Abrahams, Debbie	Bhatti, Saqib
Adams, Nigel	Blake, Olivia
Afolami, Bim	Blomfield, Paul
Ahmad Khan, Imran	Bradley, Ben
Aiken, Nickie	Braverman, rh Suella
Aldous, Peter	Brennan, Kevin
Ali, Rushanara	Brereton, Jack
Ali, Tahir	Bristow, Paul
Allan, Lucy	Britcliffe, Sara
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Brokenshire, rh James
Amesbury, Mike	Brown, Ms Lyn
Amess, Sir David	Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Anderson, Fleur	Browne, Anthony
Anderson, Lee	Bruce, Fiona
Anderson, Stuart	Bryant, Chris
Andrew, rh Stuart	Buchan, Felicity
Ansell, Caroline	Buck, Ms Karen
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Buckland, rh Robert
Argar, Edward	Burghart, Alex
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Burgon, Richard
Atherton, Sarah	Burns, rh Conor
Atkins, Victoria	Butler, Dawn
Bacon, Gareth	Butler, Rob
Bacon, Mr Richard	Byrne, Ian
Badenoch, Kemi	Byrne, rh Liam
Bailey, Shaun	Cadbury, Ruth
Baker, Duncan	Cairns, rh Alun
Barclay, rh Steve	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Barker, Paula	Carden, Dan
Baron, Mr John	Carter, Andy
Baynes, Simon	Cartlidge, James
Beckett, rh Margaret	Cash, Sir William
Begum, Apsana	Chalk, Alex
Bell, Aaron	Champion, Sarah
Benn, rh Hilary	Charalambous, Bambos
Benton, Scott	Chishti, Rehman
Beresford, Sir Paul	Churchill, Jo
Berry, rh Jake	Clark, Feryal

Clark, rh Greg	Fletcher, Colleen
Clarke, Mr Simon	Fletcher, Katherine
Clarke, Theo	Fletcher, Mark
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Fletcher, Nick
Clarkson, Chris	Ford, Vicky
Cleverly, rh James	Foster, Kevin
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Fovargue, Yvonne
Collins, Damian	Foxcroft, Vicky
Cooper, Rosie	Foy, Mary Kelly
Cooper, rh Yvette	Frazer, rh Lucy
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Freeman, George
Costa, Alberto	Freer, Mike
Courts, Robert	Fuller, Richard
Coutinho, Claire	Furniss, Gill
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Gale, rh Sir Roger
Coyle, Neil	Gardiner, Barry
Crabb, rh Stephen	Garnier, Mark
Creasy, Stella	Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Crosbie, Virginia	Gibb, rh Nick
Crouch, Tracey	Gibson, Peter
Cruddas, Jon	Gideon, Jo
Cryer, John	Gill, Preet Kaur
Cummins, Judith	Glen, John
Cunningham, Alex	Glendon, Mary
Daby, Janet	Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Daly, James	Gove, rh Michael
David, Wayne	Graham, Richard
Davies, David T. C.	Grant, Mrs Helen
Davies, Gareth	Gray, James
Davies, Geraint	Green, rh Damian
Davies, Dr James	Green, Kate
Davies, Mims	Greenwood, Margaret
Davies-Jones, Alex	Griffith, Andrew
Davison, Dehenna	Griffith, Nia
De Cordova, Marsha	Griffiths, Kate
Debbonaire, Thangam	Grundy, James
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Gullis, Jonathan
Dinenage, Caroline	Haigh, Louise
Dines, Miss Sarah	Halfon, rh Robert
Docherty, Leo	Hall, Luke
Dodds, Anneliese	Hamilton, Fabian
Donelan, Michelle	Hammond, Stephen
Dorries, Ms Nadine	Hancock, rh Matt
Double, Steve	Hands, rh Greg
Doughty, Stephen	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Dowd, Peter	Harris, Carolyn
Dowden, rh Oliver	Harris, Rebecca
Dromey, Jack	Harrison, Trudy
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Hart, Sally-Ann
Duddridge, James	Hart, rh Simon
Duffield, Rosie	Hayes, Helen
Dunne, rh Philip	Hayes, rh Sir John
Eagle, Dame Angela	Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Eagle, Maria	Healey, rh John
Eastwood, Mark	Heapey, James
Edwards, Ruth	Heaton-Harris, Chris
Efford, Clive	Henderson, Gordon
Elliott, Julie	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Ellis, rh Michael	Henry, Darren
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Higginbotham, Antony
Elmore, Chris	Hillier, Meg
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie	Hinds, rh Damian
Eshalomi, Florence	Hoare, Simon
Esterson, Bill	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Eustice, rh George	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Evans, Chris	Holden, Mr Richard
Evans, Dr Luke	Hollern, Kate
Evennett, rh Sir David	Hollinrake, Kevin
Everitt, Ben	Holloway, Adam
Fabricant, Michael	Holmes, Paul
Farris, Laura	Hopkins, Rachel
Fell, Simon	Howarth, rh Sir George

Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Kim
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Jupp, Simon
 Kane, Mike
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Kyle, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Langan, Robert
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, Clive
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lloyd, Tony
 Logan, Mark
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Mak, Alan
 Malhotra, Seema
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie

Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCartney, Jason
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Menzies, Mark
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, David
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Nandy, Lisa
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Norris, Alex
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opperman, Guy
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher

Pollard, Luke
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Powell, Lucy
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Royston
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevens, Jo
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob

Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Streeter, Wes
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trickett, Jon
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Karl
 Twist, Liz
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Winter, Beth
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Maggie Throup and
Maria Caulfield

NOES

Bone, Mr Peter
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Bridgen, Andrew

Brine, Steve
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cates, Miriam
Chope, Sir Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Colburn, Elliot
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Drax, Richard
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Girvan, Paul
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Gwynne, Andrew
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Jones, rh Mr David
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewer, Andrew
Lockhart, Carla
Loder, Chris
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim

Mackinlay, Craig
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Merriman, Huw
Morris, Anne Marie
Paisley, Ian
Pawsey, Mark
Redwood, rh John
Rosindell, Andrew
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Spellar, rh John
Stringer, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Tracey, Craig
Twigg, Derek
Walker, Sir Charles
Warburton, David
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wragg, Mr William

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr Steve Baker and
Jackie Doyle-Price

Ansell, Caroline
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Argar, Edward
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baker, Duncan
Barclay, rh Steve
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Bell, Aaron
Benn, rh Hilary
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Betts, Mr Clive
Bhatti, Saqib
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Bob
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bonnar, Steven
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Braverman, rh Suella
Brennan, Kevin
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Brock, Deidre
Brokenshire, rh James
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Bryant, Chris
Buchan, Felicity
Buck, Ms Karen
Buckland, rh Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burgon, Richard
Burns, rh Conor
Butler, Dawn
Butler, Rob
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Cairns, rh Alun
Callaghan, Amy
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Carter, Andy
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam

Chalk, Alex
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Feryal
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cowan, Ronnie
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Coyle, Neil
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crawley, Angela
Creasy, Stella
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Daly, James
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies-Jones, Alex
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dinenage, Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dowden, rh Oliver
Dromey, Jack
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duffield, Rosie
Duguid, David

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 the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Steps and Other Provisions) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2021 (S.I., 2021, No. 705) dated 15 June 2021, a copy of which was laid before this House on 15 June, be approved.

PROCEEDINGS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Motion made, and Question put,

That

(1) the Order of 2 June 2020 (Proceedings during the pandemic (No. 2)), as amended on 1 July, 2 September and 22 October 2020 and 25 March, the Order of 4 June 2020 (Virtual participation in proceedings during the pandemic), as amended on 1 July, 2 September, 22 October and 30 December 2020 and 25 March, and the Orders of 23 September 2020 (Proxy voting during the pandemic), 3 November 2020 (Proxy voting during the pandemic (No. 2)), and 25 February (Sittings in Westminster Hall during the pandemic), as amended on 25 March, shall have effect until 22 July;

and

(2) the Order of 24 March 2020 (Select Committees (Participation and Reporting) (Temporary Order)) be amended as follows: leave out paragraph (4) and insert "(4) this Order shall have effect until 22 July 2021."—(*David T. C. Davies.*)

The House divided: Ayes 588, Noes 25.

Division No. 29]

[7.10 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Ahmad Khan, Imran
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Ali, Rushanara

Ali, Tahir
Allan, Lucy
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Amess, Sir David
Anderson, Fleur
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart

Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Edwards, Ruth
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elmore, Chris
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Chris
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fell, Simon
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Flynn, Stephen
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Furniss, Gill
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Gardiner, Barry
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glen, John
 Glindon, Mary
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Grady, Patrick
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffith, Nia
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise

Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Hanna, Claire
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Healey, rh John
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hillier, Meg
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollern, Kate
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Kim
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Mr Marcus

Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Jupp, Simon
 Kane, Mike
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, Clive
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Loughton, Tim
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Mak, Alan
 Malhotra, Seema
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCartney, Jason
 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
 McPartland, Stephen
 Mearns, Ian
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Moran, Layla
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, David
 Morris, Graham
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Nandy, Lisa
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nici, Lia
 Nicolson, John
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Norris, Alex
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opperman, Guy
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Philp, Chris
 Pollard, Luke
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Powell, Lucy
 Prentis, Victoria

Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Qaisar-Javed, Anum
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rodda, Matt
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Royston

Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spellar, rh John
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevens, Jo
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Streeting, Wes
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trickett, Jon
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie

Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wiggins, Bill
 Wild, James

Williams, Craig
 Williams, Hywel
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Maria Caulfield and
Maggie Throup

NOES

Baldwin, Harriett
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Brine, Steve
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Drax, Richard
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Girvan, Paul
 Green, Chris
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Lewer, Andrew

Lockhart, Carla
 Mackinlay, Craig
 McCartney, Karl
 McVey, rh Esther
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Paisley, Ian
 Redwood, rh John
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Tracey, Craig
 Warburton, David
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wragg, Mr William

Tellers for the Noes:
Jackie Doyle-Price and
Mr Steve Baker

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.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021 (Consequential Provisions and Modifications) Order 2021, which was laid before this House on 14 April, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—(*David T. C. Davies.*)

Question agreed to.

Anti-loitering Devices: Safety

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*David T. C. Davies.*)

7.17 pm

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con) [V]: It is a great pleasure to speak on this important issue once again. Colleagues may remember that I introduced a private Member's Bill to regulate the use of sonic anti-loitering devices in 2018. In my view, unregulated, these things can be a menace. They are discriminatory, painful to some, and can cause suffering to children, babies and animals. I find it amazing that some in civilised Britain even consider them to be a useful adjunct to policing—that is the stuff of totalitarian regimes. We police by consent, not by fear and pain.

I will not simply regurgitate my earlier speech now, but I would like to remind the House of some key points. Sonic anti-loitering devices, also known as mosquitos or teenager repellents, target young people with a pulsing sound. My daughters tell me it is like a prolonged beep, akin to tinnitus. Some devices emit ultrasound specifically to achieve that effect. There are no firm figures for how many of these devices there are nationally, although the manufacturers claim to have sold thousands. In 2010, the Council of Europe found that this device was “degrading and discriminatory” to youngsters and should be banned because it “violates legislation prohibiting torture.” Academics also contest that these devices contravene several pieces of UK legislation regarding antisocial behaviour and discrimination. Despite the assertion of manufacturers, there are reports that people as old as 40 can hear these devices, and those who use them neglect their impact on very young children, babies, and animals, all of whom will struggle to communicate any distress caused. Likewise, they ignore the impact on those with pre-existing conditions that make them especially sensitive, such as autism. Many children with these conditions cannot avoid long-term exposure, because they might live next door to somebody who has one of these devices, or their school might be close to one. They could equally struggle to communicate any distress.

There is a lack of research on the harm caused by these devices, especially the effects of ultrasound and the impact on those who cannot even hear them. Some 40% of young people regularly come across these devices, but 75% of young people said that they would just put up with the irritating noise and go where they want, when they want and do what they want anyway. These devices will not necessarily stop those who want to commit antisocial behaviour, but they will harm innocent young people in public spaces.

Finally, these devices have been banned on all council buildings in Sheffield, Kent, Edinburgh and Dublin on safety grounds, so as it stands I still believe that we do not know enough about them to be confident that they are indeed safe, and therefore we must control their use. Moreover, these potentially dangerous devices are not wholly successful in preventing antisocial behaviour, as they do not stop those intending to do harm from entering a certain public space if they are so minded. Even if these devices were effective against ASB in a certain location, we would just be moving criminals and their urge to cause damage somewhere else.

Consequently, I believe that these devices are not a solution for antisocial behaviour. They succeed only in causing distress to young people who cannot avoid them, but who have a right to use the public spaces where they are often located. There are plenty of examples of innocent young people feeling unable to use railway and bus stations, shops, schools, and spaces in their own town centres—all places where these devices have been installed, and all places that young people are entitled to visit safely.

Indeed, there are reports from a Scottish survey that 41% of young respondents experienced health effects or discomfort after encountering a device, and I highly doubt whether any of them were engaged in any sort of antisocial behaviour at the time. According to those respondents, discomfort included headaches, migraines, ear problems, tinnitus, dizziness, nausea, anxiety and/or panic. We have not even touched on the potential effect on wildlife and animal habitats, both of which can be equally affected.

However, despite my clear opposition to these devices, I am not seeking an outright ban, as I understand that there are circumstances where they could legitimately be used, such as warehouses, business premises, railway lines, industrial estates and electricity pylons—places where nobody should be in the first place. Also, there is a strong case for using them to deter animals around food stores and such. If the owners of such locations wish to use these devices, they should be able to do so, but they must be used responsibly, with proper oversight. That is why, in my private Member's Bill, I argued that the use of these devices should be regulated, with a necessary licence obtained by the local authority before use.

In short, I do not argue that these devices should be better regulated just because they are ineffective; their use should be better regulated because they are also discriminatory and potentially hazardous to health, with a particularly acute impact on the most vulnerable. Moreover, I do not believe that it is fair for members of the public of any age to be exposed to these devices without adequate control. There are too many stories of families suffering because these devices have been installed nearby, and they have no effective power of redress under current legislation.

After bringing forward this proposal, I was grateful to the then Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst), for engaging with me on the issue. In her letter she sent to me on 21 April 2019, she set out how she had asked officials in the Office for Product Safety and Standards to consider the evidence against these devices. I was disappointed by its conclusion that they do not present a safety risk, and I maintain that that position is based on insufficient evidence. We just do not know enough about these devices to know either way, because the research just is not there. The only safe approach is to be cautious.

Following a further letter to the same Minister arguing that point, she set out the following in her subsequent reply of 8 June 2019. First, in response to my suggestion that such devices infringe on the rights of young people, mirroring an argument put forward by Northumbria University, she asked the Ministry of Justice to reply, as that falls under its remit. Regrettably, with everything that we now know took place in late 2019, I quite

understandably did not receive a reply from Justice at that time. I would be grateful if the current Minister followed up with his colleagues at that Department on that point.

Secondly, I asked the then Minister for further research to be undertaken by the OPSS into these devices. Unfortunately, at the time the office had set out its priorities for research going into early 2020, so of course my request was not approved. I believe that needs to change. We must improve our understanding of such devices, especially when it comes to the effect of ultrasound. Worryingly, as the former Minister said in her first response to me, there is some evidence that ultrasound can cause potential health issues. Although there is insufficient evidence that those potential health risks constitute safety risks, that does not mean that they are not present.

Currently, our knowledge of ultrasound is limited and flawed. We simply do not fully understand its effects and cannot draw any definitive conclusions about its use. As Professor Timothy Leighton set out in September 2019 work on ultrasound,

“whilst there is over fifty years of anecdotal reports of the adverse effects of ultrasound on humans (supplemented by limited laboratory testing), the state of knowledge is insufficient to meet regulatory needs.”

He concludes that

“the priority must be on ensuring that these devices are safe for any humans they may expose. It is not possible to do this with the current data on the adverse effects on humans”.

We simply do not understand ultrasound enough to use it legitimately to support any policy positions, but we are doing just that by allowing the liberal use of devices that emit ultrasound, including anti-loitering sonic devices. We are dealing with a potential harm here, and we must increase our knowledge of these devices and their impacts. We owe that to those who have already been affected inadvertently by these devices, and until we do so we must be cautious and properly oversee the use of them.

We cannot continue to treat this as a case of safe until proven otherwise. Instead, I believe it must be a case of potential harm, used with caution and in controlled conditions. I understand from previous correspondence that

“if further data or research emerges about the safety impact of such devices, then the OPSS will review their assessment.”

I argue that such further research has emerged, some of which I have mentioned, and we need the OPSS to commission further work to increase our understanding of the long-term impact of ultrasound and the impact of exposure to such devices. I hope that the current Minister will consider taking that work forward. I would welcome a meeting with him, perhaps with a representative of the OPSS, to discuss that further. I also ask him to follow up with the Ministry of Justice on the point about children’s rights that I mentioned earlier. I will write to him to set out those requests further, but for now I thank him for listening, and will welcome any comments on these devices that he may have to share with us.

7.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) on securing today’s important debate. I assure him that,

although the House did not need an anti-loitering device to empty this evening, that was in no way a reflection of his excellent speech, in which he outlined his concerns about this important issue.

As Consumer Minister, the safety of these products falls under my ministerial portfolio, and the safety of the public is a key priority for the Government. The safety of such products contributes to ensuring the safety of the public and, in particular, children and young people, so I am pleased to be able to discuss this important issue, and I thank my hon. Friend for the opportunity for us to exchange views on it. I am aware that he had an exchange of letters with my predecessor on the subject and that, as he has outlined, he has a long history of discussing and raising his concerns.

Many of the issues raised go beyond safety and fall within the remit of ministerial colleagues in other Departments. I will ensure that my officials draw the *Hansard* of the debate to the attention of relevant counterparts and continue to join up on this issue. I am more than happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the issues further, as he has requested.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) for bringing the debate forward; it is on an excellent issue. On the safety of the general public, the Minister knows, as do I and others, about the effect of autism and the number of children and adults with autism across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Does the Minister agree that, for the safety of the general public, children and adults with autism must be taken on board as a priority?

Paul Scully: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, which was as wise as always. It is important that we protect all children, but especially vulnerable children, and he raises an interesting point. I will talk a bit more about safety in a second.

It might be useful if I set out the context of the regulatory and enforcement regime with which products such as anti-loitering devices must comply. As my hon. Friend mentioned, OPSS is the UK’s national product safety regulator. It was established in 2018 to lead and co-ordinate the product safety system, providing national capacity and supporting local enforcement, and it plays a key role in protecting consumers from unsafe products and providing an environment that enables businesses to thrive. It works closely with a wide range of market surveillance authorities, including local authority trading standards in Great Britain and environmental health in Northern Ireland, which have responsibility for enforcing product safety and compliance in the UK.

The UK product safety system is one of the most robust in the world. It places strict obligations on those best placed to control or mitigate risk. We have a comprehensive regulatory framework in place for product safety, with stringent requirements on producers and distributors to ensure that their products are safe before they are placed on the market. Its approach places an obligation on those best placed to control and mitigate the risk.

The safety of acoustic anti-loitering devices, commonly known as mosquito devices, is regulated by the General Product Safety Regulations 2005 and other product-specific laws, such as the Electrical Equipment

[Paul Scully]

(Safety) Regulations 2016. These provide a baseline of safety for applicable products, requiring that only safe products, in their normal or reasonably foreseeable usage, can be placed on the market. Where product-specific legislation applies, such as the Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations 2016, a product must comply with a specific set of essential safety requirements before it can be placed on the market. Once their products are on the market, businesses have a continuing responsibility to monitor them and to act if a safety issue is identified.

The current regulatory framework enables the relevant enforcing authority—either local authorities or the OPSS—to investigate specific allegations of unsafe products and take action where it is appropriate to do so. That includes prompting businesses to take corrective action and to provide additional advice to consumers or instigate a recall. I can confirm that there have been no reports of dangerous anti-loitering devices on the UK product safety database, which is used by regulators to share information about safety risks and ensure that appropriate action is taken.

When the Government last reviewed and set out their position on the safety of these products, in 2010, the Health and Safety Executive concluded that there was little likelihood of any long-term ill effects associated with them, and that the use of anti-loitering devices should remain an option available to local authorities in tackling antisocial behaviour. That decision followed testing that was carried out by the National Physical Laboratory, which determined that mosquito devices did not operate at a high enough volume to damage hearing. However, we continue to monitor reports of safety in relation to all products. If, as my predecessor said, there is further evidence or data on the use and impact of anti-loitering devices, clearly we will review it. The 2005 regulations already provide protection for consumers from unsafe products. Where specific products are found to be unsafe, they can be removed from the market, so there are no current plans to introduce a licensing regime for anti-loitering devices on the basis of safety, as our current assessment is that such devices do not present a safety risk.

What we are discussing today, several years after that testing was done, goes beyond safety and regulation by the 2005 regulations. The basis of the debate broadens to include considerations of human rights and potential psychological impacts, and the need to understand the potential for certain vulnerable groups to experience greater harms. My Department recognises that concern but maintains that the 2005 regulations already provide protection for consumers from unsafe products.

I want to take a few moments to talk about the wider protections already in place and what the Government are doing to ensure that the freedoms of individuals are protected while also protecting the public. While these are matters for my ministerial colleagues in other Departments, I feel that it would be useful to set these out to provide the broader context for our debate. Concern has been expressed about the impact of anti-loitering devices on the freedom of assembly. The Government

are committed to upholding the right to freedom of assembly and association for all, as protected by article 11 of the European convention on human rights, which is given further effect domestically by the Human Rights Act 1998.

The Government are also committed to tackling and preventing antisocial behaviour, because we know the serious impact that persistent antisocial behaviour can have on both individuals and communities. Everybody has a right to feel safe in their own homes and neighbourhoods. The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 seeks to put victims first, giving power to local people and enabling professionals to find the best solutions for their local area. To do this, local enforcement agencies have a range of tools and powers that they can use to respond quickly and effectively to antisocial behaviour through the 2014 Act. It is up to local areas to decide how best to deploy such powers, depending on the specific circumstances. That is because they are best placed to understand what is driving the behaviour in question, the impact that it is having, and to determine the most appropriate response.

The Home Office issued statutory guidance for the 2014 Act, which was updated in January 2021, to support agencies to make appropriate and proportionate use of the powers, when they target specific problems in a public setting, depending on the circumstances. In a similar vein, where these devices are misused and create a noise nuisance for members of the public, there are statutory protections in place to deal with such nuisance.

The potential impact of anti-loitering devices on children's rights has been discussed. The UK Government regularly report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the work that we have been doing across the UK to implement the United Nations convention on the rights of the child and to promote children's rights. The UN committee published a list of issues for the UK to report against early next year. One of these issues relates to anti-loitering mosquito devices and the measures taken to guarantee children's right to freedom of movement and peaceful assembly.

The UK Government response will involve the input of a number of Government Departments and devolved Administrations, including the Crown dependencies and British overseas territories, and children's rights stakeholders to record progress. I will ensure that my hon. Friend receives a copy of that response when it is issued.

In conclusion, I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this topic for debate today. It is really important that the Government continue to keep such issues, with wide-ranging interests and potential impacts, under close review, and I thank him for his dogged work in raising these concerns across Government. I would also like to reassure him, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is in his place today, and others that the Government will always take steps, where appropriate, to ensure safety and to protect the public.

Question put and agreed to.

7.38 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)	Zarah Sultana
Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Imran Ahmad Khan (Wakefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
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
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
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)	Mark Tami
Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
James Brokenshire (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudon) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Con)	Mark Tami
Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab)	Mark Tami

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con)	Mr William Wragg
Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind)	Zarah Sultana
Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Courts (Witney) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Coutinho (East Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Cruddas (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab)	Mark Tami

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
James Daly (Bury North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab)	Mark Tami
David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con)	Ben Everitt
Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Zarah Sultana
Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Miss Sarah Dines (Derbyshire Dales) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Ms Nadine Dorries (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab)	Mark Tami
David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP)	Liz Saville Roberts
Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance)	Wendy Chamberlain
Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab)	Mark Tami

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Gideon (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
John Glen (Salisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Green (Ashford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Kate Griffiths (Burton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Grundy (Leigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Hands (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP)	Liz Saville Roberts
Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba)	Kenny MacAskill
Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab)	Mark Tami
James Heappey (Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Damian Hinds (East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Adam Holloway (Gravesham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)	Mark Tami
John Howell (Henley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Boris Johnson (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab)	Mark Tami
David Johnston (Wantage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC)	Liz Saville Roberts
Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robert Langan (High Peak) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Logan (Bolton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)	Zarah Sultana
Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jim McMahan (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alan Mak (Havant) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West)	Owen Thompson
Damien Moore (Southport) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jill Mortimer (Hartlepool) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op)	Zarah Sultana
Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Priti Patel (Witham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab)	Mark Tami
John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con)	Peter Aldous
Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anum Qaisar-Javed (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Will Quince (Colchester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab)	Mark Tami
John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Richardson (Guildford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dean Russell (Watford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Grant Shapps (Welwyn Hatfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab)	Mark Tami
David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Spellar (Warley) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Robert Syms (Poole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op)	Mark Tami
Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Elizabeth Truss (South West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Mr Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Vickers (Stockton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Jamie Wallis (Bridgend) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Warburton (Somerset and Frome) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind)	Zarah Sultana
Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Whittingdale (Malden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab)	Mark Tami
Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC)	Liz Saville Roberts
Gavin Williamson (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab)	Mark Tami

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab)	Mark Tami

Deferred Division

CLIMATE CHANGE

That the draft Climate Change Act 2008 (Credit Limit) Order 2021, which was laid before this House on 13 May, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 363, Noes 263.

Division No. 27]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Ahmad Khan, Imran
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Amess, Sir David
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Brokenshire, rh James
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, rh Conor
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex

Chishty, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam

Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus

Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lockhart, Carla
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherylyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Menzies, Mark
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morrisey, Joy
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Murray, Mrs Sheryl
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil

Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander

Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, Nadhim

NOES

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

Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy

Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 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
 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
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 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
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 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
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar-Javed, Anum
 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, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo

Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 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
 Western, Matt
 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

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.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 16 June 2021

[MR LAURENCE ROBERTSON *in the Chair*]

Transport Decarbonisation Plan

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 25 February).

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

9.27 am

Mr Laurence Robertson (in the Chair): I apologise for the late start. I am just filling in for a few minutes—I deny all responsibility for the delay. I need to remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice in order to support the new hybrid arrangements. Timings of debates have been amended to allow technical arrangements to be made for the next debate. There will be suspensions between debates. I remind Members participating, physically and virtually, that they must arrive for the start of a debate in Westminster Hall and are expected to remain for the entire debate. Members attending physically should clean their spaces before using them and before leaving the room. I remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall other than when you are speaking.

9.28 am

Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the transport decarbonisation plan.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Robertson, even if only for a few minutes. There is no question but that the UK has been an international leader in combating climate change, and I am proud of that record. Since 1990, we have decarbonised at the fastest rate of any G20 country, and of course we were the first of the major countries to legislate for net zero by 2050. In December 2020, we went even further and said that we would get to a 68% reduction by 2030. That is an ambitious target.

To get to that target, there is no question that we need a radical and comprehensive transport decarbonisation plan, because transport is the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases in the UK and currently accounts for approximately 30% of total emissions. As a percentage of emissions, if we leave out the fluctuations because of coronavirus, it is going up, and is scheduled to go up further by 2035. Transport is therefore key to meeting our objectives to be net zero by 2050 and to achieve our intermediate objective by 2030.

[CAROLINE NOKES *in the Chair*]

Some 55% of transport emissions come from cars, and almost two thirds of total emissions come from cars and light vans, so I will focus my remarks on electric vehicles, but there is no question but that we need a comprehensive strategy across buses, rail, freight and aviation, and we need clear targets. It is easy to say, “Net zero by 2050, and down 68% by 2030”, but we need a clear and firm plan as to how we will get there, and we need to constantly measure our progress against that plan.

Apart from the sectors that I have mentioned, we also need a modal shift towards more walking and cycling, which will be important for the health of the nation and to meet our transport decarbonisation goals.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): As the hon. Lady rightly says, targets in themselves are no use; we need plans. I assume she agrees that any plans need to be backed by policies and proper funding to show us a pathway to net zero.

Felicity Buchan: Yes, we need policies, and, when money needs to be made available, it should be. I personally think that there are private sector solutions, but I am glad to see that with electric vehicles, which I will go on to talk about, the Government are making available £2.8 billion.

Electric vehicles will be critical because, as I said, cars account for 55% of emissions. I am glad that the Government have brought forward the date to ban the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles to 2030. That is a huge achievement. The investment of £2.8 billion in electric vehicle technology, infrastructure and plug-in grants is hugely important. I am lucky to represent a borough, Kensington and Chelsea, that is very focused on electric vehicles. We have the highest number of electric vehicles per capita of any London borough, and probably the highest number nationally.

London is very good in not having much car usage. Only 27% of journeys are by car. Nationally, it is 68%. Clearly, rural areas will be more dependent on cars than cities such as London, but electric vehicles are important to my constituency. I hosted a seminar a few weeks ago in my constituency on the roll-out of electric vehicles. It was great to see so many of the major south Kensington institutions participating. I had Professor Richard Herrington, the Natural History Museum’s head of earth sciences, which is very important in electric vehicle batteries. I had Dr Billy Wu from Imperial College, who is one of the leaders in battery research, and Dr Rachel Boon from the Science Museum. We had a tremendous attendance from Kensington residents, and it is great to see that they are so focused on electric vehicles.

However, it was striking that the residents’ questions were repeatedly about having confidence that the electric charging infrastructure would work. There was a lot of concern about range anxiety. In my constituency, there is not much off-street parking; it is all on-street parking by the pavement. That clearly leads to challenges for electric vehicle charging. Of course, this is anecdotal, but I took away a huge willingness to embrace electric vehicle technology, but real concerns about the practicalities. If we are going to get there by 2030, we need to resolve these practicalities as quickly as possible.

I essentially have five key asks on electric vehicles. First, we need a comprehensive strategic network of electric vehicle charging points. I see this almost like the electricity national grid. I am a great free market capitalist, but I do not think in this instance that we can just leave it to the free market. We are not in the mid-19th century building railway lines randomly all over the place. We need a comprehensive network that gives people confidence, because they will not want to give up their cars that they have confidence in if they do not have confidence in the electric vehicle charging network. It needs to be Government led and top-down, as opposed to bottom-up.

[*Felicity Buchan*]

Leading on from that, it is important that we focus on the customer experience of electric vehicle charging. I too often hear stories about the unreliability of chargers and the lack of interoperability between different charging points. We and the Government need to work on these issues, because confidence is critical.

I would also like the Government to mandate that all new houses, buildings and office blocks have electric vehicle charging points. I know the Government have consulted on this, but it should be standard. In the same way as, when you build a house you put in electric sockets, you should put in an electric charging point.

Moving on from the consumer element, it will be important to have more battery capacity in the UK. I feel strongly that we need more recycling of battery capacity and capability in the UK. In my discussions with Professor Herrington, there is no question that we need to extract very precious and rare metals to make electric batteries and these have to be recycled. We cannot just use up our stock of lithium and cobalt.

Finally, I would ask the Government to consider a zero emission mandate. This has worked very well in California. For those who do not know how that works, it requires manufacturers of cars to produce an increasing percentage of electric cars as part of their output. If they do not meet those percentage sales targets, they need to buy carbon offsets. I would like the Government to consider that. It has worked well in California and the increased supply of electric vehicles could achieve a number of ends.

First, while the price of electric vehicles over their lifetime is now equal to petrol and diesel cars, because the operating costs are lower, the up-front cost is still high. We are expecting price parity in 2023, but a zero emission mandate is a way to increase supply and accelerate price parity.

The second reason it could help is that I understand from leasing experts that it continues to be more expensive to lease an electric car, because leasing models look at the future value of the car in two years' or five years' time. As there is no developed second-hand market for electric vehicles, they put a discount on to that value. The more supply we can get, the better the secondary market for electric vehicles.

I thank all Members for participating in the debate. I am looking forward to hearing the Minister's reply. There is no question but that the transport sector is a big challenge when it comes to emissions, as the biggest emitter in the UK at the moment, but that means that it also offers the biggest opportunity.

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): Before I call the next speaker, I aim to call the Front-Bench spokespeople at 10.25 am, which leaves plenty of time. I have no plans to put you on a time limit, but please can Back Benchers recognise that four of you wish to speak.

9.42 am

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I congratulate the hon. Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan) on bringing forward the debate. She is maybe a

bit hasty in thanking Members for their contributions before she has heard me speak—she should wait with bated breath.

I was talking about the debate with my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) last night. When we saw the debate title, we were hoping that the hon. Member for Kensington had an inside track and that the transport decarbonisation plan was going to be launched just in time for the debate. Alas, that was not to be. In many ways, the debate could be called “the lack of a transport decarbonisation plan”.

As the hon. Member for Kensington said, the UK Government are hosting COP26 and claim to be leading the way and talk of a green recovery. The reality is there are still no coherent interlinked strategies and policies to achieve net zero. Given that the transport sector is the biggest contributor of greenhouse gas, the lack of a transport decarbonisation plan is basically a dereliction of duty. Why are the UK Government so behind in the publication of the plan, which was initially promised last year? Given that transport decarbonisation is so interlinked with energy policy, which is itself interlinked with the decarbonisation of our fossil fuel heating systems, it is imperative that these policies are complementary to each other and are interlinked. They all go hand in hand.

When we focus on transport, it should of course come as no surprise that the Scottish Government lead the way, being the first to include international shipping and aviation emissions within their overall net zero target. The Scottish Government have published their rail decarbonisation strategy with an end date of 2035. Meanwhile, Network Rail have only published an interim programme with a business case for a 2050 date. Will the Minister confirm that they will get a grip of the final programme, with the suitable ambition that is needed to achieve net zero?

The Scottish Government's rail decarbonisation plan means increased electrification and the introduction of battery or hydrogen-powered trains. Hydrogen is clearly a plan for the UK Government, and I welcome the ongoing trials of hydrogen-powered trains. However, we are still awaiting a hydrogen strategy, which will be critical if we are going to rely on hydrogen-powered trains. The Government's 5 GW hydrogen target is, frankly, too weak. The Scottish Government have already got their own 5 GW target and hydrogen strategy in place, so will the UK Government's eventual strategy be more ambitious? Will they set a target for green hydrogen production? Will the Minister explain how extensive a role hydrogen will play for trains in the decarbonisation process? Will the UK Government address the lack of electrification of railways, which is partly due to the previous Transport Secretary's obsession with hybrid diesel trains?

Hydrogen is an obvious solution for heavy goods vehicles, but it is part of the mix for buses too. Again, that underlines the need for a hydrogen production strategy. Blue hydrogen with carbon capture and storage is an interim step on the way to net zero, so when will the Acorn project at Peterhead be given the go-ahead?

Aberdeen has led the way on hydrogen-powered buses, with the introduction of 15 of the world's first hydrogen double-decker buses. The Scottish Government have

invested more than £3 million in that project, but £8.3 million also came from the EU, so what will the replacement funding be for those types of schemes? The Scottish Government will have phased out the majority of fossil fuel buses by 2023, thanks to investment of £120 million in zero emission buses. More importantly, those buses are being manufactured by Alexander Dennis Ltd, making the investment circular for the economy. That is what the green recovery is all about: combining manufacturing with the net zero transition. What are the updates on the manufacturing strategy from the UK Government's perspective in that regard?

On flying, decarbonising the aviation sector means that some radical thoughts are required. That will be sensitive, given the fragility of aviation post covid, but a proper green recovery also means supporting the aviation sector. Although talk of air passenger duty might be welcomed in some quarters, that is too blunt an instrument. What discussions has the Minister had with the Treasury on that? What does she think of the call from the citizen's assembly to have a frequent-flyer surcharge—a policy that would affect only those who can afford to pay for frequent flying, while allowing others still to fly? Any moneys raised from such a policy could be reinvested into the decarbonisation of the aviation sector.

There are also opportunities for the production of sustainable aviation fuels, so when will the UK Government finally provide the support needed to pump-prime the private investment required to create a number of sustainable aviation fuel production plants? It makes no sense that aviation gasoline is duty-free, when domestic petrol for drivers is taxed to the hilt. That disparity should have been resolved years ago, but it will need to be addressed to incentivise decarbonisation and the switch to other aviation fuels.

On domestic electric vehicles, we heard a lot from the hon. Member for Kensington. I agree with the five goals that she set out at the end of her speech. We have heard a lot of talk about being world leading, without that being delivered. I welcome the fact that the Government are bringing forward the phase-out date for new diesel and petrol cars to 2030, but there need to be joined-up policies, properly funded, to match that ambition.

According to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, the UK will need to spend at least £16.7 billion to get its public charging network ready for the mass EV market. In March, it estimated that 700 new electric charging points need to be installed every single day until 2030 to give the right market coverage for the 2030 implementation date. At the moment, installations average 42 per day, so what will the Minister do to resolve that? Will the decarbonisation plan tackle that disparity?

It will be no surprise that Scotland leads the way on the roll-out of charge points in the UK. It has 40 public charge points per 100,000 people, compared with fewer than 30 in England and fewer than 20 in Wales and Northern Ireland. That is, of course, because the Scottish Government invested directly in that. Scotland also has the shortest average distance to travel to reach a public charge point. Will the UK Government up their game and tackle that in the decarbonisation plan, which will hopefully mean more Barnett consequentials for Scotland?

Many motor manufacturers are already starting to phase out fossil fuel cars. However, the transport decarbonisation plan will need to allow for extra

interventions. What assessment has the Minister made of Climate Assembly UK's recommendations, such as a car scrappage scheme, which I have long called for, and larger grants to assist businesses and people in purchasing electric vehicles? Will the UK Government copy the Scottish Government by providing interest-free loans for individuals and businesses to purchase electric vehicles? The Scottish Government have now extended that to the second-hand market to stimulate it as well.

Another key point regarding energy as we move towards the electrification of domestic travel is grid charging. Scotland faces the highest grid charges in the whole of Europe, so if we are to have joined-up thinking for electrification of the domestic vehicle market, that means overhauling the grid charging system to allow renewables to be developed at the best locations, incorporating investment in storage such as pumped hydro storage and moving away from the nuclear obsession.

The future can be bright and green and include a revitalised manufacturing sector, but we need to see actions, not words, and clearly we need much more than a transport decarbonisation plan. We need cross-Government departmental co-ordination and leadership from the very top. Those are matters that, frankly, at the moment, are sadly lacking, but the transport decarbonisation plan would be a first step.

9.50 am

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under you, Ms Nokes. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan) for bringing the debate forward at this moment. I am pleased that over the years most of us have come to accept that humans are having an impact on our environment. That said, I can understand why some people may be sceptical about the extent to which the UK can lead the global fight against climate change. After all, we contribute a mere 1% of the greenhouse gases produced globally, and naturally some may ask, "Why should we take such a lead?" That is a question that I have asked myself, but I believe that, with our standing in the world being as great as it is, we must lead rather than follow. We can set an example to our international partners on the merits and necessity of reducing emissions. However, it is local pollution—the pollution on our streets—that I want to speak about today.

The fumes that we breathe as we walk down the street are mainly from cars, yet in Doncaster, where the bus fleet is old, vast clouds of black smoke from the buses also fill the air. In recent months, I have said much about electric cars with regard to the need to introduce a zero emission vehicle mandate and increase the number of charging points. Such moves would help the speed at which we make the transition to electric vehicles and reduce emissions. However, many more individuals in urban centres mainly use buses rather than cars to get about.

As part of the Sheffield city region—now the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority—Doncaster has had to cope with second-hand buses for many years. Meanwhile, the newer buses are predominantly located in Sheffield. Apparently that is due to the topography of South Yorkshire. In speaking to stakeholders, I have been informed that it is better to give the new buses to Sheffield, where it is very hilly, and use the older buses in relatively flat Doncaster. My constituents rightly

[Nick Fletcher]

believe that this state of affairs is unfair, and I long for the day when Doncaster residents can also benefit from the clean air that results from having electric buses on the roads. For too long, Doncaster's children, on their way to school, have had to breathe in particulates, which can cause lifelong illnesses. If we are to embark on a green industrial revolution, I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to work with the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, Doncaster Council and private enterprise to get polluting buses off my constituency's roads.

We often hear how China is the main contributor to global carbon emissions. That is true and something that I am sure is raised by our representatives abroad with its Government. However, China is also a leader in electric transportation and buses as a whole. It is also one of the largest investors in grid renewables. Shenzhen, a city of more than 12.5 million people, has electrified its entire bus system.

I see no reason why that could not be replicated right here in the UK. After all, the UK is one of the greatest innovators in and utilisers of grid renewables. I therefore hope that, with the Government's plan to build back better, we can move quickly to complete electrification of our public transport. Electric buses reap the same benefits as electric cars: reduced servicing, increased ease of driving, reduced noise pollution and smoother journeys.

However, if we are to roll out more electric buses, infrastructure is needed. I am talking about huge charging depots, which will inevitably require a lot of power. However, if we are truly going through with building back better, the Department for Transport must prepare for that. Furthermore, we must press forward quickly in rolling out electric buses in places such as Doncaster, as that would work well and be a great example of levelling up.

To conclude, if we are ever to end the love affair we have with our cars, we must create frequent, reliable, safe, clean and easily accessible electric buses.

9.55 am

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan) for raising this important issue. I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I rise today to speak on an issue on which I feel strongly. My hon. Friends will know that much of my work in the House has focused on bringing the green revolution to left-behind areas across the United Kingdom, including Rother Valley, and that green transport has been a focus for me. In fact, I sponsored the first two debates on hydrogen and the first debate on critical minerals in the UK Parliament, and I shall speak about those topics today, as I firmly believe that they are vital in the context of our transport decarbonisation plan.

Critical minerals are incredibly important to our green energy and low-carbon transport needs. On average, each electric car uses 100 kg of copper, rare earth for the magnets, and lithium, nickel, cobalt, manganese and graphite for the batteries. To meet the Prime Minister's vision for wind power, we also need more than 26,000 tonnes

of rare earths and more than 4 tonnes of copper. Importantly, seven points in the Government's 10-point plan for the green recovery are dependent on a secure green supply of critical minerals. The UK Government must acknowledge that the construction of renewable energy technology and low-carbon electric vehicles is inextricably linked to the supply of our critical minerals. We must take action accordingly to protect our energy sector, the generation of clean power and the future transport technology for low-carbon vehicles.

The challenge to the UK is not just that rocketing demand will leave shortages, but that our suppliers of critical minerals—namely the People's Republic of China—are unsustainable and unreliable. More than 75% of the world's lithium-ion component manufacturers are located in China, resulting in more than 72% of lithium-ion batteries and 45% of all global electric vehicles already being produced there. My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) mentioned Shenzhen and other areas in China with huge electric vehicle networks. That is a positive in some ways, but also a concern, as they are almost hoovering up the critical minerals that we need to decarbonise here in the UK and across the globe. In December 2020—only a few months ago—the Chinese legislature passed a law on export control allowing the Chinese Government to ban exports of strategic minerals and advanced technology whenever they wished, so they have a stranglehold on the supply of essential minerals.

I have been active in persistently calling on the Government to adopt a comprehensive critical minerals strategy and to collaborate with the Five Eyes and Commonwealth partners on a unified supply network. I am pleased to hear that my call has been heeded and that Ministers and Whitehall are waking up to the urgency of this policy sector. Time is of the essence, and we must move now.

Furthermore, I submitted questions to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on the role of assured data in mineral supply chains and the role of the Government in the stimulus and advancement of deployment of technology, including distributed ledger technology, used in the distribution system for critical minerals. I was a bit disappointed that the Department chose to group its responses together and provide, frankly, a very short and unresponsive answer. I hope the Minister can speak to her colleagues in BEIS and get them to commit to look at the questions again, because they are essential to our future critical mineral needs.

I wish to devote the rest of my speech to hydrogen. Some great work has already been undertaken by the Government on this issue, and I have spoken a lot about it in the House. However, with COP26 coming up in the UK, we must seize the opportunity to steal a march on the competition and become a pre-eminent world leader in hydrogen technology. I would like us to go further by introducing a vehicle capital financial support mechanism that applies to vehicle types where hydrogen has the potential to significantly reduce emissions. We should also introduce a financial support mechanism per kilo of hydrogen sold. That can be achieved quickly through the liberalisation of the renewable transport fuel obligation, which has recently gone out for public consultation. Further, we hope the hydrogen strategy will enable the development of a more refined scheme, such as, potentially, contracts for difference.

In addition, we should urgently develop hydrogen train schemes and use the 4,000-strong zero emission bus scheme to buy a large number of hydrogen buses to help kickstart investment in UK-made buses, as well as hydrogen production. We must modernise the bus service operators' grant to align with the UK's net zero ambitions and favour zero emission fuels over and above fossil fuels. We must commit to an explicit medium-term, zero emission freight deployment programme with vehicle deployment targets, and relax and clarify the conditions for hydrogen projects to qualify for the renewable transport fuels obligation, which will support the entire production and supply chain infrastructure needed for full hydrogen mobility. Combined, those policies have the ability to accelerate progress to net zero, stimulate private investment and create jobs across the Union, all with minimal taxpayer spend.

One other small point I want to touch on in relation to the low-carbon transport strategy is the nature of our technology and the batteries. Let me talk briefly about oil, as someone who used to work for Shell in the oil industry. Many people do not know the amount of oil that goes into an electric car. It is a huge amount, mainly for cooling the batteries, because at the moment that is the best way to cool them down. As battery range increases, batteries will get hotter and will need more cooling, therefore needing more oil. We cannot get away from the fact that, even in a low-carbon future, we will still need oil in the engine. It is not burned; it is first fill, so it is sealed in the engine, but when the engine battery is recycled or destroyed, that carbon will be released.

In future strategies, the Government need to acknowledge that there is carbon that we will have to get rid of at some point, and there needs to be a true way of recycling it. They also need to realise that some of that oil will get lost and carbon will be released, so we need to invest in offsetting that carbon usage. We will never get to zero carbon—net zero, but not zero carbon. In the strategy that is hopefully coming up, we need nature-based solutions and, potentially, carbon capture and storage. That needs to be at the heart of the strategy. We cannot ignore the elephant in the room: there is oil still in electric vehicles.

I commend the Minister for the work the Government have already done on critical minerals and hydrogen. However, without further decisive steps in both sectors, we risk losing out to the rest of the world, putting our net zero, energy security and economic growth at risk. We must see the rapid publication of the transport decarbonisation plan and the hydrogen strategy, which I think we are still waiting on. Every time I raise that with the Government, they say it will come soon. I hope it is sooner rather than later. We also need the critical mineral strategy. Industry, politicians and international partners are waiting. Now is the time to rise to the challenge and set the gold standard for transport decarbonisation.

10.2 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I did not expect to be called quite so early, but it is a pleasure to speak, Ms Nokes. I thank the hon. Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan) for setting the scene so well. Where we can, we must make changes. Many people want to change their carbon footprint, because it is the right thing to do. I do not think I have met anyone who

thinks it is not the right thing to do, but we have to all agree whether we are prepared to pay the price to move from where we are to where we should be. I am not convinced that everyone is in a position where they want to or are able to pay that price. Others will make the change because their Government instruct them to do so. The legislation on the sale of petrol and diesel cars will be a case where we are following instructions.

I am excited by the opportunities for the electric vehicle market. But those who wish to jump on the train, to use a pun, and buy in early to start the change now are undoubtedly hampered by the lack of infrastructure to support it. In Northern Ireland, electric charging points are few and far between. I have had some correspondence with the Infrastructure Minister in Northern Ireland about that. I get contacted every week by constituents who want to buy or have bought diesel cars and vans, because they do not know how long they will last. Constituents also tell me that they buy an electric vehicle and set off to their destination, having checked the route to make sure there is an electric charging point. They see that there is one, but when they get there, 10 people are waiting in the queue. That is a real problem.

We need a good frequency of extra charging points. For someone who wants to buy an electric car, there is a very limited number of charging points in Northern Ireland. I wrote to the Minister, Nichola Mallon, about my constituency, and she gave me a clear response. She said that, in Northern Ireland, the

“electric vehicle public charge point network is owned, operated and maintained by the Electricity Supply Board... It is responsible for the operation, maintenance and development of its network. There are currently 320 22kWh (Fast) charge points at 160 locations and a further 17 50kWh DC (Rapid) public charge points in the North.”

I say facetiously that I think she refers to Northern Ireland, as opposed to the north part of Northern Ireland, but that is by the way. She goes on to say that the Government have

“made £20 million in grant funding available to local authorities/councils in GB-NI for 20/22”.

I know from my discussions with the Minister in this place and others who have been involved that that will provide some charge points for residents without off-street parking.

To quote the Northern Ireland Minister again:

“My Department has engaged with local councils in relation to the need for more electric vehicle charge points, including more recently with regard to the On-street residential charge Point scheme”.

Many of those who want to buy electric vehicles and electric vans need to make sure there is a charge point in their street. They need to make sure their vehicle can go the distance that they want it to go. She goes on:

“Therefore, the installation of on-street residential charge points, in urban residential areas, is essential going forward. My officials will continue to make themselves available to local councils to provide assistance, advice and guidance... ESB have advised that they plan to replace approx. 60 charge points i.e. 30 charge posts and a further 5 Rapid charge points to upgrade and improve the reliability of the existing public network.”

Nothing is as frustrating as going to the charging point and finding that it cannot be accessed or does not work for whatever reason. I declare an interest in that my son bought a hybrid car a short time ago, ultimately, probably

[*Jim Shannon*]

because he thinks it is cheaper, but also because it helps him and shows his commitment to moving forward to what we all want to do.

Many of us are not yet convinced that it is possible to take that step if we do not have the charging points in place. A lot of work needs to be done and it appears that the driver of the work must be the Government from this place, going out to the regions, Northern Ireland and elsewhere. Perhaps the Minister in her summing up will give some indication or advance notice of what contacts, relationships and discussions she has had with the Northern Ireland Assembly, and in particular with the Minister responsible, Nichola Mallon—a good Minister, by the way, who works very hard.

The allocation of funding for councils should provide charging points that meet the need and allow those who want to buy a new car now to be sure that if they need to make a long journey, they can do so confidently throughout Northern Ireland without worrying that there will be a queue of 10 cars waiting to get home at the one charging point—that has happened—or whether their car charge will not get them to where they want to be and ultimately get them home as well.

I support these targets, but it is up to the Government to put the infrastructure in place quickly to enable change to take place. I look for more information about funding streams, incentives and encouragements being made available to private bodies, such as major supermarkets. I think that is one of the things that people wish to see. I am conscious that some of my constituents say to me, “It’s okay to have them at supermarkets, but we’d like to see them in the centre of town as well”. I am not saying this is wrong, but we need an equal playing pitch. They need to be in the main streets as well to attract people there, and not just at the supermarkets.

I want to make a wee plug for Green biofuels. Coincidentally, I had a meeting yesterday with some representatives and friends who took the opportunity to make me aware of some of the points. These refer mostly to London, and I know the hon. Member for Kensington will be very aware of them. They informed me that out of a bus fleet of some 9,112 vehicles, only 318 are electric or fuel cell. There are 3,773 diesel hybrids, but the principal fuel source is still diesel. There are 5,011 diesel vehicles. They also informed me that the company Green Biofuels has recently entered into partnership with Thames tugs and barges and that some of them are now running on green biofuels. The point I am making is that there are other methods of decarbonisation, and we need to be considering green biofuels as one of those. I understand that green diesel and biofuels are used in generators at Glastonbury and the Hyde Park Winter Wonderland event.

There are many things that can be done to reduce carbon and have a positive impact. I think there needs to be a commitment by train companies as well, such as on some of the freight and diesel locomotives that go from King’s Cross to the north of England. At present, trains are a major source of pollution. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for respiratory health, I am aware that this issue has been brought to our attention. It is clear that we need to improve air quality and respiratory health across the whole of the United

Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Trains that sit under a main station canopy run their engines for about 30 minutes, and the amount of pollution they generate in that time, before they even pull out of the station, is very large.

I know that this is a bit last minute, so the Minister might not be able to respond today, but I am quite happy to get a response further down the line. It would be very helpful for me to go back to the people I have spoken to and tell them that. There are many people out there who have good ideas, who are very committed to reducing carbon, and all of us want that to happen.

We can make a huge difference, but until the infrastructure is in place for us to do so, there will be substantially fewer people who be confident in taking that eco step now. We want to encourage them. I believe that the Government want to do that; I believe we should work together in partnership, positively and constructively. If we do, then we will achieve the goals we need for our children and our grandchildren.

10.12 am

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I thank the hon. Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan) for bringing such an important debate to the Chamber this morning.

The Government’s rhetoric on this is fantastic, with their 10-point plan and 4,000 electric buses. The UK was the first G7 country to legislate for net zero, although of course that was after Scotland had already done so. However, the Government’s actions simply do not follow the rhetoric, from the much-delayed investment in those electric buses, which I have spoken about many times in this place, through onshore wind, carbon capture and storage, rail electrification, and reductions in electric vehicle grants—without notice, I have to say—to the obscene grid charges levied on Scottish renewable projects mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown).

The Government’s track record is poor. In the last debate in this Chamber, I asked the Minister when they would publish the long-awaited transport decarbonisation plan and I was told “shortly”. However, I think “shortly” has been the answer for quite a long time now, so I hope that when the Minister sums up she can give us an actual date for the publication of that plan, because it is needed as soon as possible.

By 2023, Scotland will see the majority of fossil fuel buses removed from our roads. That is in sharp contrast to the UK’s ambition—if we can even use that word in this context—of just one tenth of fossil fuel buses. We are getting on with that now. While the UK Government have prevaricated, the equivalent of 2,720 buses are already on order in Scotland. Scotland’s plans mean not just green buses but renewed fleets around the country at a time when, post-covid, the offer to potential passengers has to step up a gear.

Buses are the unsung heroes of the public transport network. Over twice as many commuter journeys use bus versus rail, but there is no doubt—as the hon. Members hear from their own local bus companies and I hear from mine—that bus patronage is dropping and putting the future of routes at risk. Many have already gone in areas outside London, I would imagine.

Clean buses are one way to bring patronage back and show off what technology can do on our roads. We have also committed to decarbonise our rail network by 2035. As I speak, that work is ongoing with the East Kilbride to Glasgow railway line which is set to be electrified, with a subsequent boost in services to meet the growth in passenger demand. That is just the latest in the roll-out of electrification across Scotland's railways, which has been in place for two decades. Airdrie to Bathgate, Stirling to Alloa, Larkhall and the Borders Railway have all been reopened since the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament. Just yesterday, my colleague Graeme Dey MSP, Minister for Transport, confirmed the Levenmouth line reopening in Fife will be double-tracked and electrified from day one. Communities cut off from the mainline railway network for more than five decades will now have speedy, zero emission rail travel, linking with jobs and opportunities across Fife, the Lothians and the rest of Scotland.

Over the last couple of decades, nearly all main routes in the central belt have been electrified, with plans to fill the gaps over coming years and with work to continue heading north to Perth and Dundee. Those years have seen a near continuous process of upgrading, electrification and future-proofing, at the same time as investing in rolling stock and making journeys more attractive to get people out of their cars.

This has not been a party political process. Progress has been supported across the parties at Holyrood, which is a recognition that for too long rail investment lagged behind when the sole responsibility was Westminster's. Those roles have now been reversed, with Westminster lagging far behind Scotland when it comes to equipping our rail infrastructure for the 21st century and the challenge of decarbonisation. Over the last 20 years, Scotland's rail network has been electrified at twice the pace of England's rail network.

I was proud that the SNP's manifesto at last month's election included pledges on extending free bus travel, support for zero carbon bike travel and reducing car kilometres by 20% by the end of the decade. Of the cars remaining, we want as many as possible to be zero emission cars. That is why we have enhanced funding in Scotland for drivers switching to electric vehicles. We have enhanced home charge point funding of up to £350 over and above the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles funding. We also have interest-free car loans of up to £28,000 for new zero emission cars and up to £20,000 for used models.

There is still a significant gap between the price of regular combustion engine cars and electric cars, so as well as the various sticks that people talk of, we still need a significant carrot when we talk about electric and zero emission cars to make it easier for people to switch. It cannot just be the preserve of the well-off to switch to electric cars. I should declare at this point that I have made use of the schemes just mentioned of late. We have bought our first electric car and ditched two diesel cars in doing so.

The investment follows years and years of sustained investment in charging points and the infrastructure we need to drive demand for electric vehicles, to ensure that early adopters are not discouraged by a lack of support and, more importantly, electricity. We all know—not least, in part, because my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun has told us all—that the UK

charging network, outside London at least, is lagging well behind Scotland. Further to the stats that my hon. Friend outlined, here is another: there are currently double the number of rapid charging points per head of population in Scotland compared with England. Even London's rapid charging network is almost half of Scotland's.

According to the excellent report, "Pain points" by DevicePilot, the plans for 2021 are not particularly encouraging and are not going to change things too much, with a new charging point planned for every 2,741 people in London. The figure for the rest of England is one for every 19,159. In the east of England, the figure goes up to 38,000 people. Where is the levelling up or the building back greener for the rest of England? It simply does not exist. I hope the decarbonisation plan, when it is eventually published, will address that.

There is huge innovation in public charging in Scotland, because there can often be difficulties in identifying sites and installing the infrastructure because of the various parties involved. Project PACE, a collaboration of both Lanarkshire local authorities, the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland and Scottish Power Energy Networks, explored the benefits of having the distribution network operator involved at all stages of the planning and delivery of charging infrastructure. It increased capacity in Lanarkshire by 360% and achieved savings of up to £60,000 per site, which aggregated over the project across Lanarkshire amounted to £3.5 million of savings. I would like to see a lot more of that, not just across Scotland but across the rest of the country, and I hope the Minister can look at that project for down here.

On e-bikes, the Scottish Government are taking up the slack with yet more interest-free loans for electric bikes, while Cycle to Work, overall a very worthy scheme, is unfortunately letting some fall through the cracks. Again, Scotland is taking the lead while the rest of the UK outside of London is stuck in the slow lane, and that should not be the case. The UK authorities and the Department for Transport should speak to their counterparts in the Scottish Government to learn from the experience and ambition there and use those lessons to up their game across the board.

The Scottish Government have also pledged to increase active travel spending up to 10% of the transport capital budget over the lifetime of this Parliament. That should be transformational spending that could revolutionise how our towns and cities function and how people can connect. We have heard much more over recent months about 20-minute communities, where Governments and communities ensure that for most people services and shopping are within 10 minutes of homes without using a car. My colleague, Tom Arthur MSP, with whom I share some of my constituency, has been appointed Minister with responsibility for that in the Scottish Government. Tom will make sure that the drive towards 20-minute communities will have decarbonisation and a net zero future at the heart of each development across the country, working with communities to make sure that our high streets and centres are places with people rather than vehicles at their heart.

Combining those measures has the potential to revitalise town centres that have been hit hard in recent years by regional shopping centres, the growth in car ownership,

[Gavin Newlands]

and most recently covid. By increasing the active travel budget, as the Scottish Government are doing, we can not only reboot our towns and neighbourhoods, but ensure a more sustainable economy on the ground. We are also boosting zero carbon travel and keeping more of our money in the local economy.

Decarbonisation is not and should not be just about tackling emissions and climate change. It should also be about making changes to our transport networks that rebalance our economy and naturally regenerate communities that for too long have suffered as carbon-based transport has dominated. Moving to net zero is also a move to greater fairness. It is the poor who are disproportionately affected by air pollution and climate change, the poor who are excluded from accessing services for want of private transport, and the poor who are disproportionately hit by poor quality or highly priced public transport.

Investing in decarbonised and sustainable transport is not just the right thing to do environmentally. It is fundamentally the right thing to do economically and socially if we are serious about social justice and building a fairer society and—dare I say it?—levelling up. Change will not come tomorrow and we will no doubt have many bumps along the way, but if we are to meet the challenges of a net zero country by the target of 2045, Scotland has to make that commitment and take those risks. I urge the Minister and the rest of the UK Government to learn from that and show the ambition that has the potential to transform the lives of people here in England for the better, too.

10.22 am

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in your place, Ms Nokes. I congratulate the hon. Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan) on securing this important debate. She made an excellent speech and I agreed with almost everything that she said. I say “almost everything” in case there was something in it that I did not spot and will come to regret. Certainly on the key points, she was very much on the same page as the Labour Front Bench. One of the most important things that she said was that too often there are very ambitious end goals, but they are far into the future, and unless we have clear interim targets and ways of monitoring and scrutinising progress towards those targets, and a plan as to how we will get there, there is a danger that everything will get pushed into the long grass, as we have seen with the 25-year environment plan. As the Environment Bill goes through Parliament, there is a real concern that with a 25-year plan, how do we make sure that we do ambitious things in the next five years and not just put things off?

It was really interesting to hear the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), and also the SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), talk about the progress that Scotland is making. There is a lot we can learn from that. The point was made about how many more EV charging points we need to get to where we need to be. I speak as an EV driver, and what the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said resonated with me. I have learnt not to travel on a bank holiday because of queues at the service station. I cannot charge

at home, so I rely on public charging points and have learnt to make trips in the wee small hours because I know I can get to the charging point then.

Also interesting was what the SNP spokesperson said about how this needs to be part of the planning system. Another speaker talked about new housing developments and how important it was to have charging points built in. This cannot be left to the market; it cannot be left to chance. It is something that we have to plan for.

I agree with what the hon. Members for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) and for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) said about the importance of electric buses, hydrogen, and the sourcing and manufacturing of batteries. These are real issues that we have to grapple with now. As has been said, decarbonising our transport sector is one of the most pressing challenges that we face as a nation, and we need more ambition and more action from this Government if we are to meet net zero. At the moment, whether it is the lack of a green recovery plan for our post-pandemic recovery or carbon budgets that will not be met through current policies, we are not seeing enough ambition or action from this Government. As the Scottish National party spokesperson, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North, said, the rhetoric is great—we cannot disagree with that—but where is the road map? Instead, we have a Prime Minister who talks green but then flies to the G7 in Cornwall, where climate change is high on the agenda, in a private jet rather than taking the train. What kind of signal does that send to world leaders ahead of COP26?

As has been said, transport is now the largest contributor to UK emissions. There has been real progress in areas such as energy, but we have not seen similar progress on transport. There has been a decade of inaction by this Government. According to the Climate Change Committee, surface transport contributed 24% of UK emissions in 2019, with aviation accounting for 8% and shipping 3%. I am glad that the Government have now said that they will look at including international aviation and shipping emissions when measuring our carbon footprint and on the agenda for COP.

I am also glad that one speaker in this debate has withdrawn and the other speakers, if anything, came in under time, because there will be lots of time for the Minister to answer questions, and I have quite a lot of questions for her. Obviously, the first one is, “Where is the transport decarbonisation plan?” We expected it to be published last year, and then we were told throughout this year that it would be published in spring. This Sunday marks the start of the summer solstice, so unless the Minister has a very big surprise up her sleeve for us in a few minutes’ time, it looks like that is another missed deadline. The hon. Member for Rother Valley talked about his frustration at constantly being told, “Soon, soon, soon.” That is something that we have come to expect from this Government: “Soon, shortly, spring.” When are we going to see the plan? I hope that it is very soon. Could the Minister also say whether, when the plan is published, there will be an oral statement in the House to accompany it? I certainly hope that there will be, so that MPs have a chance to ask questions.

We know that we urgently need to get polluting vehicles off our roads, get more people into zero emission vehicles, and get people back on public transport once it is safe to do so. Importantly—we have not heard very much about this so far this morning—we need to get

people to engage more in active travel, whether that is cycling on conventional bicycles, e-bikes or e-cargo bikes, or walking. All of that will improve air quality, help lower emissions, reduce congestion, and improve physical health. With all the focus on technological developments, sustainable fuels and so on, I hope that people-powered travel—active travel—will not be overlooked.

Unfortunately, what we have seen from the Government recently does not inspire confidence. Subsidies for EV plug-in grants have been slashed yet again, and although the Government have tried to say that that is because they want more people to benefit—that was the answer I got when I challenged the most recent cut—based on the figures we have seen from the Government, the overall pot for plug-in grants has reduced too. Leaving it to the market, as has been said by the hon. Member for Kensington and others, will not get us to where we need to be by 2030. Funding for public charging infrastructure has so far been piecemeal, to put it mildly. There are at least four different pots that councils can apply for, but lots of local councils have not had anything from the Government.

When I have asked the Government which local authorities have not had any public funding at all, I have not had an answer; what I have had is a list of councils that have had money, and I have tried to extrapolate from that how many have not. It is a very significant number. That might be because of a lack of political will on councils' part: maybe they do not feel the need for public charging infrastructure, and assume that people can charge at home, or that it can be left to the market. It might be because they have not been successful in putting together bids, but there are really significant gaps, and that needs to be addressed. We need a strategy to ensure consistent coverage throughout the country.

We also need to deal with grid connection costs, because the private sector has told me that there is an expense to putting in public charging points, and it could take quite a long while to recoup the costs before ownership reaches critical mass. In rural areas or tourist destinations in particular, it would take a while to recoup those costs. The actual cost of connecting to the grid is the thing that really deters companies from doing so.

On funding for local councils, the £2 billion for active travel that was announced last year—in fact, it was announced several times last year—is being released far too slowly. We have had a couple of tranches but I understand that there will be no more money until the next spending review, so we have missed the crucial window to embed the positive behavioural change that we saw during the lockdowns, when people were wary of using public transport but were quite keen to take advantage of the reduced traffic on our roads to take up cycling.

I also challenge the Minister on the £27 billion that has been pledged to road building by this Government, and on the fact that the Transport Secretary overruled the advice of his own civil servants to conduct an environmental review of the policy. I hope that the transport decarbonisation plan sheds some light on how and if such carbon-intensive construction projects can be made compatible with our net zero emissions target.

Alexander Stafford: Tarmac is made of oil, so when making roads, we need to go back to offsetting some of our emissions because we will always need that oil. Does the hon. Lady think that should be part of the plan as well?

Kerry McCarthy: We need the environmental impact assessment from the Department so that we can assess the carbon footprint of road building, and look at whether more sustainable materials can be used and whether the extent of the road building programme proposed by the Government is compatible with reaching net zero, or whether other decisions need to be made.

We desperately need a comprehensive strategy to guide the Government's approach. We do not want to see in this plan only platitudes and declarations of intent; we need clarity about how the Government intend to boost zero emission vehicle sales, speed up the transition to sustainable fuels, including for aviation and maritime, and encourage more people to use public transport, which we must ensure involves clean, greener vehicles.

We need a bold vision, linked to planning, housing and economic policy, on what role transport will play in the future, with post-pandemic adjustments to the way we live, move around, buy goods and access services—for example, the idea of the 15-minute city, which has been championed in Paris, and the role of the logistics sector. Many more people have resorted to online deliveries during the pandemic. I believe that pattern of behaviour will continue, so what is the strategy to keep heavy polluting vehicles out of urban centres wherever possible and rely on more sustainable forms of transport, whether electric vans, e-cargo bikes or other alternatives? The other day I visited Magway, a company that is looking at an underground delivery system, which it will be trialling in west London soon; that is really quite exciting stuff. Will we see ambition on that sort of thing in the plan?

I would welcome any insight from the Minister as to what concrete measures we can expect to see. Are the Government considering a zero emission vehicle mandate, as recommended by the Green Alliance and Policy Exchange, to ease the transition to 100% new zero emission vehicle sales by 2030? Are they considering a sustainable aviation fuel blending mandate to incentivise production and the adoption of stable fuels derived from waste? Will we finally see the timeframe for the production and roll-out of the 4,000 zero emission buses promised by the Government? How does the Government's consultation on cutting air passenger duty for domestic flights square with all of this?

There is huge potential for jobs, and for the UK to lead the way in technological development. What we really want to hear from the Minister is a real strategy to get us there.

10.34 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Rachel Maclean): It is a huge pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Felicity Buchan) on securing this landmark debate on the forthcoming transport decarbonisation plan. I welcome the opportunity to provide an update and set out the Government's position on all matters raised.

[*Rachel Maclean*]

I warmly thank all Members who have taken part for their contributions, which displayed their extensive knowledge of this vital topic, including my hon. Friends the Members for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) and for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) and the hon. Members for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands).

Before I move on to the main body of my remarks, I want to reassure the hon. Member for Strangford that I am shortly to meet Minister Nichola Mallon to discuss many of the matters that he raised. Northern Ireland is always close to our thoughts and we want to ensure that our transition is taking place at speed.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington started by saying, in 2019 we became the first major global economy to set a 2050 target to end our contribution to climate change and to achieve that net zero of carbon emissions. Our ambitious target to reduce our emissions by at least 68% by 2030, our nationally determined contribution under the Paris climate agreement, is among the highest in the world. It commits the UK to cutting emissions at the fastest rate of any major economy so far.

I will answer head on the question put to me by Opposition and Government Members—when are we going to publish the transport decarbonisation plan? We have done a huge amount of work on the plan, as I have said in this House many times, and we have a final draft. I am not satisfied with the draft because it does not meet the ambition we need in order to reach those incredibly challenging targets. It is my desire that, when we publish the plan, hon. Members will not be disappointed, and we will be able to ensure that we have taken into account the Climate Change Committee's sixth carbon budget advice. I cannot give a date, I am afraid, so I cannot meet hon. Members' challenges head on, but we are working through that at pace and intend to publish soon.

It is right at this point to counter some, though not all, of the narrative that we are not doing enough and it is all rhetoric. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Let me focus on a few highlights. We already have half a million ultra low emission vehicles registered on UK roads. That is backed by £1.3 billion of Government grants, also available in Scotland, as the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North updated us.

Nearly one in seven cars sold so far in 2021 has a plug. A driver is never more than 25 miles away from a rapid charge point anywhere along England's motorways and A roads. We have 4,450 rapid charge points and 24,000 public charge points. We are providing up to £120 million for zero emission buses, adding to the £50 million already awarded to Coventry under all the all-electric bus city scheme. We will commit to spend £3 billion rolling out 4,000 zero emission buses during this Parliament. On active travel, we have committed—

Gavin Newlands: Will the Minister give way?

Rachel Maclean: Forgive me; will the hon. Gentleman allow me to complete my speech, because I am sure I am going to answer his questions in it? I have a lot of points to cover, but I will take interventions later if he is still not satisfied.

We have committed £2 billion to active travel over five years. That is the largest amount of funding ever committed to cycling and walking by any Government.

Let me turn to electric vehicles, which were the focus of the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington. The key to decarbonising transport will be to roll out cleaner modes of travel that are affordable and accessible to all. I am delighted to see all the hard work she is doing in her constituency. It is by local engagement that Members of Parliament can play a vital role in ensuring that their local authorities are engaged in this. Many of these initiatives are delivered through local government funding.

I note that some local authority areas are not taking advantage of our on-street residential charge point scheme. I encourage any Member of Parliament to come to me, so I can provide them with an update about if their local authority is engaging in this, because that is how we are going to get charging points rolled out to people who do not have off-street parking. We need to move further and faster, and I fully agree with everybody who has posed that challenge to the Government.

We have an ambitious phase-out date to end the sale of all petrol and diesel cars by 2030. That is the most ambitious date of any country in the world. All new cars and vans must be zero emission at the tailpipe by 2030. We will be the fastest country to decarbonise cars and vans. There is no sign of buyer's remorse.

Alan Brown: On that ambition of before 2030, does the Minister accept that that means that energy policy has to align with that to get the electrification? That means that Ofgem must be mandated to deliver net zero and it means an overhaul of how energy is delivered. Is she discussing that with other Ministers? Does the transport decarbonisation plan interlink on that basis?

Rachel Maclean: I am absolutely discussing that with fellow Ministers. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will be coming forward shortly with its net zero strategy, which will answer many of those issues about the electricity network.

Over 90% of EV drivers say they will not go back to petrol or diesel. I am one of them because I drive an electric car, including on bank holidays, so I experience these issues first hand. We are determined to make it as easy to charge up an electric vehicle as it currently is to fill a tank with petrol or diesel. The private sector has already installed 24,000 public charging devices, but the process is changing and accelerating all the time. In two years' time every motorway service station will have at least six high-powered chargers, so that people can charge up in the time it takes to have a coffee.

To underpin our ambitious phase-out dates and to help achieve them, in November we committed to developing three key policy documents over the course of 2021. Those policy documents will specifically answer many of the questions that hon. Members have rightly posed to me. The first is a delivery plan that will set out key Government commitments, funding and milestones. That is for the 2030 and 2035 phase-out dates. It will deal with the question whether we will have a zero emission vehicle mandate. We are having that discussion inside Government at the moment.

We will set out an infrastructure strategy. That will set out the vision and action plan for the charging infrastructure roll-out that is needed to achieve our ambitious phase-out date successfully, and to accelerate the transition to a zero emission fleet. As part of this strategy we are working with local authorities, charge point operators and other stakeholders to ensure that our future charging infrastructure is practical, accessible, reliable and achievable, alongside outlining all the key roles and responsibilities for all actors in the EV charging sectors. It is clear that we need more charge points everywhere and this Government will set out how that will take place.

The Green Paper on our UK future CO₂ emissions regulatory framework, now we are no longer a member of the European Union, will set out how we will phase out petrol and diesel cars and vans, and support those interim carbon budgets, including consulting on which vehicles exactly can be sold between 2030 and 2035.

Let me go through the key points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington. On her first priority, the need to combat range anxiety, she is absolutely right and every Member has mentioned that. We need to increase not only the reality but the perception of the adequacy of the infrastructure for electric vehicles. I keep reminding people that in England they are never more than 25 miles away from the nearest charge point and we have committed, and are already investing, £1.3 billion to accelerate the roll-out of charging infrastructure in rural and urban areas across the UK.

The charge point market has evolved over the past decade. Like my hon. Friend, I am a free-market capitalist, but of course Government has a role to play, hand in hand with the private sector, which is stepping up in an incredibly impressive way. They have a growing role in charge point funding, with areas such as home charging showing signs of maturity. We need to keep working hand in hand with the private sector, so we have committed to invest £950 million in future-proofing grid capacity along the strategic road network, to prepare for 100% uptake of zero emission cars and vans. We expect to increase the number of high-powered chargers across the network by 2035 to 6,000.

We also have a £90 million local EV infrastructure fund that will support large on-street charging schemes and potentially local rapid charging hub schemes in England, as well as the £20 million already referred to, which is the on-street residential charging scheme. We are working closely with stakeholders to inform the design and delivery of the fund. We aim to launch it in spring next year. We must continue, however, as a Government—that is our responsibility—to monitor the market.

Gavin Newlands: On charge points, those plans sound fantastic and what have you, but will the Minister comment on the massive discrepancy in the numbers of planned charge points in England? In London, which already has an extensive network compared with the rest of England, this year there is one charge point for every 2,700 people, whereas in the east of England there is one for every 38,500 people. Why is there such huge discrepancy across England?

Rachel Maclean: I thank the hon. Member for his comments, but I have addressed them already with the roles that local authorities, the private sector and

Government have to play. I also point him back to what I said about our delivery plan, which will, absolutely, set out how we intend to ensure that every resident of the United Kingdom, no matter where they live, has equal access to this electric and low emission revolution. We will continue to monitor the market, and where it is not delivering, it is right for central Government to step into those areas of market failure.

Members mentioned the experience of public charging. We have consulted recently on measures to improve that experience, including opening up public charge point data, improving reliability and streamlining the payment methods for drivers—they should not have to have multiple active apps and accounts on their phone. We want to increase pricing transparency. I have done a huge amount of work with charge point operators as part of that vital work. We also plan to lay legislation later this year.

We want people across the country to have the opportunity to move to being electric vehicle drivers.

Kerry McCarthy: Am I right in thinking that that would be legislation requiring charge point operators to meet certain reliability standards? Is that what the Minister is suggesting?

Rachel Maclean: Absolutely right, it is that. We already have those powers in legislation, and we intend to use them.

The vast majority of electric vehicle drivers choose to charge their cars at home overnight or, increasingly, at the workplace. We plan to support people to charge their cars at home, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington said. We are working closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government at the moment and we have consulted on plans to introduce a requirement for every new home to have a charge point, where there is an associated parking space. We will publish our response soon. We aim to lay regulations in Parliament in 2021—this year. That will make England the first country in the world to introduce mandatory charge points in new homes, again cementing our position as the global leader in the race to net zero.

My hon. Friend spoke about R&D, and we are world-leading in the automotive manufacturing sector. We have prioritised securing investment in battery cell gigafactories. That is key to anchoring the mass manufacture of electric vehicles in the UK, safeguarding green jobs and driving emissions to net zero by 2050. We must also create a circular economy for electric vehicle batteries to maximise the economic and environmental opportunities of the transition to zero emission vehicles. That is why we support innovation, infrastructure and a regulatory environment for the UK battery recycling industry. The £318 million Faraday battery challenge is about tackling those technical challenges of reusing and recycling battery components with the aim of making them 95% recyclable by 2035—up from 10% to 50% today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley mentioned many of the critical minerals. He will have to forgive me, that topic is not my direct brief, but I assure him that a lot of the work on the Faraday battery challenge is to address such critical challenges, of which Ministers are well aware.

[*Rachel Maclean*]

We must also continue to support public transport as one of the most sustainable ways around. On rail, we are building on our Williams-Shapps plan for rail to decarbonise the rail network. We have already completed 700 miles of rail electrification in England and Wales, and we will continue to electrify more of the network in the years ahead. In the past year, there has been a meteoric rise in cycling and walking, and all of our policy development is aimed at embedding that shift. As I said, we are investing £2 billion to enable half of all travel in towns and cities to be cycled or walked by 2030.

Jim Shannon: I asked the Minister earlier—if she is coming to it, that is dead on, but if she is not, perhaps she will reply to me—about how green biofuels can improve rail and public transport in the UK. Does she have a response to that? If she does not, I am happy for her to get back to me.

Rachel Maclean: We refer to that in the transport decarbonisation plan, but I am happy to write to the hon. Gentleman with a lot more detail. Synthetic fuels are an important part of our thinking on decarbonising the entire transport network.

In the Prime Minister's 10-point plan, he announced £20 million of funding for pioneering UK freight trials. The hon. Member for Bristol East rightly mentioned freight. We want to test and develop primary candidate technologies for zero emission long-haul HGVs this year, and the role of hydrogen will be crucial as we aim to decarbonise the transport sector and put UK industry and technology at its forefront. Although it is in its infancy, in the UK we have one of the largest publicly accessible hydrogen refuelling station networks in Europe.

I seek your guidance, Ms Nokes. What time does the debate end?

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): It ends at 10.55 am. It would be a courtesy to allow the Member in charge time to wind up.

Rachel Maclean: I will certainly do that. Thank you very much, Ms Nokes. I will bring my remarks to a close and thank everybody who has contributed.

Our transport decarbonisation plan must not just change transport to be greener; it must make transport better for everyone, because transport is what connects people to opportunity, prosperity and each other. Our resolve in tackling climate change and ending the UK's contribution to it could not be stronger.

10.51 am

Felicity Buchan: I thank the Minister for that informative and ambitious update. I thank all Members, including the Opposition Front-Bench spokespeople, for their contributions. I am glad to hear that the transport decarbonisation plan is in its final phase and that the Minister wants to make it more ambitious. I am looking forward to that.

I was also glad to hear that we will be introducing legislation on the reliability of chargers, because that is something that I hear a lot about anecdotally. I am glad we are making progress on mandating chargers in new homes. There is clearly a lot of legislation to come. The Minister also mentioned the consultation on vehicle sales between 2030 and 2035. I am looking forward to seeing and scrutinising all that because, as I said, this is a huge challenge but also a huge opportunity. We collectively need to get this absolutely spot on.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the transport decarbonisation plan.

10.53 am

Sitting suspended.

Reform of the Mental Health Act: White Paper

[CAROLINE NOKES *in the Chair*]

11 am

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the “Reforming the Mental Health Act” White Paper.

It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair today, Ms Nokes. I am grateful for this opportunity to bring to the Minister the concerns and aspirations of my constituents about the “Reforming the Mental Health Act” White Paper.

I appreciate that the consultation on the White Paper closed only recently and that the Government will be considering their response ahead of bringing forward legislation. My intention in securing this debate is to emphasise many of the concerns and priorities of my constituents on reform of the Mental Health Act 1983, to put those concerns on record and to seek assurances from the Minister that they will be addressed in the Government’s response and in forthcoming legislation. Although I draw on the experience of my constituents, I am confident that these issues apply equally to communities up and down the country.

I am grateful to Lambeth and Southwark Mind for the work it has done to engage with local residents in Lambeth and Southwark, including many with lived experience of accessing mental health services. That work has informed its submission to the consultation, which I will draw on today. I am also grateful to national Mind, for its research and analysis of the experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic residents of mental health services.

Being sectioned is one of the most serious things that can happen to somebody experiencing a mental health problem. It involves the deprivation of liberty, removal to an institutional facility, multiple interactions with professionals, who are most likely to be strangers, and medical interventions, sometimes involving the use of chemical or physical restraint. For far too many people, the experience of being sectioned is itself an additional trauma.

That reality was brought home to me when, as a teenager, I had a regular summer job in a firm of legal aid solicitors in Liverpool who represented people at the mental health review tribunal. It was my job to open the post and, day after day, I read handwritten accounts of the pain and distress suffered by people detained due to their mental health. The overall impression from the weight of correspondence over many weeks and months was of desperation and a system that was so often not listening to the patients in its care. Reform of the Mental Health Act is long overdue. Many of the proposals for reform set out in the review chaired by Sir Simon Wessely are very welcome.

The boroughs that my constituency covers, Lambeth and Southwark, have among the highest rates of mental ill health anywhere in the country. They are also among the most diverse communities in the country, with a significant proportion of residents from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. It is therefore a top

priority for me and my constituents to ensure that the forthcoming reform of the Mental Health Act delivers services that work for our diverse communities, in terms of both sustaining good mental health and delivering equitable access to services that are culturally appropriate and free from racial discrimination.

Mental health research points to a relationship between the experience of racism and mental ill health and to racial inequality within mental health services. There is ethnic disparity in the diagnosis of mental illness. For example, for every one white person diagnosed with schizophrenia, 4.7 black people and 2.4 Asian people are diagnosed with the disorder. Incidence is highest among UK residents of black Caribbean heritage, but that disparity is particular to the UK and is not replicated in the Caribbean, which points strongly to social determinants of mental ill health, including poverty, unemployment, poor housing and school exclusion.

Growing evidence, cited by Mind, suggests that discrimination and, in particular, experiences of racism, both personal and institutional, contribute to increased likelihood of developing mental health problems. Experiences of racism have been linked to an increased likelihood of developing depression, hallucinations and delusions and post-traumatic stress. Routine experiences of racism and discrimination, and the associated prolonged exposure to stress and distress, have been found to have a toxic wear-and-tear effect on the body over time.

There is also evidence of some racial discrimination within mental health services, particularly with regard to racial stereotyping and the perceived risk of violence contributing to increased rates of detention. That translates into significant racial inequalities in the use of the Mental Health Act. Black people are more likely than white people to be referred to mental health services through the criminal justice route, four times more likely to be sectioned, more likely to be detained more than once, three times more likely to be the subject of physical restraint, and eight times more likely to be given a community treatment order.

The Government’s support for the Sewell report, with its denial of institutional racism, gives rise to grave concerns among many of my constituents about whether the reforms will address racial inequality in mental health. It is absolutely vital that reform of the Mental Health Act addresses those stark and unacceptable inequalities. I hope the Minister will understand why I am anxious to emphasise this matter before the Government publish a response to the consultation.

Lambeth and Southwark Mind has identified three ways in which racial and ethnic disparity and discrimination can be addressed in mental health services. The first is greater community engagement directly with black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, working with existing, often dynamic, community structures, rather than expecting communities to engage proactively with NHS structures. Such structures can seem distant and opaque and which often reflect services that have been the source of painful experiences in the past, and in which trust is sometimes low. There are many grassroots organisations and NHS services that engage very well with communities. It is vital that best practice is understood and embedded across all services as part of those reforms.

The second is investment to support more culturally focused peer support groups and counselling as part of much wider investment in improved community care.

[Helen Hayes]

There is concern that, although increasing the threshold for sectioning is the right thing to do, without a step change in the level of investment in community-based mental health services—specifically those that are culturally appropriate and competent—some people could experience a delay in accessing services until they are much more unwell.

Thirdly, Lambeth and Southwark Mind recommends a significant change in language to reduce stigma and improve access to mental health services. That type of change is modelled exceptionally well by organisations such as Black Thrive, whose language focuses not on the stigma of illness but on the changes that are required to keep people well and thriving. Lambeth and Southwark Mind also emphasises the need for practical changes, including the introduction of discreet mental health vehicles to transport people suffering a mental health crisis, which are more appropriate, less traumatising and less stigmatising than ambulances and police cars.

There is widespread support for the proposal to move to an opt-out system for mental health advocacy services. It is important that training and funding are put in place to ensure that advocacy services are always delivered in a culturally appropriate way. The introduction of a nominated person is a significant improvement over the current nearest relative provision, but in a consultation meeting held by Lambeth and Southwark Mind, which I attended, some of the contributors flagged concerns that there should be robust safeguards against coercion and exploitation, since it is possible for people to be subject to abuse and exploitation from non-relatives, which may result in pressure to designate them a nominated person.

Lambeth and Southwark Mind raises some questions about the lack of clarity in the White Paper on the time limit for temporary detention. As it stands, section 5 of the Act places a 72-hour time limit for an in-patient to be temporarily detained in hospital pending assessment. It is unclear whether the limit extends to out-patients in A&E. Provision of a 72-hour time limit for temporary detention in A&E reflects the horrific experience of far too many mental health patients in A&E departments across the country, due to the acute shortage of in-patient beds. Long wait times in A&E are unacceptable. They should not be enshrined in law; rather, investment should be made in services to ensure that they are available in a timely manner.

Nationally, Mind has raised particular concerns about community treatment orders, given the appalling racial disparity in their use. Black people are 10 times more likely to be put on a CTO than white people. CTOs can involve very significant coercion and intrusion, and there is no evidence that they reduce the number of black people being sectioned. The Government have committed to ensure that any reduction in the use and duration of CTOs is matched by a reduction in disparities surrounding their application, but that is not a sufficient response to the level of racial disparity in the use of CTOs, and will not help to build trust and confidence of black communities in mental health services. I urge the Minister to look again and to ensure that reforms are fit for purpose, by removing racial disparity from the use of CTOs in mental health services.

I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed) for his work to introduce the Mental Health Units (Use of Force) Act 2018 known as Seni's law, in honour of Seni Lewis, who died while being restrained. It was passed in 2018 but has not yet been implemented. Will the Minister commit to expedite the implementation of Seni's law, which is so important in reducing the use of restraint?

Finally, I want to raise two important issues on the reform of the Mental Health Act for children and young people. First, the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition raised important concerns about the lack of data on children and young people admitted informally to inpatient facilities. There is currently no legal requirement for advocacy for informal patients. Although the White Paper recognises the importance of extending that right to them, it also states that

"this will create an additional burden for local authorities, and advocacy providers",

and will

"therefore be subject to future funding decisions."

Advocacy is rightly recognised as important enough to make it a statutory requirement. It is surely therefore important enough for the Government to fund it properly. Will the Minister make a commitment today to fund advocacy services for children and young people who are admitted as mental health in-patients, whether by a formal or informal route?

Secondly, it is absolutely vital that these reforms remove the routine use of out-of-area placements and placements in private hospitals for children and young people. Out-of-area placements are distressing for young patients and their families, limit access to vital support networks, make services less transparent, and are not conducive to good outcomes. Will the Minister confirm that there is a commitment to ensure that children and young people who need to be admitted to hospital for their mental health will be able to access a bed close to home?

These reforms are vital and long overdue. They are also complex and far reaching, and it is vital that the Government get this right. Reform of the Mental Health Act must work for everyone in our diverse communities, and it must work for children and young people. Involving and engaging a wide range of community stakeholders and people with lived experience of in-patient treatment and care in developing the reforms further and in the future design of services will help to ensure that these reforms are fit for purpose.

11.11 am

The Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health (Ms Nadine Dorries): I thank the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) for bringing this debate to the House and for raising important concerns on behalf of her constituents in what was a truly constituency oriented speech. We both come from Liverpool, which is an incredibly diverse city. I recognise many of the points she raised in her speech and thank her for that.

The hon. Lady spoke about the consultation, which was wide reaching and had a huge response, including from Mind, which she spoke about. Mind has worked very closely with us throughout the development of the

mental health White Paper and contributed strongly to the consultation process. It is a very important stakeholder and we work very closely with it.

The Mental Health Act exists so that people with severe mental illness who present a risk to themselves or others can be detained in hospital and treated, which, I am sure the hon. Lady will agree, is necessary at times, unfortunately. Outside the cases where we know that people are safest in hospital and require hospital treatment, no mental health treatment is better delivered in a hospital than in the community. Our goal is for people to receive community mental health treatment close to where they live and to their families and work, in order to prevent them from having to be admitted as hospital in-patients. There are times, however, when detention is, unfortunately, necessary. We are taking steps because it is time to modernise the Act so that it works better for people.

In 2018, the Government asked Professor Sir Simon Wessely to review the Mental Health Act. I thank the hon. Lady for her comments about him. We asked him to review the Act because we were concerned about the rising rates and numbers of people being detained under the Act and the racial disparities in those detention rates. Sir Simon's independent review of the Act clearly shows that it does not always work as well as it should for patients, their families and communities. It goes too far in removing people's autonomy and it does not give them enough control over their own care.

In response to Sir Simon's review, in January the Government published the White Paper on reforming the Mental Health Act, setting out our proposals to make the Act work better for people. These are once-in-a-generation reforms that will give people greater control over their treatment and let them have the dignity and respect they deserve. Through these reforms, we will give patients a voice in their own care, which we know leads to better engagement in treatment. We will put care and treatment plans, and advance choice documents, into statute for the first time. I will address in a moment some of the individual points made by the hon. Lady.

Patients will be more closely involved in the development of their own care and can have confidence that if they lose capacity because of illness, their preferences on drug treatment, named next of kin and choices for the future will be properly considered. We will also make it easier—this is incredibly important—for patients to challenge decisions about their care. We are creating a new right for patients to choose a nominated person who will best look after their interests. I am sure the hon. Lady knows that, until the reform of the Act, it was still the case that if a woman was detained in hospital, it was her husband, father or next male relative who—regardless of how remote that person was to her life or experience—was nominated to make decisions on her behalf. That is one of the reasons why I personally think that this new provision is so important—it is so that that anyone can choose their nominated person, regardless of whether they are a relative, next of kin or someone in their family. That person is nominated during a time of wellness and remains the nominated person in the future. That can lead to patients having a far greater degree of control over their treatment, and a feeling of control over decisions taken on their behalf.

We are increasing patients' access to the independent mental health tribunal to provide vital independent scrutiny of detention. The reforms also seek to address

the disproportionate number of people from black and minority ethnic groups detained under the Act. Black people are currently four times more likely than white people to be detained under the Act, and 10 times more likely to be placed on a community treatment order, as mentioned by the hon. Lady. Our plans to enhance patient choice, increase scrutiny of decisions and improve a patient's right to challenge aim to address those concerning disparities.

On the criminal justice system, our proposals include key improvements to how we manage offenders with acute mental disorders and support them to access the care they need as quickly and as early as possible. We will improve the timeliness of transfers from prisons to mental health hospitals where individuals become unwell when in custody—I am sure that the hon. Lady is familiar with that situation from her previous experience—so that people in the criminal justice system get the right care, in the right place, at the right time, while continuing to fulfil our duty to keep the public safe.

Finally, we want to improve how people with a learning disability and autistic people are treated under the Act. The right community services would prevent needs from escalating. In future, the Act should be used only where there is a treatable mental health condition and admission is therapeutic, close to home and for the shortest time possible. There have been far too many examples of poor practice and quality failings in in-patient care for people with learning disabilities and autistic people. Therefore, we are proposing reforms to limit the scope to detain people under the Act where their needs are due to their learning disability or autism alone. We are firmly committed to developing community based services to support people with learning disabilities and autistic people, and to reduce reliance on specialist in-patient services. We have put forward proposals to ensure that that is available. These once-in-a-generation reforms will be instrumental in bringing the Mental Health Act into the 21st century.

On the points raised by the hon. Lady, CTOs are incredibly important and we are increasing the scrutiny of when they are used—and the frequency of that scrutiny—so that they are used only when appropriate and for no longer than necessary. That has been one of the failings so far, and it needs to be addressed. They will now be monitored and kept in place for no longer than is necessary. We are taking action to address racial disparities across the use of the Mental Health Act. Those CTO disparities are, of course, happening in the communities represented by the hon. Lady.

The hon. Lady mentioned Seni's law. We are clear that restrictive intervention and restraint should only ever be used as a last resort, when all attempts to de-escalate a situation have already been employed. The Mental Health Units (Use of Force) Act, also known as Seni's law, received Royal Assent in November 2018. The purpose of the Act is to increase the oversight and management of the use of force and acts of restraint in mental health units, so that force is only ever used as a last resort. We published the draft statutory guidance to the Act for public consultation in spring, and are committed to publishing the final guidance and commencing the Act in November.

We have made a huge amount of progress, but unfortunately, and sadly, we have been delayed by covid. The Department's resources have all been focused on

[Ms Nadine Dorries]

covid over the last 15 months. I met Seni's family and the hon. Member for Croydon North (Steve Reed) only a few weeks ago to discuss this. They were absolutely delighted to hear that we will make huge progress from September to November, and that by November the Act will hopefully be live. I commend them for the work and the campaigning that they have done—they are still campaigning.

The disparity in the use of force and restraint speaks to the communities that the hon. Lady represents. The Mental Health Units (Use of Force) Act will be instrumental, along with reform of the Mental Health Act 1983, in improving her constituents' mental health experiences of detention and in-patient treatment.

On the next steps, public consultation on the White Paper has ended. I note that the hon. Lady said that she would like her comments to be considered, and they will be—they have been heard and duly noted. I reassure her that the stakeholders, many of whom represent her community and interface both with the Department of Health and Social Care and with other organisations and arm's length bodies, have been fully engaged in the White Paper for the reform of the 1983 Act and in the consultation. I stand to be corrected, but I think we have accepted 124 of Sir Simon Wessely's 127 recommendations. We meet him regularly to look at how we can enhance and implement those recommendations.¹

I want to thank and reassure the hon. Lady. I absolutely understand why we are reforming the Mental Health Act and the reason why we supported and assisted the enactment of Seni's law. It is because we are absolutely committed to improving the experience of mental health in-patient detention for all, and especially the communities she represents. We are very aware of the fact that black men are four times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act, and we very much want to change that. That is why we have accepted so many of Sir Simon Wessely's recommendations.

I thank you, Ms Nokes, and I thank the hon. Lady for securing this debate. I always look forward to an opportunity to speak about mental health, particularly the reform of the Mental Health Act, which I very much look forward to championing later in the year.

Question put and agreed to.

11.24 am

Sitting suspended.

Children and Young People's Mental Health

[SIR GARY STREETER *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice in order to support the new hybrid arrangements. The timing of debates has been amended to allow technical arrangements to be made for the next debate. There will also be suspensions between each debate.

I remind Members participating physically and virtually that they must arrive for the start of debates in Westminster Hall, and they are expected to remain for the entire debate. I also remind Members participating virtually that they must leave their camera on for the duration of the debate, and that they will be visible at all times, both to one another and to us in the Boothroyd Room. We would have it no other way.

If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, they should email the Westminster Hall Clerks' email address, which is westminsterhallclerks@parliament.uk. Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and before they leave the room.

I also remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall. Members attending physically who are in the latter stages of the call list should use the seats in the Public Gallery—I think we have one or two there already—and move to the horseshoe when seats become available. Members may speak only from the horseshoe where there are microphones.

2.31 pm

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered children and young people's mental health.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. I am very grateful to be given the opportunity to lead a debate on this critical issue. Eighteen months ago in my maiden speech, I pledged that children and young people's mental health would be an issue that I champion in this place. It is a cause for which I will fight relentlessly, because children and young people are our future. Their hopes and dreams depend upon us doing the right thing by them.

Those who are struggling with their mental health and wellbeing, whether those suffering mild anxiety to those young people attempting to take their own life, deserve the very best care and support. Yet children and young people do not have a voice in the political system and are too often overlooked. In fact, the former Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, said in her final speech earlier this year that in Government there was an "institutional bias against children"—never more so than during the pandemic when, frankly, they have been an afterthought at every turn. From new born babies to schoolchildren to university students, the Government have let them down in planning and providing for their social and educational needs, and again in their announcements about children's recovery.

1.[Official Report, 17 June 2021, Vol. 697, c. 4MC.]

Teenagers and young people in my constituency who are ambassadors for the fantastic local charity Off The Record tell me that uncertainty over exams, combined with the social isolation of being stuck at home away from their peers, worries about loved ones and now concerns about their future job prospects have all taken their toll. But this crisis in children and young people's mental health started long before the pandemic. One reason why I made it my priority at the start of last year was because following my election, I was astounded week in, week out by the emails from parents or conversations at my surgeries, of stories of battles with child and adolescent mental health services to access treatment for children who are considering suicide, self-harming or withdrawing themselves from school. Yet they were having to wait six months or sometimes a year for treatment.

At a lower level, support in schools is patchy, with only some having access to a counsellor or mental health support team. Community-based support to intervene early can be dependent on voluntary sector provision in any given area. The pandemic has only served to highlight and exacerbate the existing lack of access and inequalities within children and young people's mental health. In 2017, one in nine children had a diagnosable mental health condition. That rose to one in six at the height of the pandemic. The Government need to use this moment to renew their focus on mental health and overhaul the support available.

I want to focus on three elements within the system and what needs to be done: CAMHS, schools and community services. Turning first to CAMHS, referrals are at their highest ever level, with over 65,500 referrals for 0 to 18-year-olds received in March 2021. That is more than double the number in March 2020 and almost 70% higher than in March 2019. Behind the staggering numbers is a child or a younger person in turmoil, often left in limbo waiting for treatment, and a carer beside themselves with worry. From talking to NHS leaders in my area, I know that unplanned admissions for children suffering a mental health crisis are at extremely high levels with services struggling to cope.

While it must be acknowledged that the Government have increased spending in this area, resulting in the NHS slightly exceeding its 2019-20 target of community mental health support for 34% of children needing support, there is still a long way to go. Last week, a local GP said she is increasingly finding that children she refers to CAMHS are being knocked back, and she is routinely requesting schools make a supporting referral to secure therapy. When referrals succeed, the wait can seem interminable. I heard from the adoptive father of a seven-year-old who suffered significant trauma and abuse within her birth family. She was referred to treatment, the initial assessment took several months to secure, and then the family were told that there would be a year's wait—yes, a year's wait for a seven-year-old for an eight-session course of treatment, only if deemed necessary.

There is a postcode lottery of spending across the country. Eight local areas spend less than £40 per child on mental health services, while 21 areas spend more than £100 per child. That brings me to an important point about data and reporting, which is so important for accountability. Inconsistencies in financial reporting across clinical commission groups make it difficult to

interrogate the data to check they are meeting NHS England guidance to increase year-on-year the proportion of spending on children and young people's mental health. This measure should be included in the mental health investment standard.

The other issue with data collection and publication is that it is impossible to judge whether different areas are meeting access targets, as the percentage of young people with a diagnosable mental health condition is only available nationally, not on a local basis. The Children's Commissioner should not have to request this comprehensive data on waiting times and referrals every year. The Minister will know that I tabled an amendment during the passage of the NHS Funding Act 2020 to improve transparency in operational expenditure and performance at a local level. I discussed this with her ministerial colleague, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), a few months ago. He assured me that the Minister is taking this forward, and I hope she can update us on when this local data might be routinely available.

However much money is pumped into CAMHS, improving access to it is contingent on plugging big holes in the workforce. The Royal College of Psychiatrists' 2019 workforce census found that the rate of unfilled NHS consultant psychiatrist posts in England has doubled in the last six years, with one in eight CAMHS psychiatrist posts vacant. We urgently need a proper long-term workforce strategy, adequately resourced and with an annual report to Parliament. The forthcoming health and care Bill is the ideal opportunity to hardwire this provision.

Turning to the role of schools in tackling mental health concerns, they are key to early intervention, and step in where children do not meet the CAMHS threshold. Provision of counselling and other mental health support services in schools can be variable and dependent on already massively overstretched school budgets. Mental health support teams can fill the gap. However, the current roll-out rate is very slow. The Government are aiming to reach a fifth to a quarter of the country by 2022-23, and have recently provided more funding to accelerate the roll-out, but I urge the Minister to be more ambitious.

On children's recovery from the pandemic, most of the education catch-up funding announced by the Government has been largely focused on academic catch-up, with little focus on emotional wellbeing and mental health support. All the research shows that it is difficult for children to learn if they are struggling with their mental wellbeing. Liberal Democrats supported YoungMinds' call for a £178 million ring-fenced resilience fund to allow schools to provide bespoke mental health and wellbeing support packages, as appropriate to their pupils and context. So far the Government have committed just £17 million of dedicated mental health support for schools as part of the recovery. A recent Ipsos MORI poll showed that parents put increased wellbeing support at the top of their priority list as part of any education recovery plan.

Finally, I will touch on the importance of community support services. We know that half of all mental health conditions present themselves by the age of 14 and three quarters by the age of 24. That is why prevention and early intervention are so critical. We know that some children and young people do not want, or are unable, to access mental health support in schools, but community-based services can be a lifeline.

[Munira Wilson]

Waiting until children reach crisis point is far too late. For younger children, family-based interventions, such as those offered by Kids Matter, are an effective approach. The Purple Elephant Project in Twickenham, founded by the inspirational Jenny Haylock, who has built a team of art and play therapists, works with children and their families from a very young age. Coram is also doing some incredibly important work on boosting children's self-esteem and resilience.

For teenagers and young adults, I warmly welcome the campaign launched by a range of children's and young people's mental health charities, called "Fund the Hubs". It calls for early-support hubs, offering easy-access, drop-in support on a self-referral basis for young people up to the age of 25, who do not meet the threshold of CAMHS.

The hubs would offer a mix of clinical staff, counsellors, young workers and volunteers, providing a range of support services. Additional services could be co-located under one roof, such as sexual health services or employment advice. The hubs could be delivered in partnership with the NHS, through local authorities or working with the voluntary sector, depending on the local area. Such an approach has already been tried in Manchester, Ireland and Australia, and has been shown to relieve pressure on and deliver cost savings to the health service. I hope the Minister will look at that innovative model.

In conclusion, we owe it to our children and young people to offer them the very best start in life. As a Liberal, I am passionate that every child gets the maximum opportunity to reach their full potential. With spiralling figures of children suffering anxiety, who are self-harming or struggling with eating disorders, as well as many more who are grappling with low confidence and self-esteem, we need to use this moment as we emerge from the pandemic to hit the reset button.

I urge the Minister, who I know shares my passion on this issue, to develop a proper cross-departmental strategy to tackle this growing crisis. Let us re-envision what support looks like for children and young people. Let us break down the silos between schools, local authorities and the NHS. Let us make sure that we prevent and intervene early to stem the tide, while also investing in training the mental health workforce.

I have heard too many times, from too many parents sick with worry, that CAMHS is simply not fit for purpose. I have yet to see much evidence to disagree with them. I hope the Minister will make it her mission to fix it, and work cross-party, if she is willing. I stand ready to do so for the sake of our children and their future, and I hope my Labour counterpart will, too. Not only is it morally the right thing to do, but our country's recovery depends on their success.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Colleagues, we have 45 minutes and nine Back-Bench speeches to fit in, so that is exactly five minutes each. Please try to keep to time, so that I will not need to impose any restrictions.

2.43 pm

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. As we know, the Timpson review was commissioned by

the Secretary of State for Education in March 2018 and published in May 2019. There is no need today to go into the detail of that excellent document, which is on public record, but I will highlight some key factors.

From 1998 to 2013, there was a downward trend of school exclusions. They dropped to a rate of 0.06% for the 2012-13 school year. However, that level has increased in recent years. For example, in 2017-18, there were almost 8,000 permanent exclusions in state-funded schools across all levels, a rate of 0.1%. The reasons are multifarious, including persistent disruptive behaviour and physical assaults against pupils and adults. Most intriguingly, the exclusion rates for children with special educational needs are much higher than average. With overall permanent exclusion set at 0.1% in 2016-17, it was 0.35% over the same period—three and half times the problem. So, indeed, Houston, we have a problem.

We are not here today to admire our challenges, but to solve them, so what do we need to do? The SEND review is expected imminently, but it is a matter for DFE and DHSC. First, we need to invest in our SEN children as never before. Yes, many are disruptive, hard to handle and come with a range of issues, but what about their energy, skills and strengths? If we can harness them to best effect, just think of the rewards.

Why might that work? By getting to the root cause of the issues, providing focused intervention and allowing children to fulfil their potential in the right environment, rather simply be excluded because it is all too difficult, we can get the best out of them. By providing the right care in the right settings, we can give them the focus they need to be productive, employable, law-abiding and responsible citizens, because we have addressed the root causes.

Our prisons are sadly full of people who have made the wrong decisions or acted impulsively, because they were not diagnosed at an early age, so let's invest in all our kids to give them the best possible chance.

I want every single local authority in the UK to comprehensively review their SEN provision, so that it becomes available in every area. In other words, every authority should provide specialist in-house provision. Specialist and dedicated settings are the way forward, and I want more dedicated schools established for SEN. Why? It is because it is not fair on the 95% of children in a class if 5% are disruptive, nor is it fair on the 5% to be constantly out on a limb, feeling the odd one out or being excluded. Let us separate the children, where we need to, but also be free to adopt hybrid models where access to the mainstream will still be beneficial. It is about a needs-must basis—individually streamlined to each child.

Why is it necessary for local authorities to do that? It is because it is the right thing to do. Our children are closer to home and enjoy the normality that they crave. It would also save on the exorbitant cost of providing taxi fares to schools a long distance away and perhaps even save the huge school fees of private education, when this should be provided in the state sector.

We must also give our teachers better training in identifying special needs and processing the education, health and care plans. I know of many families who are simply swept under the carpet, waiting for years for someone to take them seriously and for the EHCP to be authorised. This cannot be a golden ticket for the lucky

few, but a rightful passport for every child to get what they need. Please, let's speed up the EHCP process and hold headteachers and councils to account. And please don't get me started on local councils that fail to acknowledge hidden disabilities or autism in applications for blue badges—a whole different issue.

Lastly, our child and adolescent mental health services across the UK need 20,000 volts put straight through them. For families to be waiting up to two and a half years for a consultation, it is not only immoral, it is also, frankly, inept. The irony will not have escaped anybody that a GP cannot prescribe medication for autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, Asperger's or any other mental health condition without a diagnosis from CAMHS. Therein lies a vicious circle: children desperate to escape their symptoms, parents and teachers desperate for solace, GPs unable to prescribe without a diagnosis and CAMHS unable to see these children, in some cases, for up to two and a half years. It is a national disgrace, but we can now solve it.

To conclude, I commend the Timpson review. Let's get diagnosing, treating and spending and give all our children the future that they deserve in specialist educational settings that give them the chance.

2.48 pm

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of visiting Positive Youth Foundation in my constituency. I had the best time, as videos on my social media show. It is a fantastic organisation providing young people in Coventry with a huge range of activities and opportunities. Visiting the centre, I saw the bonds that had been formed between the staff, volunteers and young people and the confidence and support that gave them. I want to begin by paying tribute to everyone at Positive Youth Foundation from its founder and CEO Rashid Bhayat to all the staff and volunteers.

As staff and volunteers made clear to me, this is an incredibly challenging time for young people, with more than half of safeguarding reports at the centre being about children's and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health. The pandemic, and the new stresses, strains and isolation it has brought, has added to what was already a mental health crisis for children and young people. Before coronavirus hit, one in five young people aged between 16 and 24 suffered mental ill-health, and for school-aged children the figure was one in six. That has only got worse in the last 12 months. University students have been trapped in accommodation, away from friends and family, and have missed out on what should be the most exciting time of their lives. Almost two thirds of the people who have lost jobs during the pandemic are under 25. Schoolchildren have been missing out on vital education and have often been stuck in overcrowded homes with overstretched parents.

Things have got even worse for oppressed groups. Nearly three in four children with autism have a mental health condition, but in Coventry waiting times for autism assessments have been growing, and were doing so even before the pandemic. Working-class and LGBT+ young people, and children from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities all have greater rates of mental ill-

health. What makes this not just a crisis but a scandal is the totally inadequate support for children and young people's mental health.

More than a decade of austerity has cut away the support that was once provided, while deepening the problems that give rise to mental ill-health. Since 2011, mental health trusts have faced a real-terms cut of more than 8%. Huge cuts to school funding have put even greater pressure on budgets, forcing schools to have bigger classes while cutting mental health services. Nearly half of young people with moderate to severe mental health needs have to wait more than 18 weeks to start treatment. That is a cruel failure for children and young people. Mental health support needs the funding across the board that it deserves—for services such as NHS services and school counsellors—to guarantee that every single young person who needs support can get it when they need it.

Although funding for support is vital, the mental health crisis cannot be tackled with funding alone. It is getting worse, and more and more young people face mental ill-health. It is estimated that depression has tripled for those aged between 16 and 39. We cannot look just at the consequences; we have to look at the causes, too. Asthma, for example, is a health condition, but people do not suffer from it totally at random. If someone lives in an area of high air pollution, they are more likely to suffer from asthma. It is an individual problem, but it has social and political causes. The same is true for many mental health issues. The more stress, anxiety and trauma there is in people's lives, the more likely they are to experience mental ill-health. For children and young people who have grown up under austerity, life is getting more stressful and less secure. That is what is driving this mental health crisis, so although funding is vital, so is building a society that nurtures people, gives them security and safety, and truly values and cherishes them.

A report presented to the United Nations in 2019 argued that the best way to tackle the global mental health crisis is to build a supportive environment, including everything from the building of good homes to secure and well-paid work. If we are to solve the mental health crisis faced by children and young people, we must build a society where basic needs are met, where young people find decent and secure employment, where housing is both affordable and liveable, where education is understood to be a right and a good in itself, and where people do not have to work every hour of the day, but instead have time to live their lives to the fullest.

2.53 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con) [V]: It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. The issue of children and adolescent mental health is mission critical. It is the next tsunami—the challenge that will follow the covid pandemic. Now is the time not only to right historical wrongs—they are not as simple as underfunding; it is about truly looking at parity of esteem—but to look at the increasing needs that young people, and adolescents in particular, face and need to be satisfied.

We sometimes forget that mental ill-health is as much of a killer as physical ill-health. Life expectancy for those with mental health problems is usually reduced by some 10 years. Clearly, that can get worse in some areas and mildly improve in others. One of the real challenges

[Anne Marie Morris]

is that it is those in deprived areas and lower-income families who suffer the most. Sir Gary, you will be aware of the huge deprivation in our rural areas, which is sadly hidden and therefore not properly addressed.

To get this right, we need properly to monitor it. We need to be clear what we mean by mental health. We need to be clear what illness means. We measure diagnosis, but there are many problems that come before it. We heard earlier from hon. Members that the time gap between someone putting themselves forward with a potential problem and diagnosis can be significant. We need to recognise that both have to be addressed.

The point that has been made about data is right. If we do not understand who is coming forward within the three systems—education, health and local government—what hope do we have of really understanding the scope of the problem? We need to collect, measure and keep consistent data across the country about diagnosis, waiting times, treatment and recovery. It is not just about what we put in to address mental health; what happens at the end of it—whether people get better—is equally important. Unless we do that, this promise of parity of esteem is never going to be delivered.

Some of the existing targets, which in my view are not adequate, are distinctly unambitious. The access target for children and young people is 35%. That seems the wrong way around—surely it should be the larger part, not the smaller part.

We must remember when we talk about youngsters that children are the most vulnerable to mental health problems, and an earlier contribution set out exactly what the statistics look like. I pay tribute to Devonshire Partnership NHS Trust in my area, which has done a fantastic job of providing support against all odds, but the numbers are growing. The eating disorder challenge is going exponentially upwards. Quarantined children are showing acute stress disorder and acute adjustment disorder.

Addressing the waiting time issue is just the start of solving the problem, but let us at least look at it and try to find a proper target to collect data for and monitor, with some sanctions if it is not met. In 2017, a four-week waiting time was piloted, but it was only a pilot and has not been rolled out across the country. We know from our own experience around the country that the actual waiting time can be significantly greater. My call today is for a national access and waiting time standard. It is much needed and would be the start of our journey towards true parity of esteem.

The pandemic has had a huge impact on youngsters. Many—up to 25%, it is estimated—are not getting the treatment that they have been given historically. We also know that the numbers have grown enormously. They will just add to the burden. Although the Government have provided support, it is not yet enough.

My ask is this. We need to look again at the health and care Bill, and at specific provision for mental health. We need to look at specific provision for how it is commissioned, and at proper measurement to deliver parity of esteem. We need national access and waiting time standards. The five year forward view for mental health has not been met; it must be. Mental health matters. Young people matter. What gets measured gets done.

2.58 pm

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. We have talked a lot about self-isolation over the past year but less about the impact of being isolated on our mental health. Many children and young people have faced the disruption, hardship and heartbreak of this pandemic largely away from their friends and school support networks.

Last week, I visited a breakfast club at a primary school in Camden, where I had some really uplifting conversations with young children. Most were absolutely delighted to be back in school, around their classmates and teachers once again. We know that the attainment gap has widened substantially during school closures, in part due to the Government's failure to deliver laptops to disadvantaged children. Many of the children I have spoken to, however, found that their wellbeing and mental health took the biggest hit in lockdown. Most have been able to do classes on Zoom and to get on with their homework remotely, but they said that the wellbeing support which can only be delivered properly by teachers in person is what they have missed out on the most. The teachers I spoke to at the school expressed their frustration that they were not able to do more to help with mental health issues during school closures.

Children with special educational needs and disabilities have suffered particularly badly, with three quarters of parents saying that their disabled child is socially isolated and often unhappy, downhearted or tearful, and that there is a real risk that that could translate into serious long-term mental health issues without better support. That is also something I have picked up in my role as the governor of a primary school in my constituency. Remote learning also stifled the role that teachers often play in spotting problems that are emerging, intervening with assistance or, in serious cases, with referrals to other services.

The number of children and young people receiving support through the NHS for mental health difficulties halved in April and May last year, as did the number of referrals to CAMHS, compared with the previous year. Sadly, the number of current referrals does not make up that shortfall or address the worsening problems caused by the pandemic. That means that many children are still suffering in silence and without the support that they desperately need.

I heard that message loud and clear last summer when I met a group of inspiring children—the meeting was organised by Barnardo's—who told me about the isolation and other difficulties they had faced as a result of the pandemic. They also spoke about how difficult it can be to access basic mental health assistance and how there is almost no joined-up thinking between different but related support services in some areas of the country. The reality is that young people are far too often unable to access mental health support until it is too late and they have, sadly, started to harm themselves.

It is a source of great sadness and shame that one in six young people in the UK could now have a mental health disorder, up from one in nine in 2017. We must turn that around, which requires a laser-like focus on improving access to mental health support, and giving schools and other bodies the resources to provide direct targeted help and to join up children's services properly. The children and young people I have spoken to over

the past year simply cannot afford to wait for the snail's pace of change that this Government are overseeing in prioritising and investing in mental health support. We have to act, and we have to act now.

3.2 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under you as Chair, Sir Gary, and I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for securing this important discussion. This debate on young people and mental health is important to my constituents, many of whom have contacted me about it. As many other hon. Members have said, people come to explain their experiences and their difficulties in accessing services.

To provide some context, according to NHS Digital, in 2017 one in nine children was estimated to have a diagnosable mental health condition. That number has increased to one in six because of the covid-19 pandemic, but it is important to emphasise that the crisis existed before the pandemic. Research by University College London shows that in 2018-19, almost a quarter of 17-year-olds had self-harmed in the previous year and 7% had attempted suicide at some point in their lives. According to the Office for National Statistics, in 2017 suicide was the most common cause of death for boys and girls aged between five and 19. The figure for boys was 16.2% of all deaths, and for girls 13.3%. That is a sobering thought.

I have the pleasure of chairing the all-party parliamentary group on suicide and self-harm prevention. We have been looking at this area over the past year, including hearing evidence from organisations such as YoungMinds and from young people themselves. We received evidence that many young people who self-harm still struggle to access the support that they need in an acceptable time-frame. In fact, the NHS dashboard shows that 37% of young people—just over a third—with a diagnosable mental health condition can access NHS specialist support.

Respondents to our inquiry made it clear that the single most impactful change to improve the support available to young people who self-harm would be a system shift away from the current reliance on crisis interventions and towards a preventive model of support. However, budgets for preventive interventions have markedly reduced in recent years. Demands for specialist NHS mental health services such as CAMHS and improving access to psychological therapies has therefore increased exponentially, outstripping investment and exacerbating workforce issues. This has led to longer waiting lists, higher thresholds, and refused referrals of young people who self-harm. Even before the pandemic, people who self-harmed could struggle to access the support they needed.

There are also clear inequalities when it comes to children and young people's mental health, with higher rates of mental health problems among young women than young men, and among LGBTQ+ young people, young people with autism and young carers. There are also clear links between mental health and race, and between mental health and financial insecurity. Experiencing mental health difficulties in childhood or adolescence can have a significant impact across the life course, and can affect young people's educational outcomes, earnings, employment and ability to maintain relationships, as well as increase their likelihood of engaging in risk-seeking behaviour.

I want to talk about early support hubs. We need a shift towards preventive community-based interventions to urgently address the wider drivers of self-harm. That is why I support the call by the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition, including YoungMinds and the Children's Society, for the national roll-out of the early support hubs model, which would ensure that young people in every area across England can access early support for their mental health. We know that the earlier young people get support, the more effective that support will be, and the better the outcomes. Early support hubs offer easy-to-access drop-in support, on a self-referral basis, for young people who need urgent help but do not meet the threshold for children and young people's mental health services or who have emerging mental health needs up to the age of 25. These hubs can be delivered through the NHS, in partnership with local authorities and the voluntary sector, and would offer support across areas of need. Services would include psychological therapies, employment advice, youth services and sexual health services. Finally, I stress the need for security of funding for organisations providing these services.

3.7 pm

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary, and I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for having secured this incredibly important debate. We know that half of mental health illnesses develop before the age of 14, and it is therefore essential that everyone has access to mental health services from an early age. I have spoken many times in this House about the inadequacies of CAMHS provision, including unacceptably long waiting times for referrals and the incredibly high threshold for treatment. However, today, I want to focus my remarks on infant mental health.

Worryingly, reports have demonstrated that there is a baby blind spot in our mental health service when it comes to the very youngest, and while children and young people's mental health services are aimed at those aged 0 to 19, research has shown that there is inadequate provision for our youngest children. In 2019, 42% of clinical commissioning groups in England reported that their mental health services would not take a referral for a child aged two or under. The Parent-Infant Foundation recently surveyed professionals working in children's mental health, and found that only 9% of those surveyed believed that sufficient provision was available for infants whose mental health was at risk.

Just like us, babies and toddlers can experience stress, anxiety and trauma. This impacts on their emotional wellbeing and development, but by failing to provide infants with access to mental health support, we enable mental health problems to build up. Given that thousands of babies have been born during lockdown with limited access to health visitors, peer support, playgroups and children's centres, it is really urgent that we tackle these issues. Early intervention can have long-lasting benefits for mental wellbeing, benefiting not only the infant, but also reducing demands on mental health services in the future if it is tackled early on.

It is clear that we need action to address this blind spot. We need to invest in the provision of infant mental health services. We must also develop a strategy to ensure that there are enough qualified professionals

[Ellie Reeves]

to deliver it, so I urge the Government to address this baby blind spot and ensure that babies are not forgotten in mental health policies, strategies and services.

More widely, I am concerned by reports that find that one in six children now have a probable mental health condition. Demand for support is rising; there was a 35% increase in referrals to children's mental health services in 2019-20. The Children's Commissioner has warned that the pandemic will have a profound impact on children's mental health going forward, putting already struggling mental health services under more pressure.

It is clear that urgent action is needed to support CAMHS. The postcode lottery in service provision has only worsened during the pandemic. There is huge disparity in the length of waiting lists, in the number of children accessing treatment and in the number of children being turned away. It is not acceptable that the availability of support can be based on where someone lives. The ability to access mental health services is so important, and this needs to be addressed.

I am concerned that the current expansion of mental health services is not fast enough to meet increased demand, and the Government must urgently address this. We need full and sustainable funding to support expansion, and we need a plan to address the shortage of specialist staff in the sector. Greater emphasis needs to be put on prevention and early intervention to ease demand, with properly funded mental health support in every single school across the country. After the extremely difficult year that our children, infants and young people have had, we owe it to them to put their mental health at the top of the agenda.

3.12 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for securing this important debate. We have a long way to go to properly respond to our growing mental health crisis, especially for young people.

Eating disorders are a serious mental health issue, affecting many thousands of young people. They are complex and potentially life-threatening. They have no single cause, and they have the highest mortality rate of all mental health disorders. Recovery from an eating disorder takes, on average, three times as long as having the disorder itself. The fact that, all too often, an eating disorder goes undiagnosed and untreated for years adds to the problem.

Access to help continues to be a postcode lottery. NHS data on eating disorders show a fourfold increase in the number of children and young people waiting for urgent care. Behind these awful statistics hide thousands of real-life tragedies, not just for the sufferers themselves, but also for the friends and relatives who watch loved ones suffering from this awful illness virtually disappear before their eyes. With face-to-face appointments not going ahead, it has been much easier for sufferers to say that they are fine and not to ask for help until they reach crisis point. Like many forms of mental illness, eating disorders thrive in isolation. Some people have described their eating disorder as the only thing they have felt able to control during lockdown.

The demand for children and young people's community services was already rising before the pandemic, but now these services are backlogged. The news that CCGs

in England would increase their funding for eating disorders by an additional £11 million to help them cope with increased referrals was extremely welcome. However, this funding is not reaching the frontlines. Research commissioned by the all-party parliamentary group on eating disorders, which I chair, and carried out by the eating disorder charity Beat, shows that CCGs in England increased their spending on children and young people's community eating disorder services by just £1.1 million in 2019-20. Only 15% of CCGs increased their spending in line with the increase in additional funding; 21% spent less. On behalf of the APPG and Beat, I ask the Minister and the Government to hold NHS leaders to account, because they must make sure that every penny that the Government have made available goes to frontline services.

The impact of the pandemic on the mental health of disabled children and young people has been considerable. Research from the Disabled Children's Partnership consistently shows that disabled children have been more isolated than the rest of the population. Its latest survey shows that 90% of disabled children are socially isolated, and 72% of parents said their children are "often unhappy, downhearted or tearful."

Disabled children are at risk of being forgotten in the national recovery from the pandemic. It is deeply disappointing that the Government's recently announced education recovery plan provides no tailored support for disabled children to meet their complex needs. I urge the Minister to back calls for immediate dedicated catch-up funding and services for disabled children and their families. In the autumn spending review the Government must go further. They should commit to proper funding to tackle the pre-pandemic gap in disabled children's social care services.

Childhood trauma is at the bottom of a very large number of mental illnesses. Many children take their traumatic experiences into later life and it affects their life chances in every aspect, from educational achievement and professional qualifications, to health and wellbeing, to the risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system. We still lack a proper understanding of the effects of childhood trauma and how to prevent it. Trauma-informed services across the board, in schools, the NHS, the police and our prisons, would have a transformative impact on the whole of our society. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the prevention of adverse childhood experiences, I hope very much that we can engage with the Minister on the work we are doing in that field.

Our children's mental health is deteriorating. We must do all we can to improve it.

3.16 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab) [V]: I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for not just securing the debate but superbly setting the scene.

I want to reinforce the message that has just come so eloquently from the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) with regard to eating disorders. I saw the recent paper by Dame Til Wykes and other scientists and campaigners, supported by the Government's national adviser, Chris Whitty. They discussed the end goals for mental health research. The first end goal was halving the number of children and young people experiencing persistent mental health problems.

Eating disorders are just one of the serious persistent problems that start early and often persist into adulthood. As the paper sets out, they are associated with extremely poor outcomes, so it is appropriate to try and stop these disorders persisting from an early age. It makes sense for the individuals and their families, but also for the NHS, in terms of reducing costs, and for the economy overall, because people can contribute so much more fully to society.

What came out of that paper is the decision that we need to implement what we know already, but also support more research to improve recovery. As the hon. Member for Bath said, we already know that eating disorders are a growing problem. Some of the statistics are startling. The NHS 2019 health survey for England found that 16% of adults aged 16 and over screened positive for a possible eating disorder. In recent years, we have seen a fourfold increase in eating disorder hospital admissions, and waiting lists are at an all-time high. Hon. Member after hon. Member is finding this in their constituency, particularly when they are approached by distressed parents.

It is estimated that one in three young people experiences an eating disorder. Because these disorders occur among so many young people, they are still sometimes viewed as almost a teenage girls' illness—a diet, a lifestyle choice or something a person grows out of. Yet, the statistics on their severity are shocking. It is reported that eating disorders have the highest death rates among all mental health disorders, and the rate of suicide is 23 times higher in people with eating disorders, compared with the general population—one in five deaths in eating disorder patients is reported to take place because of suicide, and I pay tribute to the work my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) and her all-party parliamentary group on suicide and self-harm prevention are doing. According to the reports that we receive as constituency MPs, these serious consequences result from eating disorders partly because of the lack of access to psychiatrists who are fully trained in eating disorders and who specialise in eating disorder treatments.

As the hon. Member for Bath said, evidence is emerging that there has been a significant rise in people with eating disorders during the covid pandemic. Those in recovery have been set back, and new eating disorders have developed among a wider range of the population. From what I hear from my constituents, there is a vicious cycle of a lack of awareness, a lack of training and a lack of research funding at the scale needed. Let me just quote the parents from one family, who said: "Tell them right now the support, the treatment and the understanding is just not out there for us."

Concerns have also been expressed about what some people consider unhealthy messages being pushed by the Government's obesity strategy, which is being developed at the moment. I hope that more consideration will be given to consulting organisations that represent people with eating disorders in the development of that strategy.

I want to pay tribute to Hope Virgo. Many will have heard of her campaign "Dump the Scales", which has been calling so effectively through the media for proper investment in eating disorder treatments. Just this week, Hope told me she has received numerous letters from parents whose children have been naso-gastric-fed on general wards, with no psychological support in some health settings.

F.E.A.S.T., a global website campaign, is reporting thousands of people contacting it through Eating Disorders Support UK, and 5,000 have signed up for its 30-day support scheme. Hope Virgo is the founder of the Hearts, Minds and Genes eating disorder coalition, which is the first coalition to declare a state of emergency around eating disorder treatment, and I am pleased that it is now meeting the Department of Health and Social Care. This serious issue needs ministerial support to drive through the new programme, and I hope that pathways and support will be developed within a timescale that recognises its urgency and seriousness.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): The winding-up speeches will begin at 3.28 pm. Jim Shannon has five minutes.

3.24 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, Sir Gary. I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for setting the scene so well. She obviously has a passion for the subject. I love to engage with the debates that she is involved in, because I usually find I am on the same page, so I thank her for securing this debate.

I like quotations, and John F Kennedy had one that is appropriate for this debate. He once said:

"Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see."

I think that sentence captures this debate. The years march on, and for those of us of a certain vintage, they march terribly quickly—at least, they seem to. But that's the way it is. I understand these things more than ever. My mum is 89 years old. In four weeks' time, almost to the day, she will be 90, and she is very fit in mind and body. She reads the Minister's novels, by the way—the Minister knows that—and she finds them very enjoyable. That is the sort of mind she has, but she is the first to tell me that she does not know how young people are coping at present. Long gone are the very simple times. Our children live in an age where the world is at their fingers, which sounds great. It also means that when they are at home, in a place that should be safe from the world, the cyber-bullies are still at play, information is still at hand, and the anxieties of the world are never too far away.

I am always amazed when I look at my two oldest grandchildren—Katie, who is 12, and Mia, who is seven. They are so active and so capable on their iPads and laptops. Their grandfather, unfortunately, has not caught up with them at all. I am thankful for the wonders of the internet and all the possibility it brings, yet it also brings a world of uncertainty and fear. Information is truly available, but so too is information that is false and that could really harm, corrupt and do a great deal to the health of our young people.

During home schooling, we told our children to access school online and do more on the iPad and the computer than ever before. At the same time, young children were scared and frightened by the seismic shift in their lives because of covid, watching informational programming that was not designed for them and that caused fear and upset. We were isolating them from their support systems at school, from their friends at church and even from their neighbours. Little wonder our young ones are struggling now, fearful of this bug and not sure what that normal is any more. I am not sure what the normal is any more either—it might be what we used to have.

[Jim Shannon]

YoungMinds, a charity that the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) and others referred to, is doing tremendous work. In its recent survey, which I quote for the record and to focus our minds, 75% of respondents agreed that they found the current lockdown harder to cope with than the previous ones, with 44% saying it was much harder, while 14% said it was easier and 11% said it was the same. Some 67% believed that the pandemic will have a long-term negative effect on their mental health. That includes young people who have been bereaved or who have undergone traumatic experiences during the pandemic, who were concerned whether friendships would recover or who were worried about the loss of education or their prospects of finding work. Some 19% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 14% disagreed, but the figures we need to focus on are the 67%, the 75% and the 44%. Some 79% of respondents agreed that their mental health would start to improve when most of the restrictions were lifted, but some expressed caution about restrictions being lifted too quickly and about the prospect of future lockdowns.

The statistics speak volumes, yet the issue is the silent, solemn children who carry burdens that their wee shoulders were never designed to carry. How heartbreaking it is to imagine that one of my precious grandchildren could be feeling that; it is a feeling felt by too many children. I know that from speaking to parents, teachers and ministers back home in Northern Ireland. The question on our lips is, what can we do?

As a grandparent, I know that Katie and Mia are old enough to understand much of this. They have perhaps observed loss and watched their parents and grandparents grieve. As a Christian—I always say this if I get the opportunity, and I know it is something that resonates with you, Sir Gary—I will be seeking that the perfect peace that comes from God descends on our young people. But as a parliamentarian, I ask my Minister and my Government to put in place funding to enhance the counselling available, to encourage schools to carry out Mental Health Day events, and to work with churches to enable them to signpost children to help. We must act, lest the message that we send to the future be nothing other than an apology for our failings.

3.28 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I begin by echoing the thanks to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for securing this debate and for her excellent exposition of the challenges that we face. Maintaining the good health of our children and young people is a challenge, and much more so in the wake of covid-19, with all the destruction and disruption it has wreaked on young lives, plaguing children with fear and uncertainty during their formative years. Tackling that has to be a public priority, and it is for the Scottish Government. I hope the Minister will agree that it will be a public priority in England as well.

Scotland was the first nation of the UK to create the post of a dedicated Minister for mental health. It is true that young people's mental health was a challenge even before the covid pandemic, but we all need to try to more fully understand the mental health and wellbeing impact of lockdown and school closures for children

and young people, in order to be better informed about how to support them and what support can be offered as lockdown eases.

It is perhaps obvious that feelings of anxiety have developed in many young people throughout lockdown, especially for those children whose parents are key workers. We often forget that the children of key workers will undoubtedly have been worried about their parents, and perhaps other family members, being on the frontline during the pandemic. While young people are off school, their worry is likely to be magnified and exacerbated, as their key worker parents could be working longer hours than usual on the frontline, to benefit wider society.

Those living in disadvantaged communities are more likely to have had negative impacts on their mental health during lockdown, but many young people across the board have been concerned about returning to school and missing out on school, and worrying about the future. We know that lockdown has been particularly difficult for young people who face challenges with digital access, physical space or insufficient support with their home learning, and lack of contact with peers, which is particularly important for children and young people.

There is no denying the link between poverty and poor mental health, as well as poor physical health. That is as true for young people as it is for adults. Tackling inequality must be part of any long-term strategy to improve mental health. The Scottish Government have established a range of measures to reduce inequality. The real levers to tackle the ingrained inequality, of which we are all aware, are reserved to the UK Government.

Local authorities have reported increased self-harming and suicidal feelings, with an increased number of suicide attempts among care leavers. Recent studies show that 6% to 7% of young people surveyed believe that the pandemic will have a long-term negative effect on their mental health. That is pretty shocking, but I do not think the long-term mental health adverse effects are inevitable—I sincerely hope that they are not. Hope, sadly, is not enough. There has to be a determined, decisive political will to tackle this problem.

The Scottish Government's approach is to focus on further investment in and redesign of child and adult mental health services. The mental health transition and recovery plan is supported by an additional £120 million to transform services, with a renewed focus on prevention and early intervention. The additional demand for mental health support in the wake of covid poses challenges across the UK, but they are challenges that we have to meet. There is no dressing it up; there is no getting away from it.

We know that the waiting lists for mental health support in Scotland and across the UK are simply too long. That is why the Scottish Government are redoubling their efforts to ensure that waiting lists come down, and they are working closely with health boards to that end. The Scottish Government are also working hard to ensure that schools are as equipped as they can be to support children. That is why the £20 million additional investment in the pupil equity fund, bringing it to almost £147 million, is so important for supporting children and young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

That fund resources educational psychologists, home school link workers and mental health counsellors. In addition, the investment in raising attainment and supporting the wellbeing of pupils is complemented by

a £20 million summer programme, alongside a range of other investments in youth work, outdoor learning and education in Scotland, to support schools with the resources they need to strengthen mental health support. The Scottish Government's £262.2 million budget for mental health and autism in 2021-22 is over and above the NHS spending, and more than double the previous year. Suicide prevention spending has also been doubled.

The hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) is correct. Psychiatrists are warning of a "tsunami of eating disorders", thought to be a direct consequence of the isolation and feeling out of control engendered during the pandemic. The mental health pandemic that has followed so hard on the heels of the health pandemic will require ongoing determined action across the UK. The explosion of mental health challenges created by the health pandemic will take time to treat, and it will take time for those suffering to recover. As long as we have the political will to do that and give it the priority it needs, that is what matters.

The reality is that we still do not yet know the full picture of the mental health impact of covid-19. We may not know that full picture for some time to come. However, a glimmer of hope can be found in the fact that now people are more willing and able to talk openly about their mental health, which is a real culture change, even from as recently as a decade ago. That means that young people today are more likely to ask for help or talk to someone they trust if they are struggling, and that has to be welcomed.

We know that talk is not enough; we need action. The focus we now have on the importance of mental health must not be lost. Young people and children who have mental health needs require and deserve our support and we have a duty to provide it. The Scottish Government are working hard to do this, and I hope to hear that the Minister will be doing the same in her role.

3.35 pm

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): It is such a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for securing this extremely important debate and all hon. Members for their thoughtful contributions.

My speech is full of stats. We have heard stats and real-life stories. We know what has been unfolding in our communities. Today, we have a choice to do something about it. The Government have a choice to do something about it. What are we going to do? We are going to make our interventions, state our cases, speak the numbers. The Government will respond and then we will go back to normal, with children attempting to throw themselves off bridges; a reality where parents have to take time off work or give up work because they are so worried about their children who are self-harming. We are going to go back to teachers who would walk over broken glass for their students, desperately telling me that they cannot get their children on to CAMHS waiting lists. Even if they are lucky enough to tick those boxes and get on a list, it is far too long until they are seen.

Today, we have the choice to do something about this. Demand for mental health support is at an all-time high, yet access to services is simply not keeping up. For over a year, Labour has warned that children's mental health should not be forgotten in this crisis, but it is easy to blame the coronavirus pandemic for what we are

seeing playing out in our communities—every single community. This issue cuts across the class and socio-economic divide. It can affect any child or young person. Prior to the pandemic, access thresholds in many places were so high that they created unacceptable waits and led to children having their referrals cancelled without treatment.

The former Children's Commissioner outlined in her 2021 annual report that over half a million children and young children were referred to CAMHS in 2019 and 2020. Of those, approximately 3,500 either had their referral closed or were still on the waiting list by the end of the reporting period. This simply is not good enough.

The pandemic has pushed services that were once stretched to breaking point over the edge. The Minister does not need to take my word for that, but she should certainly heed the warning from the NHS mental health trust leaders surveyed in May this year. The survey, carried out by NHS Providers, found that two thirds of trust leaders said they were unable to meet demand for CAMHS. Every leader surveyed stated that demand for children's and young people's services is higher now compared with last year. Some 78% said they were extremely or moderately concerned about their local system's ability to meet the level of demand over the next 12 to 18 months, and 84% of trust leaders said children were waiting longer for treatment than they were six months ago.

The Government know all these stats. The Minister knows all these stats. What is she going to do about it? Is she going to recycle yet more money in a new announcement? Is she going to spend £2.3 billion over and over again in every debate that we have, depending on exactly which mental health topic we are talking about? The NHS does an incredible job with limited resources. However, it needs the political will to close the gap, now more than ever, and workforce capacity is often cited as the biggest barrier to scaling up provision.

That has been known for some time, with not enough being done to rectify it. Failure to resolve the issue before the pandemic is now having disastrous consequences. Mental health trusts had to give money to local hospital trusts to plug gaps, leaving them with even less of the money that they needed. This, on top of 11 years of an austerity-driven agenda, means the money is simply not in the system, and anything put back into the system will simply not cut it.

Staff have been grappling with a health emergency for more than a year, under enormous pressure, resulting in the acceleration of burnout and exhaustion. They are in desperate need of a reprieve, but the mental health fallout from covid means that waiting lists continue to pile up. Without urgent action, that gap in access will only continue to grow, leaving thousands of children to fall through the cracks.

National and crisis provision are extremely important, but more must be done to ensure that support is proactive, holistic and community-led. The biggest driver of poor mental health in children is adverse childhood experiences—I can see colleagues nodding. That is a well-known fact. When I do a shift in accident and emergency, and a child comes in with mental health issues—a child I have seen multiple times in the previous year, living in mouldy housing, in multi-occupancy homes, with parents who cannot access jobs—it is no surprise to me that they are suffering with their mental health.

[Dr Rosena Allin-Khan]

What will the Government do about that? In areas of deprivation, it is not uncommon for parents to resist answering calls from withheld numbers or opening letters labelled private and confidential, but that is the main way in which CAHMS appointments are communicated to parents. Many miss the appointments, despite them and local advocates having pushed for treatment for many months and even years. Those children, the poorest and the hardest hit by other Government measures, then get dropped, which unfairly creates the impression that parents simply do not care. Those same parents are often grappling with many children suffering with mental ill health as a result of their life experiences.

Advocates out there would give the shirts off their back and, as I said, walk across broken glass to get those children to appointments. A fully holistic approach would include in a child's referral the GP and school, where necessary. In areas where mental health is less understood, or cultural or language barriers exist, many children will attend a CAMHS appointment with mum and dad after the school has referred them, but because of a lack of understanding, mum and dad cannot explain the issues that their child is facing, so no course of treatment is started and the child is taken off the list.

These are our most vulnerable children, and often the children who need our help the most. What will the Government do to make services accessible for such children and their families? The scars that children live with forever means that those with the best English and a better understanding get the treatment they need, while others fall through the cracks. Many of us serve communities where that is the case, and it is no surprise that, despite being four times more likely to have a mental health problem than their affluent peers, children from the poorest backgrounds are much less likely to access services. A more joined-up, proactive approach between education, health and local authorities is needed, with greater focus on prevention and early intervention.

Talent is everywhere, but sadly opportunity is not. That is why the Labour party announced a children's recovery plan to ensure that children can continue to play, learn and develop in the post-covid period, no matter where they are from, or what school they go to. That programme is meant to support children and young people throughout their education, and to recognise that positive mental health and wellbeing can be pivotal for children to reach their fullest potential. By tackling food poverty in schools, guaranteeing quality mental health support for pupils and fully funding extracurricular clubs and tutoring, each child would have an equal chance to succeed.

The Government know we are facing a mental health crisis. That is not news. We have whole communities full of people who are desperate for support—parents, teachers, families, children, desperate for support. They are counting on us to use the debating time today to make real, effective change. They do not want just rhetoric—just empty words and gestures, the same old recycled announcements time and again—but an acknowledgement that the Minister has today listened: listened to the pleas from those with eating disorders; listened to those who are suicidal; listened to those unable to access CAMHS services; listened to those who have waited far too long for the help they need and deserve; and listened

to people who are unable to reach their fullest potential because they have a Government that do not understand the scale of the issue.

The time for dither and delay is over. I look forward to the Government announcing some real, tangible change.

3.45 pm

The Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health (Ms Nadine Dorries): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) for bringing forward this important debate. We have had a number of interactions and I know how genuinely important the issue is to her. I am aware of the meeting she had with the Minister for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar). I will give some information, but also reassure her that we are continually working on these issues. More has happened as a result of her meeting. I know she is genuinely very concerned about this issue and has been since the day she arrived in Parliament.

As the Minister, I speak to all stakeholders, trusts, organisations and just about everyone involved in the area of mental health, particularly among children and young people. It is incredibly important that we keep our language and our comments about children and young people both proportionate and responsible. There is not a mental health pandemic. I will go on to explain what I mean by that.

It is very important that we divide wellbeing from mental illness, not least because we do not want mental illness to fall by the wayside in people's awareness and understanding of mental health, because the conversation is dominated by mental health and an overarching title that is not appropriate. Mental health is divided—it is not just a catch-all title. We have people who suffer with serious mental illness and childhood mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, psychosis and eating disorders. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) on her speech; we have discussed eating disorders many times, and she is compassionate and is compelled to improve eating disorder services for children and young people in the UK. I thank her for her commitment to the issue.

It is incorrect to describe 140,000 children as having been turned away. The measurement of progress against the five-year forward target is based on two contacts with NHS services—this is an important point. Many children and young people have one session. After that, it is jointly decided to close their referral. To quote the 140,000 figure is misleading. One session is thought enough to provide them with the help they need or, more importantly, to provide pathways to their carers, parents and those who accompany them to the appointment. The expansion of Every Mind Matters, which was developed by Public Health England, to include children and young people under the age of 18 has been a huge boost. It is wrong to say—to misquote—that 140,000 children have been turned away. It is important to look at the reasons why.

I began by saying that I speak to stakeholders, trusts and others. I would like to quote from a letter a trust sent to MPs, following a debate on the issue only days ago. The trust said: "Partner organisations work incredibly closely to ensure children and young people receive the services they need." It was referring to the narrative

used by parliamentarians. It said that frontline staff had worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic and had taken the additional investment that the Government had provided to increase their workforce, and that to describe their services as failing had an impact on the morale and wellbeing of dedicated frontline staff and those who are delivering services to children and young people. It went on to say that the statements that were being made caused concern and alarm to children and young people and their families at an anxious time.

We have a responsibility in Parliament when we are talking about mental health, particularly of children and young people, to keep language proportionate. For me, talking in a debate about children throwing themselves off a bridge is completely beyond the mark and I am afraid that I think that that type of language is exactly what the trust was referring to—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) is commenting from a sedentary position. I reiterate my comments, Sir Gary. It is important that we consider the families and the people that we are representing and do not make inflammatory statements.

I have heard first hand from NHS staff that thousands of children and young people have had to adapt to the challenges of covid-19. It has been an incredibly tough year for everybody, and many children and young people have felt anxiety, apprehension and a gamut of emotions that adults also felt when faced with the unknown, sudden and rapid change to routines as well as a lack of understanding of what would happen and how life was to continue. However, many people are resilient, and many of those children and young people, who at stages reported they felt all those emotions and were included in that statistic of one in six, came through once there was a greater understanding of what was happening and how it was going to work. They were incredibly resilient, and we should be proud of those children and how they helped others too.

We take the pandemic and the mental health of children and young people extremely seriously. I work seven days a week on what this Government do, what we provide and how we assist. Although I have been criticised by the hon. Member for Tooting for talking about the investment we provide, we cannot provide services without the money for them. We cannot increase our mental health workforce if we do not provide the money to train people and to provide those services and that is exactly what we have done. I have no shame in quoting the figure of £2.3 billion a year that is going into mental health services—more than any Government has ever ploughed in, plus an additional £500 million to a mental health recovery plan for the pandemic this year, of which £79 million has gone into eating disorder services based in the community. We hope that that funding will allow around 22,500 more children and young people to access community health services.

Wera Hobhouse: The Minister has quoted the numbers for what the Government have made available. As I said, unfortunately a lot of that money has not reached the frontline. Will she make CCGs accountable and that money goes where it is meant to?

Ms Dorries: It is a constant pressure for me to ensure that. NHS England has worked incredibly hard to establish community-based services. It is important to

say that the uptick in eating disorders came before the pandemic—it was spotted before it struck. We can have another debate on why we were beginning to see that rise in eating disorders, and the hon. Member for Twickenham and I have had that discussion. I am proud of how the NHS has rapidly looked at how we can deal with this exponential rise in eating disorders, because that is where our problem is.

We know exactly who has been affected by the pandemic, in terms of mental health services. We know from the referrals that have gone to our partners across the board and to local services. I am saddened to say that eating disorders are our toughest problem at the moment because of the exponential rise—over 22% over the past year.

NHS England is using that money. As I said a moment ago, having the workforce to provide services is really important, so we have accelerated the number of mental health support teams that we are putting in. The first question I asked when I took up my ministerial post was: “Can we have more mental health support teams in schools faster? Can we accelerate the long-term plan so that we get more areas covered quicker?” It took the pandemic to make that happen, but now—I have not even used my speaking notes; I have gone completely off piste—I think we have another 112 school areas covered. I will write to Members attending today to give them the figures on mental health support teams. We have managed to accelerate the programme by over a year as a result of the £500 million of funding that we put in.

Something that we can really shout about is that we have people coming forward. Mental health was never an area where people really wanted to work. I remember during my nurse training that we were given the option to take 12 weeks’ maternity or 12 weeks’ mental health, and my entire cohort took 12 weeks’ maternity. Nobody went to do the mental health training. Now—the pandemic has highlighted this—we have 100 applications for every place in university for people to train in mental health. That means mental health support teams to go into schools, deal with eating disorders and work with children and young people. When we put that kind of money in, run those kinds of courses and have the commitment to accelerate mental health workers, we do not see those results overnight, but that work is being done now to ensure we have the results. We want to ensure that people come out of universities and go into mental health support teams in schools. I have seen the work they do and how they work with children and young people.

Time has whizzed on, and I would just like to make a few points. The hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves) spoke about young mums and infant mental health. I am totally with her. That is why I worked so hard during the lockdowns to ensure that we kept support groups open for mums and young babies, and particularly those that give mental health support to mums. That included all sorts of groups, such as playgroups—Monkey Music is one that somebody used—where mums could meet together with their young babies. I argued for that and made the case for supporting their mental health. During the pandemic, those groups were kept open for young mums because I felt it was so important that they were supported.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): May I remind the Minister to leave one minute at least for the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson)?

Ms Dorries: I am going to sit down.

Liz Twist: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Dorries: I do not think there is time.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): You have one minute of your time left.

Ms Dorries: I have not got time, I am so sorry. There is only one minute left.

The hon. Member for Twickenham asked about data. That data is produced on the mental health dashboard every quarter. There is work ongoing, but I will come back to her on the details of it. I do not know whether she has access to the dashboard and the data, but I will make sure she does. If the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) would like to speak to me when the debate is over, I will come back to her on the points she raised. I will sit down now to give the hon. Member for Twickenham a chance to respond.

3.58 pm

Munira Wilson: I thank all hon. Members who contributed in such a knowledgeable and passionate way to this debate. I hope the Minister has seen that there is cross-party support for greater support for and investment in mental health services. I recognise that the Government have put more money in, but one of the themes has been whether it is getting through to the local level and the frontline. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) and I keep picking up the point about data, and the hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) did the same. I am grateful to hon. Members for picking up points that I was not able to cover, such as the baby blind spot, eating disorders and disabled children. There are so many issues; this is multifaceted.

The Minister talked about definitions and said that we are conflating mental health and wellbeing, but it is all part of a continuum. That is why it is so important, as part of the prevention agenda, to focus on wellbeing as much as the serious mental health concerns. That is why I was trying to cover that vast spectrum in my speech. I reiterate that I stand ready to work with the Minister.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) quoted JFK. Well, I will quote Mandela back at him:

“There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way it treats its children.”

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

4 pm

Sitting suspended.

European Union Settlement Scheme

4.5 pm

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice in order to support the new hybrid arrangements—welcome to those on the screen. I also remind Members participating virtually that they must leave their camera on for the duration of the debate, and that they will be visible at all times, both to each other and to us in the Boothroyd Room. If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, they should either throw something at the screen or email the Westminster Hall Clerks at westminsterhallclerks@parliament.uk. Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and as they leave the room. I also remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)
[V]: I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of the EU Settlement Scheme.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. With the 30 June deadline for applications for the EU settlement scheme fast approaching, I am pleased to have the opportunity to open this debate. I also wish to give my colleagues time to speak, and therefore I will use only some of my time today, not only to remind EU nationals living in the UK to apply for settled status if they have not already done so, but to highlight to the Minister that this scheme is already causing disruption in people's lives and that this may be the last chance to prevent another Windrush scandal.

The EU settlement scheme was launched in March 2019 as part of the withdrawal agreement. The scheme was trailed by the Department for Exiting the European Union as the method for EU nationals to secure their rights post-Brexit, and to continue to live their lives broadly as they did under freedom of movement. The reality is that being forced to register for rights in the country they call home has caused a great deal of upset and anxiety among many of our European friends, neighbours and constituents. People have been left feeling unwanted, unwelcome, humiliated and angry due to this Government's heavy-handed approach. For many, it has broken their sense of belonging and eroded their trust in this Government; for others, it has been the final straw, and they have left the UK altogether. This is a sorry state of affairs, considering the benefits that EU nationals bring to the UK: to our economy, our workforce, the NHS, and—most importantly—our culture.

As of the start of this month, there have been 5.6 million applications to the EU settlement scheme. The majority of those applicants, around 4.9 million, have been granted settled or pre-settled status. Settled status guarantees the right to live, work, and remain indefinitely, free of immigration controls, and is available to those who have lived in the UK for more than five years. Pre-settled status offers less definite security, giving permission for five years that will expire, with the expectation that the person will later apply for settled status. The onus for converting pre-settled status to settled status falls on the applicant. There is the potential for people to forget to reapply or to miss that reminder, and in this instance,

someone could easily find themselves working illegally and have to go without income while applying to update their status. Will the Minister give consideration to a system of automatic conversion to settled status for those who are pre-settled?

Right now, there is a backlog of more than 300,000 applications still waiting to be cleared by the Home Office. The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants has raised concerns that if these applications are still live after the deadline, that will create a legal ambiguity for applicants. Will they be in the country unlawfully while they are waiting on this decision? Can the Minister offer clear guidance on the rights of the tens of thousands of people waiting for a decision, and give his assurances that those will not be affected after the deadline? Perhaps the Minister could allow applicants to avoid this pitfall altogether by taking the advice of the Scottish Government's Europe Minister, Jenny Gilruth, to extend the deadline.

As of midnight on 30 June, those who have not applied to the scheme will feel the full effect of this Government's hostile immigration system. That means that people who have lived and worked in the UK legally for years will be criminalised and potentially face a dramatic change in their rights. They will be unable to work or rent; they will be unable to receive NHS treatment free at the point of need; they will be unable to receive welfare benefits or access to other public services, such as housing; and they will be liable to criminal prosecution, detention and removal from the UK.

The Home Office has confirmed that it is aware of those people who are still due to apply to the scheme and will miss the deadline. According to the Home Office guidance, those groups include children, people with care or support needs, victims of domestic abuse, people in poverty, homeless people and rough sleepers, and, in particular, minority groups such as the Roma community. Could the Minister outline in his answers what steps are being taken to support those vulnerable people who his Department already knows will miss the deadline?

The campaign organisation the3million, which has been at the forefront of being a voice for so many people, has reported that even though the application process is still open, EU nationals are already being asked to prove their settled status in a wide range of contexts, contrary to Government guidance. Those asking them to do so include landlords, estate agents, housing agencies, employers, banks, councils, GPs, hospitals, schools, international airports, prior to their boarding a flight, and UK border staff. Those are just some of the many examples. I mention this because it is clear that the people asking for proof of status are unlikely to be specialists in the immigration field and may be unfamiliar with the settled scheme terminology, creating situations ripe for discrimination. As the Minister will be aware, the Court of Appeal ruled in December that those with pre-settled status must be treated on an equal basis with all other claimants when applying for welfare benefits, so will the Minister put it on the record that that must be the case in relation to employers, landlords and all services?

Successful applicants are not given physical proof of their status. Instead, every time someone needs to prove their status, they will have to go through a complex process, involving at least 14 steps, in order to show an

online document. The Government's implementation of covid certification allows people to show their status simply on their phone or to download and print a PDF document. Alternatively, if someone is not digitally literate, they can request a printed version. Allowing a similar physical status document would make life so much easier for those granted settled or pre-settled status. Can the Minister offer a convincing reason why that has not been built into the EU settlement scheme, and will he consider building physical documentation into the system going forward?

The Minister will be aware of the correspondence on behalf of my constituent Jenny Condie. According to her settled status documentation, she is called by her maiden name, Serraf. This is the case for many married European women whose passports list both their married and their maiden names. I understand that it is due to the Home Office taking details from the machine-readable zone of the passport. However, it may raise suspicions when the status documentation does not match any other form of identification. When I asked the Home Office how many women were issued with documentation in their maiden name, the information was not available. I am concerned that women will discover that their documentation is misleading only when they face awkward questions, delays or discrimination when trying to prove their status.

Initially, Jenny was advised by the Home Office to approach the French authorities to have her passport amended, so I am grateful to the Minister for his letter outlining that a process for changing maiden names to married names has been created at the Home Office since I first contacted him about this case. However, Jenny has been unable to have the change carried out. The Home Office requires her to send her physical passport, but she is reluctant to do so, because she is worried that she may need to travel to France if there is an emergency. Should the document get lost in the post, she would need to travel to London for a passport replacement. Those concerns will be replicated for most EU nationals in the same position. When making the application, Jenny only had to send a picture of the document. Will the Minister review the process and either make the change to married names automatic or streamline the process by accepting photographed documents?

In 2016, as part of the Vote Leave campaign, the current Prime Minister and the current Home Secretary issued a commitment that there would be no change for EU citizens already lawfully resident in the UK; those EU citizens would automatically be granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK and would be treated no less favourably than they were at present. The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary respectively not only have failed to uphold that commitment on all counts, but have caused confusion, upset, anxiety and fear, and allowed the dignity of EU citizens to be trampled, through the faulty EU settlement scheme. It was evident when the scheme opened in 2019 that people would fall through the cracks; and now, two weeks before the deadline, the reality could not be clearer.

The Minister today has the opportunity to extend the deadline and avoid a Windrush-style scandal. I wish to allow time for parliamentary colleagues to speak. Therefore I will conclude here: I urge him to take this consideration very seriously.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): We now have two mini-speeches. First, we go again to Scotland with Anne McLaughlin, and then to Wera Hobhouse.

4.15 pm

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP) [V]: Thank you, Sir Gary. I thank my hon. Friend and colleague the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) for securing the debate, and I thank her and the Minister for allowing me to speak. I will be quick—I would like to raise just three issues.

First, I am really concerned that certain groups of EU nationals may be forgotten about in all this: the older people and children in the care system who rely on their local authority to act on their behalf and ensure that their claims for settled status are being processed. I and many of my colleagues have written to our local authorities to find out what they are doing to ensure that people in their care have applied. Most are working to ensure that that is done, but inevitably some people will fall through the gaps and lose their right to remain.

Will the Minister tell us what will happen in those cases? If the lack of status means that an EU national is unable to receive NHS treatment, benefits or access to public services, does that mean that people in our care system will be effectively thrown on to the streets? Obviously, as they are in care settings, they are by their very nature vulnerable people who need our help.

I also echo the calls of Jenny Gilruth MSP, the Scottish Government's Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development, for the deadline to be extended. If the UK Government cannot see fit to extend the deadline for all EU nationals, they must really seriously consider extending it for those vulnerable people whom I have just mentioned.

Secondly, on the lack of physical evidence and the requirement for people to prove their status digitally, which my hon. Friend mentioned, I have been told that the system is already crumbling under the pressure, meaning that websites are crashing and people are simply unable to prove their right to live and work here. It is hardly any wonder given that there are 14 steps to go through. Why not just do what we do with everyone else and give them a piece of paper and a card that they can show to employers?

Aside from the terrible toll that it takes on individuals who are now made to feel like second-class citizens, have the UK Government seriously considered the impact that this system will have on our economy? We are already hearing about how Brexit is affecting access to labour markets for some sectors. Even arch-Brexiteer Tim Martin of Wetherspoon is now moaning that he does not have enough staff, and he is calling for a special dispensation for his industry—or maybe just his pubs. If he of all people is saying that, we know what a terrible impact Brexit must be having. If EU nationals who live and are entitled to work here are unable to prove it quickly or easily, what does that do for the availability of labour?

Finally, I will mention some EU citizens who approached me recently—they were Portuguese, but this could apply to any country. In the last year, they have been having terrible trouble getting in touch with the consulate in the UK to access the essential documentation required to apply for the settlement scheme, and indeed to travel.

That appears to have a disproportionate impact on EU citizens living in Scotland. Certainly, in the case of those Portuguese citizens, there is no Portuguese consulate in Scotland; they have to travel to London or Manchester, but for a very long time no cross-border travel was allowed. That and other restrictions have put Portuguese nationals in Scotland in a challenging and stressful position.

I want the Minister to take cognisance of the fact that Portuguese people and those of other nationalities in Scotland may, because of circumstances beyond their control, have some difficulty that those in England do not. If he cannot assist with those issues, will he at least give reassurance that people who have not applied by 30 June for any of the reasons that I have mentioned will not simply be thrown out of the country? I suppose what I am really asking is this: will he do everything in his power to ensure that we do not experience another Windrush?

4.18 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) for securing this important debate, and I thank the Minister for granting me permission to take part.

EU citizens have for decades been tightly woven into the fabric of our society—they are our friends, colleagues, neighbours and families—but for many, their future in this country, which they call home, is at risk. Covid has, as we have heard, exposed and compounded the flaws in the system. One of my constituents wrote to me just this week worried that she will not have any way to prove her status in the country where she has lived for decades. Can the Minister tell my constituent what she can do to prove her status when we have heard so many stories of landlords and employers refusing digital proof? Please, the Government must allow applicants to register for physical proof of status, as we have already heard. Another constituent does not have a smartphone. She needs a scan of her passport, but the scanning centre has been closed for the past 14 months. What is my constituent meant to do?

I pay tribute to the In Limbo Project, which was co-founded by one of my constituents, for its incredible efforts. It has helped many people navigate the pitfalls of the EU settlement scheme. Let us say this again: over 320,000 EU citizens are still facing the cruel anxiety of hoping that the Home Office will grant applications before the cliff edge of the end of this month. That is just two weeks to go. I urge the Minister to extend the 30 June deadline, in line with other countries. The deadline for UK citizens in the Netherlands is 30 September. The UK must show the same understanding. The Government cannot afford to get this wrong; the human cost is far too great.

4.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. I hope Members realise that, in the short time I have, I will not be able to cover every issue that has been raised.

I start by thanking the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) for securing the debate. Before I respond to the points that have been made, I

want to emphasise at the outset that the Government are fully committed to ensuring that everybody eligible for the EU settlement scheme—EUSS for short—gets the help they need to apply and that they can apply, with extra support provided to the most vulnerable.

My message is twofold. The first is to encourage everyone who is eligible for the scheme and has not yet applied to do so by 30 June. The second part is to reflect on the huge success of the scheme so far, notwithstanding some of the doubts expressed today. By 31 May 2021, more than 5.6 million applications had been received since the scheme's launch in March 2019. It is continuing to receive and process thousands of applications every day, including all the way through the covid-19 pandemic.

I am delighted that so far the scheme has already given assurance and secure legal status to millions of people who have chosen to make our United Kingdom their home. We are delighted that so many will do so.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Government for all that they have done. What discussions has the Minister had with the Northern Ireland Assembly, which will have some responsibility for raising awareness, to ensure that people in Northern Ireland can access the scheme as quickly as possible?

Kevin Foster: Only yesterday, I was in Northern Ireland talking to two of our grant-funded organisations: the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme, whose chief executive Bernadette Devlin, as people may know, is a former Member of this House; and Advice NI. We talked about the work that they have been doing. We have been directly funding adverts. We are grateful for the support we have received from the devolved Administrations, both in Northern Ireland and, as has been referred to already, in Scotland, with the Stay in Scotland campaign, which the Scottish Government have been running.

I want to make clear a couple of core elements of the scheme. We made the application process simple and straightforward, including the introduction of a digital app to confirm identity, and automated checks of Government data, reducing the need for applicants to provide evidence of residence. We also made it simple by making the criterion residence, not exercising particular free-movement rights. People did not have to prove, for example, that they were working or studying here—just residence was enough. Those familiar with the EEA free-movement regulations will know that they are more complex. We wanted to make it simple and easy, so that it lent itself to quick and simple decision making.

We looked at the EUSS to provide us with a template for how we manage immigration applications and immigration status going forward: fewer physical visits to a visa application centre, less need for physical documents or sending information to the Government that they already have, such as tax records. That enables more simplicity in getting a decision, allowing us to focus resources on supporting and helping the most vulnerable.

Given that there is still debate on the point, I want to be absolutely clear. A person who applies by 30 June 2021 deadline will have their existing rights protected, pending the outcome of the application and any subsequent appeal, if it is not successful. That is achieved by the Citizens' Rights (Application Deadline and Temporary Protection) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020. That is quite

firm. From 1 July, they will be able to rely on their certificate of application as proof to access the right to work or rent, when verified by the relevant Home Office checking service. In essence, that is a process similar to that for those who have been granted status. I want to make that very clear.

Similarly, the scope to make a late application based on reasonable grounds for missing the relevant deadline is indefinite. There is no set time for how long lateness can be deemed reasonable. The example I regularly use is of someone who turns 18 and applies for a job, and discovers that 10 or even 13 years ago the local authority looking after them at the time did not make the application for settled status. We consider that a reasonable ground, even though that may happen 10 or 13 years in the future if they are a young child in the care of a local authority today, or if their parents have not applied for them. The guidance states that for those under 18 at the time the deadline applied. I hope that gives reassurance on that matter.

We are working through a large number of applications, but the vast majority are cleared within less than three months. In many cases, those that have been outstanding for longer are more complex, such as those based on derivative rights that apply to non-EEA nationals as well as EEA nationals, or where there are matters of a relevant history of criminal offending or outstanding prosecutions, where the Home Office cannot proceed to decide the application until those matters have been brought to a conclusion, given that the offence involved would inevitably affect their status here in the UK.

In terms of supporting the most vulnerable, £4.5 million in grant funding was announced on 11 February for 72 organisations across our United Kingdom, who are providing invaluable support and help to vulnerable and hard-to-reach individuals in groups applying to the EU settlement scheme. That was on top of the £17 million already provided, and will ensure the continued delivery of support until at least the end of September 2021. We were keen that there would be funding and support available in the first three months of using digital identity and for those making late applications.

We are really pleased that over 310,000 individuals have been directly supported by these organisations to apply to the scheme to get the status they deserve. This includes a range of people with complex or chaotic lifestyles, and those who are not able to make an application themselves, due to their health. That is in addition to other support that is more generally available, such as the EU Settlement Resolution Centre, We Are Digital, the assisted digital service for applications, and the support available on gov.uk.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Order. I remind the Minister that he has until 4.35 pm, not 4.30 pm.

Kevin Foster: Thank you for the reminder, Sir Gary, which I greatly appreciate. Perhaps it is appropriate to come to the subject of children in care.

Across Government, we are looking to ensure that all eligible looked-after children and care leavers are supported to secure their status under the EUSS, through an application made by 30 June 2021; as I have touched on, we have already made it clear that if the application is not made by someone else who is responsible, then we will accept a late application.

[Kevin Foster]

The total number of looked-after children and care leavers eligible to apply for the EUSS, identified by a survey of 210 local government bodies UK-wide, was 3,600. As of 23 April, 2,440 applications from looked-after children and care leavers have been received, which was 67% of the total identified and an increase from 15,020—46%—back in November. We are now starting to see these applications coming through. To reassure Members, 72% of these applications have been decided, of which 1,365 resulted in a grant of settled status and 235 in a grant of pre-settled status.

I turn now to some specific points raised during the debate. It is worth touching on the issue of digital status. We are developing a border and immigration system that is digital by default. That means that over time we will increasingly replace physical and paper-based documents, some of which can be many years old, with easy-to-use, accessible online and digital services. We are building on this work based on the experience of countries like Australia, which has had fully digital systems for some time. That was highlighted by a letter from the 3million to all Members of Parliament last year.

Individuals will still receive a written notification of immigration status, by email or letter, which they can retain for their own records, but they will be given access to the digital version of their immigration status information, which can be accessed and shared at any time by the online view-and-prove service. Unlike a physical document, this cannot be lost or stolen and, it is also worth bearing in mind, it cannot be retained by someone who is seeking to exploit or abuse it. That status cannot be taken away; it is retained and it can be accessed by public services. It is not a document that someone can physically keep from someone else's possession.

We are already seeing employers and landlords successfully using our online checking services, not least in the context of the pandemic, where performing physical checks on people's rights to work may be a lot more difficult than it would normally have been. We are updating our guidance and communicating to ensure they are clear on the steps they should take at the end of the grace period. That will include additional safeguards for existing EEA employers and tenants who may have missed the deadline, which will include a period of time for people to make a late application to the EUSS. We genuinely believe that will provide a balance, ensuring that those who have taken up employment after 1 July can show status and their right to work. However, we will not require any employer to take retrospective checks on their staff who they have employed previously as EEA nationals, who have passed previous right-to-work checks using a passport or national identity card. We are not requiring anyone to do checks on 1 July retrospectively. There is absolutely no requirement for any employer to do that.

In terms of looking at how the system is working, as some hon. Members commented, between October 2019 and March 2021 the service had over 3.9 million views by individuals and over 330,000 views by organisations checking immigration status. Between January 2019,

when the service was launched for employers, and March 2021, there were over 390,000 views by employers. A similar service to enable right-to-rent checks, which only apply in England, went live in November 2020; between then and March 2021, there have been over 6,500 views by landlords and agents on the online right to rent service. No one should be required to show status under the EUSS until after 30 June, but it can provide a convenient and useful way of proving status to a bank, landlord or employer, hence why people are already taking the opportunity to use it.

When it comes to conversion from pre-settled to settled, we will take a proactive approach of seeking to remind people when that is due. People will start to be required to convert in 2023. It would be difficult to go to an automatic conversion, given the reality that somebody may not be intending to settle in the UK, or may not have stayed in the UK having been initially granted pre-settled status. But we will look to proactively remind people. To be clear, it is a free-of-charge application and there are similar criteria for reasonable grounds for a late application to convert as well; unsurprisingly, they will be similar to the non-exhaustive guidance that we have published in relation to those making a late application at this stage, as we feel that is a reasonable and proportionate approach.

On looking at the issue of names in passports, I take on board the point that sometimes people discover what is in the machine-readable zone of their national passport when they apply for a status with the Home Office. That is not something that affects only the EUSS; it also affects wider immigration statuses. Members will appreciate why we put quite a lot of store into making sure we have secure identity and that we link people clearly to the identity status that they use to apply to the scheme. I appreciate that can produce some issues in countries where it is less easy to convert a passport so that it shows a married name rather than a maiden name than under the system we have here in the UK, but it is an important part of how our system operates that we have that security.

On having a digital system that allows people to apply from home, we are increasingly moving towards systems that will read someone's passport rather than require them to go to an application centre to prove their status—the British nationals overseas route is a good example, where many apply from home using their BNO or their HKSAR passport to prove their identity to the Home Office. We will consider whether improvements can be made, but there is the basis of real security that we need to maintain, so that we do not have opportunities for different identities in applications being submitted.

The EU settlement scheme has been a success. It has given security and certainty to millions of people and is a genuine success of which we can be proud as a nation. I encourage all who are eligible who have not yet applied to do so as soon as possible. Support is available online, on the phone and in person through grant-funded organisations to help them apply.

Question put and agreed to.

4.35 pm

Sitting suspended.

Road Connectivity: Teesside to Scotland

4.50 pm

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice to support the new hybrid arrangements. Timings of debates have been amended to allow technical arrangements to be made for the next debate. There are also suspensions between each debate.

I remind Members participating physically and virtually that they must arrive for the start of debates in Westminster Hall. Members are expected to remain for the entire debate. We have no Members participating virtually, so I do not need to say the next bit. Members attending physically, however, should clean their spaces before they use them and as they leave the room. I remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the A68 and road connectivity from Teesside to Scotland.

Left behind, ignored, forgotten, neglected, overlooked, the rust belt—those are the synonymous phrases often used to describe the communities that make up the towns and villages for whom the A68 is their key artery. There are many different descriptions but, politically speaking, the phrase I heard most often is that Labour had taken their community and their vote for granted forever. I am sure that that is felt on the streets of the towns and villages not only of North West Durham, from Crook to Castleside, from Willington to Wearhead, but of my neighbours in Bishop Auckland, Sedgefield and Darlington.

Running from Darlington through Sedgefield to Bishop Auckland, up through my constituency, before dropping into Northumberland and over the Scottish border, the constituencies along the A68 have names synonymous with new Labour—Tony Blair, Alan Milburn, Hilary Armstrong—seats referred to as the red wall, now the blue wall. However, that is a mythical construct of political scientists and commentators. The A68 is very much real-world hardcore, a real rather than a metaphorical construction. The A68 is now the blue road.

The Prime Minister, on his visit to Sedgefield in December 2019, following the general election, understood that: the pencil hovering over the ballot paper before breaking the voting habit of generations. I want the people of the north-east to know that I will repay their trust—and trust is the key word. The Prime Minister had recognised that the trust between their previous MPs and their constituents had been broken. We can see why around the A68.

I have with me the County Durham plan of 1951—thanks to the Library of the House of Commons, which was able to source it for me from a research library. It was produced the year after my constituency of North West Durham was created. In it, my constituency had three railway lines to Consett alone, along with others to the south, and new plans for roads and bypasses, including on the A68. When I was elected, the big improvements on the A68, including the Toft Hill bypass, marked in 1951, still had not been done. Seventy years on, it still has not. Seven decades on, there are

now no railway lines or stations at all in my constituency. The road improvements have not been done. Is it any surprise that people felt that trust had been broken?

In that time, we switched the rest of our railway network from coal to diesel and, increasingly, electric. Seventy years ago, Winston Churchill was Prime Minister. We had not even had the Suez crisis. The treaty of Rome was still a glint in the eye of European leaders. King George VI was on the throne. Labour have, for 70 years, taken North West Durham, much of the rest of the north-east of England, the north of England, Wales, Scotland and the midlands for granted. Only last month, in County Durham we saw Labour finally lose control of the council after 102 years. Things are changing.

I am pleased to say that, with the restoring your railway funding, I have submitted plans for enhanced cycling and walking, better disabled access and examination of options for a new public transport route between Consett and the Tyne. In the south of my constituency, alongside my hon. Friends the Members for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison), for Darlington (Peter Gibson) and for Sedgefield (Paul Howell), backed up by Ben Houchen, the Mayor of Tees Valley, I am leading the support for the new restoring your railway bid for the Darlington and Durham dales railway line.

When I was elected, the Shotley Bridge Community Hospital, which a couple of decades ago was a maternity hospital, was going to be rebuilt with no beds—a hospital with no beds. Thanks to the campaign, I have now ensured that we will get 16 beds, which is double the number in the current facility.

I am campaigning for bus routes to Weardale and Burnhope, to bring those physical connections back to cut-off communities. I am campaigning for broadband for places such as Muggleswick and Maiden Law, so that they have the connections that will allow our businesses to compete and individuals to connect in the 21st century.

What we have not yet seen enough movement on is the A68. For the communities of Crook and Weardale to be able to make the most of the opportunities being created in Teesside—from the freeport to the excellent new jobs coming at the Treasury and other Departments—the Toft Hill bypass and the Darlington bypass need to be prioritised. At firms such as Elldis Transport, a fourth generation family firm run by Nigel Cook, whom I met recently, drivers are still having to make difficult journeys on an A68 suitable for previous generations.

For people in Castleside, it is clear that the long-term siting of a major road through the centre of their village is no longer an option. It is time for the A68 to be put on the strategic road network because it is an arterial route. It carries a far greater proportion of its traffic as heavy goods vehicles than most other roads in a similar category. It is the third route to Scotland between the M1 and the A1.

Whether it is upgrading the A1 or the east coast main line or getting the Leamside line up and running, we north MPs here today are all supportive, and are all backing each other up. The A68 is the clear next step. We want our communities to be able to thrive and for our local private sectors not to be hemmed in, so that good jobs can be created and, in turn, help fund our great public services.

[Mr Richard Holden]

Our communities are already seeing the difference Conservative MPs make. In his speech in Sedgefield, the Prime Minister said:

“Our country has now embarked on a wonderful new adventure and we are going to recover our national self-confidence... and we are going to do things differently and better.”

Seventy years on from the initial plans, it is now time to do things better. It is time to cement the foundations and the economic bonds and to enhance those community ties with a road like the A68, which is strategically so important, to help unite our Union.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Order. It may help if I set out the timings for this 60-minute debate. The Front-Bench speeches will take 20 minutes in total, and therefore wind-ups will begin at roughly 5.30 pm. That is better news than I indicated previously. Colleagues do not have to take their full time, but each speech can now be between seven and 10 minutes.

4.58 pm

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship today, Sir Gary, and to be called to speak in today's debate, which has been so ably led by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden). He has been a tireless campaigner for infrastructure in the north. I congratulate him on securing this important debate.

Improving connectivity in areas that have been left behind for too long must be central to our goal of levelling up. The A68 is not just a central artery of northern transport infrastructure and connectivity. While it links Darlington with Edinburgh, more than 128 miles away, it is also vital to our cultural connectivity, linking the communities of Darlington, Sedgefield, Bishop Auckland and Hexham.

At its southern tip in the heart of my constituency, the A68 provides access to the A1(M) at junction 58. Much of the northbound traffic has to snake its way through residential areas such as Cockerton and Faverdale, causing congestion and emissions. Much of the traffic could be directed on to the A1 at junction 57, if it only had a northbound entry slip road.

At the northern end of my constituency, our outer ring road is incomplete. The A1(M) and the A66, which was recently awarded long overdue upgrading, form three quarters of the ring road, but the section between Great Burdon and junction 59 of the A1(M) does not exist. Although the entirety of the route falls in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Paul Howell), he knows the benefits it will have for Darlington.

The missing section causes traffic to snake through residential parts of north Darlington such as Whinfield and Harrowgate Hill, causing congestion and emissions. My campaign for this long overdue piece of infrastructure is essential to the success of the County Durham economy and its connectivity, and will be key to accessing our new freeport located throughout the Tees valley. Delivering the bypass will be the last piece in our ring road jigsaw. My two key asks for road infrastructure feed into the improvements to the A68 itself and access to it.

Over the past 18 months, the Government have committed to revolutionising the north-east by giving targeted money to make the biggest impact, from £105 million

being invested in Darlington's Bank Top station to £23.3 million being invested in Darlington through the towns fund, or the delivery of “Treasury North” and a freeport on Teesside, the Government are delivering on their levelling-up agenda. However, much more is needed to equal the investment that others have so heavily benefited from and to revitalise our road network, improve connectivity, reduce emissions and deliver on our region's full potential.

As we build back better, seeking to cut congestion and the consequent waste emissions, road improvements must be central to our recovery. The new road will cut gridlock and the nightmare that has been caused to my constituents in Darlington. I know I am not alone in wanting to cut gridlock and reduce emissions for my constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison) is also campaigning for her own bypass on the A68 to cut gridlock and improve road safety at Toft Hill. Likewise, my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield is campaigning for rail improvements. Collectively, along with my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham, we are all campaigning for the reintroduction of services from Darlington to the Durham dales.

With the opening of the £4.8 billion levelling-up fund in March this year and the upcoming independent Union connectivity review, I look forward to working with my hon. Friends from across the region to explore the opportunities for investment that that will bring. I know, and the people of Darlington know, that the Government are serious about delivering on their ambitious levelling-up agenda, and I will continue to press the Government to deliver for the north-east.

5.2 pm

Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) on securing this important debate.

Colleagues will know that I regularly appear when the matter of regional connectivity and levelling up are pertinent to the debate, so here I am. Today I want to talk about how improving the A68 and connectivity from Durham and Teesside to Scotland is important in the levelling-up agenda.

A great deal of investment in transport infrastructure is needed to realise the Government's levelling-up agenda. I have spoken in this place before about bus, coaches and trains strategies. All of those initiatives rely on adequate physical foundations being put in place. The A68 is currently not an adequate physical foundation. As it currently exists, the A68 is a single carriageway, save for two small sections where it meets larger roads such as the A1(M) and the A69. Ultimately, if someone gets stuck behind a slow driver and there is too much traffic, bottlenecking occurs and the whole journey speed is compromised and/or dangerous risks are taken. I know that all too well, as in a previous life I regularly commuted between Durham and Edinburgh. It is dangerous, and has been for many years.

Durham County Council has simply not given the road the work that it needs to be maintained or improved. As far back as 1951, it was suggested that a bypass be installed at Toft Hill, yet no move was made to erect it and ease congestion. The A68 is not just a regional

road; it is nationally significant and an artery that requires investment and managing in that context. Although the A68 serves west County Durham in the main, the whole of the county would benefit from improvements to the road. To the south of my constituency, the A68 crosses the A1 close to Aycliffe business park, which has a great many businesses. The business park is deliberately located near the A1, which is a main commuter artery to London, but also to Newcastle and Scotland. Any blockage on the A1, however, means that my constituents and their businesses are wholly reliant on the A68. As the A1 is single-carriageway further north too, its own congestion problems can easily arise.

When it comes to congestion problems, there are significant issues in Darlington, as my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) just outlined, relating to the transport links between the A1(M) and Teesside with traffic from the north, and, in particular, from the 10,000-job industrial estate in Newton Aycliffe and the freeport scheduled in Teesside. The Darlington northern bypass, which is in my Sedgefield constituency but would massively impact on efficient connectivity and congestion, is another critical artery that needs delivery. Businesses such as Hitachi in Newton Aycliffe need to make significant diversions to avoid Darlington, which adds both cost and carbon to everything they do.

Should the A68 be better managed, my constituents would not rely on the A1 and would have much better road links to Scotland, for both tourist and commercial journeys, making northerly business ventures faster and more reliable. That would serve to make northern towns and cities better connected. I have already put my name to three bids to improve the rail transport in and around the constituency—namely Ferryhill, Leamside and the Durham dales line, which connects Bishop and Weardale, through Darlington, on the edge of my Sedgefield constituency.

Today, I am asserting that the road infrastructure must complement any improvements in rail, because currently County Durham is very car reliant. Out of 228,000 people found to work in County Durham, only 2,000 use the train to commute. Buses are slightly better at 13,000, but the car is the main mode of transport, with 164,000 people opting to use one to get to work.

Although I would clearly like to see a shift in the number of people using the railway, and we need to drive the “Bus Back Better” plans to get road infrastructure that is fit for purpose, the fact remains that there are many cars on the road in County Durham, and they need catering for. Those who own a car are reliant on it. Those without one find leaving the local area and expanding their opportunities very difficult. To realise their potential, people and businesses in south Durham and Teesside must be able to reach Scotland in a decent journey time in order to reach new markets and customers.

Infrastructure investment is undoubtedly a key economic driver, helping both the national economy and regional and county economies attract and retain businesses and jobs. This investment has been acknowledged to be needed most critically away from London and the south-east. The Government’s industrial strategy states that the UK has a greater disparity in regional productivity than other European countries, which in turn causes disparity regionally in people’s pay, opportunities and life chances.

Nationally, it is recognised that our transport infrastructure needs to support UK business growth, not only in terms of supporting the movement of people and goods but in respect of providing more efficient means of transport and reducing journey times, which is precisely what we are discussing today. It is therefore imperative that improvements be made on these roads in the north-east as the Government deliver on their commitment to level up and improve the micro-economies and opportunities in the north of the country. Taking ownership and delivering critical arteries is fundamental, and I ask the Minister to keep this at the top of his agenda.

5.8 pm

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary.

My hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) and I have many things in common and many common interests, but the one that really united us from the get-go—it was not pints of lager anywhere near the Red Lion—was in fact our passion for the A68 and our joint commitment to making it the monolithic structure it should be: a proper road that is part of the strategic road network. I have been working with him since we were elected to try to make that happen, and the campaign continues. I see the Minister’s ears pricking up. I hope he has heard us, but we will continue to remind him until it is done.

In a past life, before I became a Member of this place, I used to drive the A68 every day to go to work, from High Etherley, just near Toft Hill—hon. Members will hear me mention it a few times, so I thought I would get started early—right up towards Annfield Plain. Every day, I faced absolute torment trying to drive through Toft Hill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) mentioned the disaster when the A68 goes right through those residential zones, the congestion and the issues it causes for local residents and their quality of life. As a commuter, it used to add 15 to 20 minutes on to my journey time to drive a mile-long stretch. It was absolutely disastrous and something has to be done about it.

During the general election, I went out around Toft Hill and High Etherley with some surveys and asked local residents about the key concern on their mind. Universally, across the board, the issue that came back on 90% of all surveys from those who did bother to respond, was building the bypass in Toft Hill finally.

We have heard today from all three of my colleagues from the County Durham area—my hon. Friends the Members for North West Durham, for Darlington and for Sedgefield (Paul Howell)—about how the Toft Hill bypass was in and promised by the County Durham plan back in 1951. We are 70 years down the line and it has still not been delivered. It is an absolute disgrace, but I have some good news, which will come up later in this speech.

Residents told me in the survey that they wanted a bypass. The local parish council has been campaigning fiercely for a bypass for decades. My predecessor even presented a petition to this place in 2018, calling for a bypass to be built, and yet it was not done. I made building the Toft Hill bypass a key part of my general election pledges. It was one of my five pledges and I have worked on it non-stop since I was elected.

[Dehenna Davison]

The issues for residents of Toft Hill and Etherley are vast. It is not just cars whizzing by; it is parking on both sides of the street, heavy goods vehicles and other heavy vehicles trying to get through, right next to a primary school that is just feet away from the road, with a school crossing. The congestion can be absolutely crippling. The road safety aspect cannot be understated. A few years ago, one of my constituents, as was raised by my predecessor, was sitting at home in her living room when a van came speeding down the road, ran straight into her living room and completely destroyed her property. She was out of her home for months waiting for it to be rebuilt. That shows just how much of a road safety priority it is to get the Toft Hill bypass built.

The local parish council has been pushing for this for years. I have only been in post for a year and a half, but I have been non-stop nagging the Transport Secretary and basically anyone else who will listen about this bypass. In the national scheme of things, it may seem small and insignificant, but for residents of Toft Hill, High Etherley and the surrounding areas it is absolutely crucial. I have raised it with the council and the director of regeneration, Amy Harhoff, at our very first meeting. She asked me what my local priorities were and I think she expected me to talk about all sorts of job creation measures, which we got on to later, but the very first thing I raised was the Toft Hill bypass. I told her that, working with her in partnership, that was the key project I wanted to get completed in my first term as a Member of Parliament.

I raised it with the chief exec of the council, who I think is absolutely sick of hearing me utter the words “Toft Hill bypass”, but he has been fantastic in helping me to facilitate the campaign. I have also raised it with Government, the Transport Secretary, the Leader of the House, in the Chamber and privately with countless Ministers, including the Communities Secretary and the Chancellor. I really hope they are listening, because this is crucial for Toft Hill.

We had our local elections a few short months ago and I am delighted to say that, going from one Conservative and one Labour ward, we took the ward in which Toft Hill sits, with two Conservative councillors, and one of their key election pledges was getting the Toft Hill bypass built. The good news that I promised earlier is that, thanks to the incredibly hard work of Amy Harhoff and Dave Wafer at Durham County Council, and countless other officers and campaigners from Toft Hill parish council and Etherley parish council, we now have a bid that will be going in to the levelling-up fund in the next few days calling for the bypass finally to be built. We have a plan and are asking the Government for the money, so Minister, please tell me you are listening and please put a good word in for me with the powers that be.

Finally, after decades of inaction and, I am afraid to say, of Labour promising and not delivering, I hope, after 18 months in this place, to get some good news and get the Toft Hill bypass approved and delivered in my first term as an MP.

I know West Auckland residents of in my constituency are concerned about the proposed bypass. They want a bigger bypass that would go past both Toft Hill and West Auckland. We believe that was discussed in earlier

plans, 20 or 30 years ago—I think before I was born. I think there are concerns that the bypass will bring new congestion into West Auckland. I want to reassure any residents of West Auckland that that will not be the case. It will be the same traffic that is already coming into the village. There will be no worsening. I certainly agree with local residents, however, that the next phase has to be completing the bypass around West Auckland. Unfortunately, given the amount of time we had for the levelling-up fund bid, the hoops we have to jump through and the amount of funding available, it is not possible at this stage.

I hope he will forgive me but I say to the Transport Secretary—I hope he is listening—that I am coming to you at the moment for the Toft Hill bypass, but as soon as the ink is dry I will be nagging you once more for the next bypass, the West Auckland bypass. I hope that local residents of West Auckland hear me loud and clear when I say that that will be my next major transport priority. Mum always said, “If you don’t ask, you don’t get,” so I figured I would throw it in early.

I am delighted that we have had this debate on the importance of the A68, and that I have had the opportunity to discuss the importance of completing the Toft Hill bypass. The levelling-up bid will be going in this week, and I hope that any Ministers present and any who happen to be reading *Hansard* in the middle of the night this evening will take that bid on board, and grant us the bypass for which local residents have been calling for so long.

5.15 pm

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) for having secured today’s debate and for raising some very fair concerns about the A68. Having driven up and down it several times in the past, I can certainly attest to sometimes being caught behind slow-moving vehicles. The connections between Teesside and Scotland are critical, and as a Scottish MP I am not going to comment on the details of what needs to be done by way of road improvements for the south. Those improvements would undoubtedly benefit my constituents as they travel southwards, but there are clearly others in the room far more qualified than me to discuss the details of issues in their own constituencies. However, I certainly understand the need to improve connectivity and the importance of an arterial route to boost economic growth for the south—I know most Members here would refer to it as the north, but it is the south—and to help folk get out to our marvellous country more easily.

These days, in terms of traffic flow the A68 border route plays second fiddle to the A1 in the east and the M6 and M74 in the west, but it is a central route. It remains one of the most beautiful and important routes between our nations, not least the section through my own Midlothian constituency, where it terminates—not Edinburgh but Midlothian: a wee technical point for locals. It might not be the most timely or efficient route, but it makes for a beautiful, hilly, dramatic meander through Northumberland’s forests into the historic border town of Jedburgh and up that way to our finest of counties, Midlothian. The border itself is worthy of a pit stop and picnic—that is if drivers do not take time out for a toastie at the Camien Cafe, which I understand is the last café in England, and a fine pit stop.

The A68 is, of course, a route steeped in history, passed by many a king, a queen, and a border reiver over the centuries. Portions of it follow the Roman road, Dere Street, and it takes us to the site of the largest outpost of the Roman empire north of Hadrian's Wall, the Trimontium fort near Melrose. It was established around 80 AD, and for most of its existence it was the main forward base for the continued yet unsuccessful attempts by Rome to invade and occupy Scotland. Drivers who were lucky enough to have been on the A68 last Friday might have spotted yet another relic, with legendary Hollywood actor Harrison Ford on site making the latest "Indiana Jones" film in the shadow of the Leaderfoot viaduct.

Of course, the A68 lost much of the bustle in my part of the world when the Dalkeith bypass opened in 2008. This took custom from one of the famous coaching inns serving the route, the Old Meal Market, which had many a tale to tell of hauntings and highwayman. The A68 also lost its final run into the city of Edinburgh: it now finishes at the city bypass, the A720. Incidentally, if we are looking at other priorities for investment, that would be right at the top of my list, although that is a matter for another day and, dare I say, another Parliament.

Historical importance is one thing, but we also have to recognise the historical underspend there has been on this creaking network, particularly in the north. We are playing catch-up in so many areas, and lots of improvements are needed to cut the risk of accidents and make the A68 a much safer route for all who use it. Indeed, many of those points have already been made by other Members in this debate. The hilly parts of the route make it all the more challenging to maintain and improve, and just last year we were very lucky that there was not a major accident when thunderstorms and heavy rain caused the A68 to collapse at the Fala embankment, near the town of Pathhead in my constituency. I have huge respect for the massive effort that went in, and for the speedy and efficient repairs carried out by the engineers at BEAR Scotland, who managed to get the route back up and running in a phenomenally short period of time. Having visited the site and seen the extent of the damage after the incident, I was astonished when the timeline they had presented was actually achieved—all credit to them.

I am genuinely supportive of calls for improvements to the A68 and better connectivity with all our friends, trading partners and neighbours across the border. We are no longer supposed to be living in the dark ages of Tory-rule diktat, however, and it is important that decisions on cross-border road improvements are taken with full respect for the democratically elected Governments of each nation. For that reason, I have some difficulty with the Union connectivity review, which assesses transport connectivity between nations of the United Kingdom in a unilateral fashion.

The Scottish Government have robust evidence and the insight to make better informed decisions on transport spending and priorities in Scotland. As I mentioned, we have already had a Dalkeith bypass approved, and it did not take us 70 years to achieve that—it took devolution. The focus needs to be on projects to improve lives, boost the economy, support communities, and work towards net zero. That is how the Scottish Government are planning Scotland's future transport infrastructure

investment. They are doing so much through the second strategic transport projects review, not the Union connectivity review.

Sadly, that review was established without meaningful discussion with the devolved Administrations, and it seems like another attempt to directly encroach into areas in which funding should be devolved. Existing joint working groups of the Scottish and UK Governments, such as on the border growth deal, are far more meaningful frameworks for bilateral relationships between the two Governments. As Friday's match will no doubt show, the rivalries between Scotland and England can be fierce, but they can also be the best of friends, and it is important that we can engage constructively when it matters. A bit of respect must be shown on both sides.

I am proud that Scotland will show solidarity with England on Friday by taking the knee against racism. Similarly, I hope that our Governments can engage meaningfully over mutually beneficial projects, such as road infrastructure connectivity, through proper channels. I offer a friendly warning to the UK Government that any attempt to undermine the Scottish Government and to claw back powers that have already been devolved will be strongly resisted and—dare I say?—they will be sent homeward to think again.

5.22 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is, as always, a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Gary. I congratulate the hon. Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) on securing the debate. I very much look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say in response to so many of his colleagues' passionate pleas for investment in their constituencies, so I do not intend to speak for too long.

It is incredibly important that we improve connectivity between the UK's regions and nations. That should be absolutely at the heart of Government policy, whether in the south-west of England, where the seat I represent is, or in the north-east. I was slightly baffled by some of what the hon. Gentleman said about the 1951 county plan. I was not quite around in those days, but I am pretty sure that there was an election that year that was won by the Conservatives, and that in the 70 years since then, as much as I wish it were not so, the Conservatives have won far more elections than Labour—they were in Government for 46 years out of 70, by my rough calculations.

The things about which the hon. Gentleman spoke—investment in roads and rail, and he mentioned a local hospital and broadband—are by and large the responsibility of national Government. They are certainly reliant on central Government funding. I am not quite sure, then, why he is pointing the finger. Well, I am sure. I know why he is pointing the finger at a Labour-led council rather than the Government, but that does not reflect the true picture of why the area has not received the investment it needs.

I do not think it very helpful to dwell on that point. We should focus more on what we have in common than on what divides us, as my very sadly missed colleague Jo Cox would have said. We all have a desire to improve transport links to reduce congestion and to improve road safety, and I hope that we also share a commitment to environmental objectives. That is not to

[Kerry McCarthy]

say that the Labour party would oppose all the road provisions, but we very much want to see them within the framework of tackling air pollution and reducing carbon emissions.

We had a debate in this room this morning on the much-awaited and long-delayed transport decarbonisation plan. I made the point that the Government are committed to that huge £27 billion-worth of spending on road infrastructure but the Transport Secretary ignored the advice of his civil servants to carry out an environmental impact assessment. It is not my role to take a view on what local projects are needed. That is for locally elected representatives, and I would not want them to do that in my patch. However, I hope that we measure things against the impact on the natural environment and overall contribution to getting to net zero, because that cannot be done just by a shift to electric vehicles. We have to discourage road travel and give people alternatives, whether that is investment in rail or buses, as has been mentioned, or other means.

There is also something to be said about spending on basic road maintenance, the budget for which has been slashed. There is now a £11 billion backlog for pothole repairs. Those sorts of things really matter to people in the villages that Members have talked about. [Interruption.] I thought the Minister was leaving—when I mentioned potholes, he put on his jacket and I thought he had had enough and was off. Those things really matter to local people, as well as flagship new bypasses.

On the A68, I am not familiar with that part of the world, although I did once go for a night out at Trimdon Colliery social club in the constituency of the hon. Member for Sedgfield (Paul Howell), so I may have travelled on that road. Needless to say, it was when the then local Member of Parliament was also the Prime Minister and I was a constituency member of Labour's national policy forum. We had a night out and I remember that lots of pies were delivered, which, being vegan, I could not eat, and then we went down the chip shop. Phil Wilson, the former MP for Sedgfield, delights in saying that the shop still talks about these strange out-of-towners and southerners descending on Trimdon Colliery chip shop, asking what the chips were cooked in. But I digress. Actually, I looked at a map and noticed that Toft Hill is very close to Barnard Castle, which is the other interesting fact I have to share about the area.

On the issue of road safety, I spoke to my Teesside colleagues, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham), who said that the A68 is well known for the number of blind summits on route, and the statistics show that it is one of the most dangerous A roads in Britain, with an accident rate of 2.7 for every 1 million vehicles. I would welcome the Minister setting out what can be done to tackle that issue. People do not want to be stuck in the queues that the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison) spoke about, but road safety is absolutely imperative.

I will conclude by saying again that we all want to see investment and levelling up, no matter where we represent. The Government could do more, however, including by making rail affordable and creating the rail connectivity that we do not have. I am sure my former colleague Andrew Burnham in Greater Manchester bends Ministers'

ears very frequently—perhaps even more often than the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland. We all want to see improvements, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

5.28 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Andrew Stephenson): It is pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary, and to respond to the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden) on securing this debate on a topic that I know is very close to his heart and to those of all who have spoken today about the vital route connecting communities through County Durham, Northumbria and onwards to Scotland.

Like many, this year I will have a staycation rather than a vacation. I already have it booked in Durham and in Scotland, so I look forward to sampling for myself the A68 and the picnics and cafés in what is a very beautiful part of the world.

Dehenna Davison: Will the Minister consider a trip to Barnard Castle to view the delights that our wonderful market town has to offer?

Andrew Stephenson: I will consider such a kind invitation. I look forward to viewing the local sights and sampling the hospitality, and Barnard Castle or the A68 may be on the list.

Paul Howell: To complement that offer, the chip shop next to Trimdon Colliery, otherwise known as Deaf Hill, is also somewhere the Minister could not miss.

Andrew Stephenson: I will bear that in mind.

Some colleagues may not be aware that, while I firmly hail from the north-west of England, my family on my father's side come very firmly from the north-east of England. My father grew up in Shildon, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison). My grandmother was from Ferryhill—

Paul Howell: That's mine.

Andrew Stephenson: In my hon. Friend's constituency. My grandfather worked as a bus driver in Darlington, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson). So I have connections and many family members living across the north-east of England. I am delighted to have listened to the speeches from my colleagues in the north-east, who represent that part of the world so well.

As has been said, the A68 is not a strategic road, and therefore decisions will be reserved to the local highways authorities it passes through. But I assure Members that the Department for Transport works constructively with all partners to ensure that our road infrastructure is fit for purpose and funded appropriately, investing in a road network that maximises economic growth and supports thriving local communities.

To that end, the Government are wholeheartedly committed to delivering on their vision of levelling up the British economy and strengthening the bonds of our Union. Improved transport connectivity is fundamental

to that vision, unlocking the economic potential of the northern powerhouse, building back better following this awful pandemic, and ensuring that the north of England plays a key role in a resurgent UK economy. That is why my Department, led by the Secretary of State, who is also the Cabinet Minister responsible for the northern powerhouse, is at the forefront of making this vision a reality.

Since 2010, more than £29 billion has been invested in transport infrastructure in the north, but at the Department for Transport we want to go further and faster. Levelling up all parts of the United Kingdom is at the centre of the Government's agenda, with a White Paper in development, led by the Prime Minister himself. Transport will be a fundamental part of that vision. While the White Paper is being developed, we are already making strides on investment and strengthening the voice of the north. Significant progress has already been made: over 60% of the north of England is now covered by metro Mayors, offering a strong voice to the people, as well as access to new funding opportunities, particularly for transport.

As part of the devolution deal for the Tees Valley Combined Authority, £126 million was secured, including local growth funds, an investment fund and local transport funding, and there is more to come. The intercity transport settlements announced in the 2020 budget will deliver £4.2 billion to mayoral city regions over the next five years, from 2022-23. That is on top of the £4.8 billion levelling-up fund, underlining our commitment to a robust UK economy firing on all cylinders and maximising economic opportunities for all parts of the country.

The levelling-up fund can be used to support projects such as the A68, so I am delighted to hear that a bid is going in, and I look forward to seeing that bid alongside what I am sure will be many other bids from across the country. That funding will help to level up the region, supporting Mayors who have the powers and the ambition to help their city regions prosper. Indeed, the Government welcome the hard work of the Mayor of Tees Valley, Ben Houchen, who has worked constructively with the Department on a range of transport initiatives, from securing the future of Teesside International airport to delivering improvements to Darlington and Middlesbrough stations and accelerating upgrades to a range of road projects. The Government look forward to receiving proposals from other local authorities in the north-east for a new devolution deal, establishing a Mayor with additional transport powers for the area.

With the right investment, the north-east of England can truly be the cornerstone of a thriving northern powerhouse. Tees Valley received £76 million from the transforming cities fund to improve intercity connectivity. The restoring your railways initiative, which was mentioned by a number of Members, has seen a new station secured for Ferryhill. My hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham should be commended for his work on campaigning for the opening of the Weardale line and the Consett-Tyne rail link. But we should not forget the basics, either. Over £80 million will be spent across the north-east to support highways maintenance, pothole repairs and local transport measures, through 2021-22, meaning smoother, safer and more reliable journeys for not just motorists but bus passengers and cyclists.

We should not consider the north-east of England in isolation. We want the regions to be joined up, with strong north-south connections, especially to Scotland, enabling unencumbered movement of people and goods between our nations. When we work together UK-wide, we are safer, stronger and more prosperous. Together, we are better able to tackle the big problems, from defending our borders and fighting national security threats, to delivering the furlough scheme or the world-beating vaccination roll-out.

The Government are already taking huge strides to strengthen our Union and level up every single part of the country. We are determined to build back better in a way that brings every corner of the UK closer together, making it easier to reach friends, family and businesses from different parts of the UK. I must admit, as the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) mentioned, that our close bonds of friendship with those north of the border may be tested somewhat for 90 minutes on Friday, but, whatever the result, that will not shake the Government's commitment to strengthen the Union.

We are working to ensure that the institutions of the United Kingdom are used in a way that benefits everybody from Aberdeen to Aylesbury, from Belfast to Brecon. The independent Union connectivity review is key to realising these ambitions. I hear what the hon. Member for Midlothian says, and I can assure him that we intend to work collaboratively and in partnership with the Scottish Government to ensure that the proposals that are brought forward by Sir Peter are ones that we can all get behind and support.

While we eagerly await Sir Peter's review, the Government are far from resting on our laurels. We are acting now to strengthen the links between England and Scotland. The borderlands growth deal will realise a new era of regeneration opportunity, as we build back better from the pandemic, bringing £452 million of fresh investment into the borderlands area, driving economic growth and strengthening cross-border links.

Making stronger links between Scotland and England a reality requires investment and delivery on the ground. Roads such as the A68 are the lifeblood of the north-east's economy, and fundamental to getting people and goods to Scotland. That is why the Department is investing £700 million in the strategic road network in the north-east between 2020 and 2025.

I am sure that my hon. Friends from the Tees Valley will share my joy that the A19 is one of the chief recipients of the road investment in the region, with up to £70 million secured to upgrade that road. We are also improving the A69 Bridge End junction in Hexham, to reduce congestion and improve journey times and safety for all road users. The scheme will improve connectivity within the region, including some journeys that use both the A68 and the A69.

The energy we are devoting to delivering transformative transport projects now is matched by our ambitions for further improvements in the future. The Department is starting work to develop the third road investment strategy, known as RIS3, which will set Highways England's objectives and funding for the period 2025 to 2030. RIS3 decision making will be underpinned by a strong evidence base that will be assessed over the next couple of years. We want to understand people's priorities for the strategic road network over the RIS3 period and

[Andrew Stephenson]

beyond, recognising that people will have a variety of views, whether as road users or as neighbours to the network.

Highways England has a central role to play in this evidence-gathering process. It has recently written to key stakeholders, including parliamentarians, mayors and local authorities across the country, inviting them to get involved in its work to refresh our route strategies. Route strategies assess the current performance and future pressures on every part of the strategic network, identifying the priority locations for future improvements. They are one of the principal ways for people to inform our decisions for RIS3, and I encourage colleagues here today to get involved and to reiterate the points they have all made about the significance of the A68.

In the meantime, we are getting on with improvements, such as investing in the A1. In recent years, we have extended motorway conditions along the A1 to Newcastle, so there is a continuous motorway link south, all the way through the midlands and to London, for the first time. We are extending the dual carriageway northwards to Ellingham, with work planned to start next year. A total of 13 miles of road will be upgraded between Morpeth, Felton, Alnwick and Ellingham. As we develop our next road investment strategy, we will consider the case for further work improving the road onward to Berwick-upon-Tweed.

However, our attention should not focus just on those schemes that have commanded the largest price tags. As many of my hon. Friends have done today, we must also shine a spotlight on the smaller schemes, which nevertheless are of huge importance to local communities and businesses. That is why I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland, who, ever since her election, has been pressing hard for the Toft Hill bypass. As the road in question, the A68, is a local road, it is for Durham County Council to promote such a scheme. I advise her to maintain her pressure on the county council, but I will certainly look with interest at the bid that is coming in as part of the levelling-up fund and is supported by the council.

Other local schemes also need consideration. My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington talked eloquently about the Darlington northern bypass. I fully appreciate the benefits that the scheme could bring in bringing better connectivity between Newton Aycliffe and Tees Valley, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his campaigning on this issue. I know that my noble Friend Baroness Vere, the Roads Minister, would be happy to meet him, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgfield (Paul Howell), to discuss the scheme.

As important as these local connections are in the region, we should recognise that Tees Valley can play a real role in the global economy as well. That is why I was pleased to see Teesside announced at the Budget as one of the eight successful freeport bids in England. That will establish the region as a national hub for international trade, innovation and commerce, while regenerating our local communities. Freeports will play

a significant role in boosting trade, attracting inward investment and driving productivity across the UK. That will level up communities through increased employment opportunities. That is more important than ever as we begin the recovery from the ongoing economic crisis that we have been left in by covid-19.

I am grateful to all my colleagues for today's very insightful debate. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham welcomes the updates that I have provided, which make it clear that the Department and the Government at large are committed to levelling up transport infrastructure in the north and strengthening the bonds of our Union.

Sir Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Thank you, Minister. I call Richard Holden to have the final word.

5.41 pm

Mr Holden: As every other hon. Member has said today, it is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Gary. Thank you for everything that you have done for us today.

I say to my hon. Friend the Minister, as bids have been made by my fellow County Durham and Darlington colleagues for a visit during your break, that you are more than welcome to pop along with me to Frosterley fish bar or Craven's in Wolsingham. They are two of my favourites, although I have to say to the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) that they do specialise in frying their stuff in beef dripping, so I do not think it would tick her box, unfortunately.

I welcome the support from the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) for general transport schemes. I just hope that he still supports the schemes we are proposing after Friday—whatever happens. I would also just like to point out that there are some parts of my constituency in which we could refer to Scotland as being part of the south, because we do go quite a way north, really, on the other side of the country.

I welcome the hon. Member for Bristol East and thank her for some of the points she mentioned. I am also, obviously, grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Darlington (Peter Gibson), for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison) and for Sedgfield (Paul Howell), who have raised really important issues, particularly on the need for road infrastructure to be there in order for our bus infrastructure to come and to support that as well. In particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland raised issues about road safety and how important that is. Perhaps now we should share our second passion, aside from the A68, and go and have a pint of lager somewhere.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the A68 and road connectivity from Teesside to Scotland.

5.43 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 16 June 2021

CABINET OFFICE

Electoral Commission's Performance Standards for Electoral Registration Officers

The Minister for the Constitution and Devolution (Chloe Smith): In accordance with section 9A of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, I am laying before Parliament the Electoral Commission's new performance standards for electoral registration officers.

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 gave the Electoral Commission powers to set and monitor performance standards for electoral services. Under these provisions, the commission can determine and publish standards of performance for relevant electoral officers in Great Britain.

Following a consultation, the Electoral Commission established a new set of standards which will be used by electoral registration officers and the commission throughout the year to understand and improve the performance of election registration officers, ensuring that registers are as accurate and complete as possible, enabling everyone who is eligible and wants to, to be able to vote.

I welcome the Electoral Commission's updates to the performance standards to reflect the current environment for electoral registration officers, though more broadly, further measures are needed to strengthen electoral integrity and prevent electoral fraud—which will be delivered through the forthcoming Elections Bill. It is important that performance standards keep pace as we improve electoral registration further.

The attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2021-06-16/HCWS94/>.

[HCWS94]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Counter-Terrorism and Security Act: Post-legislative Scrutiny

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): The Government have today submitted a memorandum to the Home Affairs Committee regarding post-legislative scrutiny of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015.

The Home Office has carried out the post-legislative scrutiny, which includes an assessment of how the Act has worked in practice, and set out its findings in a Command Paper to the Committee.

The memorandum has been laid before the House as a Command Paper (CP 455) and published on gov.uk. Copies will also be available from the Vote Office.

[HCWS95]

Ministerial Corrections

Wednesday 16 June 2021

DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Draft Conformity Assessment (Mutual Recognition Agreements) and Weights and Measures (Intoxicating Liquor) (Amendment) Regulations 2021

The following is an extract from the debate on 10 June.

Paul Scully: On divergence from the EU and Northern Ireland diverging from GB, in many ways the EU signals are still changing. The UK-Japan CEPA is the first agreement that the UK has secured to go beyond the existing EU deal, with enhancement in areas such as digital data, financial services, food and drink, and the creative industries. Clearly, the single distilled shochu will still be available in the entire UK market, including Northern Ireland, but an additional bottle size will be available in **the UK**.

[Official Report, Vol. 696, Fifth Delegated Legislation Committee, 10 June 2021; c. 10.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully):

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra).

The correct response should have been:

Paul Scully: On divergence from the EU and Northern Ireland diverging from GB, in many ways the EU signals are still changing. The UK-Japan CEPA is the first agreement that the UK has secured to go beyond the existing EU deal, with enhancement in areas such as

digital data, financial services, food and drink, and the creative industries. Clearly, the single distilled shochu will still be available in the entire UK market, including Northern Ireland, but an additional bottle size will be available in **Great Britain**.

EDUCATION

Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

The following is an extract from Oral Questions to the Secretary of State for Education on 26 April 2021.

Kate Green: The national tutoring programme is reaching only one in six pupils on free school meals, and changes to the school census date mean that schools are also losing out on thousands of pounds of pupil premium funding for those students. Will the Secretary of State now come clean and publish his Department's full financial analysis of the funding lost to schools from this pupil premium stealth cut?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady forever moans and complains about the resources—the extra resources—that we have been putting into schools. Just a short time ago, we unveiled a £14.4 billion expansion of funding into secondary schools.

[Official Report, 26 April 2021, Vol. 693, c. 4.]

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson).

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green).

The correct response should have been.

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Lady forever moans and complains about the resources—the extra resources—that we have been putting into schools. Just a short time ago, we unveiled a £14.4 billion expansion of funding into **schools**.

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**not later than
Wednesday 23 June 2021**

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