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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 23 June 2021

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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.]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Misuse of Drugs Act 1971

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What discussions he has had with the devolved Administrations on the effectiveness of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. [901450]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack): May I start by saying that the dream is over, and my commiserations go to Steve Clarke and the Scottish team now that they are out of the Euros? Us Scots will now turn our attention to Wimbledon, where we have won the men's singles twice in the last eight years. I also congratulate Wales and England on proceeding to the knockout stages of the tournament, and I wish them well in that.

In answer to the question, it is a tragedy that drug deaths in Scotland are the worst in Europe and about four times those of England and Wales. The majority of the levers to tackle drugs misuse are delivered and devolved to the Scottish Government, including health, education, housing and the criminal justice system, but as the First Minister has admitted, they have taken their eye off the ball. The United Kingdom Government are keen to work with the Scottish Government to tackle this scourge, and the Minister for Crime and Policing, my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), held a UK-wide summit in Glasgow. He also invited the Scottish Government to be part of a new scheme, Project ADDER, which aims to protect communities from the harm caused by drugs. The Scottish Government have, sadly, so far declined.

Angela Crawley [V]: The Scottish Government intend to open an overdose prevention centre in Glasgow to tackle drug deaths and HIV infection rates. They are prevented from doing so by this Government's reliance on the out-of-date, ill-fitting drugs legislation, the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Ahead of Saturday's "Support. Don't Punish" day of action, will the Minister speak with his Cabinet colleagues about the need to reform the Act and support the Scottish Government's call for an urgent four nations summit on this issue?

Mr Jack: As I said, all home nations have the same tools at their disposal, yet the drug death rate in Scotland is four times higher. There are no plans to introduce drug consumption rooms. The current evidence does not support their use. We do support, however, needle and syringe programmes to prevent blood-borne diseases, and the widening of the availability of naloxone to help prevent overdose deaths.

Covid-19: Public Inquiry

Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab): Whether he has had discussions with the Scottish Government on a public inquiry on the (a) Scottish and (b) UK Government's response to the covid-19 outbreak. [901451]

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Whether he has had discussions with the Scottish Government on a public inquiry on the (a) Scottish and (b) UK Government's response to the covid-19 outbreak. [901468]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart): I draw the House's attention to the words of the Prime Minister when he announced the Government's plans for a public inquiry. He said that we should learn the lessons "as one Team UK" and that the Government "will consult the devolved Administrations"—[*Official Report*, 12 May 2021; Vol. 695, c. 137.]

about the scope and remit of the public inquiry. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has started the conversations with his devolved counterparts.

Rosie Cooper [V]: The Scottish Government revealed earlier this month that they underspent their budget last year by hundreds of millions of pounds. That is a slap in the face to businesses across Scotland that are struggling without the financial support they need. Does the Minister agree that any future covid inquiry must examine whether the financial support offered to businesses by both Governments was sufficient and whether it actually reached those who needed it?

Iain Stewart: The hon. Lady raises a very fair point. This Government have provided unprecedented levels of support to people and businesses in Scotland. Some of that comes through UK-wide schemes such as furlough, but other money goes as a fund to the Scottish Government for them to distribute, and there are serious questions about whether that money has been used in the most effective way and gone to the people for whom it was intended. I very much hope that will be part of the remit of this inquiry.

Mr Dhesi: One of the greatest tragedies in the coronavirus crisis has been the scale of the outbreak in care homes. I know from personal experience that that has caused untold misery and robbed families across the UK of our loved ones. The brutal reality is that that loss was multiplied because of Scottish Government and UK Government decisions to discharge hundreds of patients into care homes even after they had tested positive for covid-19. Does the Minister agree that any future pandemic inquiry must investigate how the discharge of those patients was ever allowed to happen?

Iain Stewart: I recall that, in a previous exchange, the hon. Gentleman mentioned that he had suffered some personal family losses as a result of the pandemic, and I

again extend my sympathy to him. He raises an important question. I am pretty certain that those matters will be covered by the inquiry. As I say, the discussions to establish its remit and processes are under way. The issue of care homes in Scotland is, of course, a devolved matter for the Scottish Government, but we want this inquiry to be as wide-ranging as possible so that we learn the lessons from the pandemic.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I join the Secretary of State in congratulating Stevie Clarke and the whole Scotland team on cheering up a nation over the past 10 days or so. As we said in the 1970s, we had a dream. That dream died, unfortunately, last night, and it will now have to wait until Qatar next year for the World cup.

In recent weeks we have heard scathing criticisms from the Prime Minister's former chief adviser about the UK Government's covid response, which has no doubt cost many lives. We have even learned that the PM described his Health Secretary as "hopeless". Most recently, their dither and delay in securing the borders of the UK has resulted in restrictions continuing beyond the initial date. Sadly, the people of Scotland have also been failed by the choices of the Scottish Government. We know from a recent freedom of information reply that the Scottish chief medical officer advised the Scottish Government to say nothing at all in response to the Edinburgh Nike conference outbreak last March. The Scottish public were kept in the dark. These are just some of the major issues, which include the two we have heard about from my hon. Friends this morning. Will the Government agree with calls for an urgent separate Scottish judge-led public inquiry into both Governments' management of covid-19 in Scotland so that we can learn the lessons of covid and the grieving families can get the answers they so deserve?

Iain Stewart: In response to the hon. Gentleman's first point about the tartan army, my experience is that while the spirit is often tested it is never broken, and I am sure it will sustain.

I do not think that, at this stage certainly, there is a need for a separate inquiry. We are still at the very early stages of establishing the remit of the UK-wide inquiry, which will cover both reserved and devolved matters. It is important that that inquiry looks at all aspects of the situation. We should also remind ourselves that this is an unprecedented challenge that Governments right across the world have faced. Inevitably, with the benefit of hindsight, different decisions would have been made. We are learning all the time. I do not necessarily accept some of the charges that the hon. Gentleman has made—on borders, for example—but lessons are being learned all the time, and the right place for permanent lessons is from the wide-ranging inquiry that the Prime Minister has promised to set up.

Ian Murray: I am tempted to ask the Minister if he has ever filled any of London's fountains with Fairy liquid, but that can maybe be kept for private discussion. *[Interruption.]* Exactly—only for cleansing purposes.

One of the most frustrating elements for many people is the inconsistency of the decisions that have been made. Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham has rightly criticised the First Minister both for mimicking the arrogance of the Prime Minister by failing to contact

the Manchester authorities before announcing a travel ban and for its inconsistencies. Cases remain lower than they are in Dundee, yet Dundonians can travel all over Scotland while those living in Bolton, for example, are effectively banned from travelling to Scotland at all.

These varying decisions are having a devastating impact on key sectors. Take the wedding sector, for example. Yesterday I was contacted by a constituent whose wedding in Edinburgh is limited to 50 guests but will travel to London the following week to a wedding where guests are unlimited, and she was at the Glasgow fan zone last week with 3,000 other supporters. She is deeply frustrated, and I am sure the Minister can understand her anger. So does he agree that any covid inquiry should examine the consequences that have resulted from the refusal of both Governments to work together?

Iain Stewart: I am happy to confirm to the hon. Gentleman that to the best of my knowledge I have never filled any fountain anywhere with any domestic cleaning product.

Turning to the important points that the hon. Gentleman has raised, the issue between the Mayor of Greater Manchester and the First Minister is clearly not satisfactory, and I would urge them both to come to a very sensible arrangement to allow travel to resume between Scotland and Greater Manchester. The two Governments do work closely together. There are several meetings a week, whether between the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the First Minister or the Health Secretary and his counterparts, to discuss all these arrangements. At the end of the day, the Scottish Government have the ability to make their own decisions, but a lot of them are co-ordinated—particularly, at the moment, on the travel corridors. Of course we constantly look at all these decisions and have to make often snap judgments in the face of new evidence, but we do so in a co-operative way as far as is possible.

Child Poverty

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on efforts to reduce child poverty in Scotland. [901452]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Iain Stewart): Let me first take this opportunity to thank Department for Work and Pensions staff in Scotland and across the UK who have provided unprecedented levels of support to families during the pandemic. It is a mark of their dedication that the system has coped well with the extra demand that we placed on it.

We take child poverty very seriously. Through the joint ministerial working group on welfare, I regularly discuss welfare matters with Ministers from the Scottish Government and the Department for Work and Pensions. Our most recent meeting included a discussion of the new Scottish child payment, which was delivered through the powers in the Scotland Act 2016.

Alex Cunningham: I join the Minister in paying tribute to DWP staff. Perhaps the Government could respond by giving them a decent pay rise this year. According to the Child Poverty Action Group, over two thirds of children growing up in poverty in Scotland live in a household where someone is actually working. That is a

damning indictment of the economy under both the Tories and the SNP—low pay, insecure work and children growing up in poverty. Does the Minister accept that both Governments need a fundamental rethink of their strategy to tackle child poverty?

Iain Stewart: We are putting in considerable support in a whole range of ways, such as through increases in the living wage. One of the challenges of the pandemic is to ensure that new employment opportunities are there, and this Government and the Scottish Government do work well on co-ordinating our various schemes, such as the kickstart process, to make sure that those jobs are secure and sustainable for the future. It is not just about jobs, of course; it is also about issues such as the quality of education. I know there are significant issues with the stewardship of the Scottish education system under the Scottish Government.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): The Scottish Government recently spoke of making the eradication of child poverty a “national mission”. Those are welcome words, but statistics released last month show that child poverty has risen in every single local authority in Scotland since the Scottish First Minister took office. Indeed, the last national mission for the SNP—there have been plenty—was closing the attainment gap, which the OECD has said will not be possible with the levels of poverty that exist in Scotland.

Of course, it is not just the SNP; the UK Government’s record is appalling, too. More than a decade of Tory government has created a society of low pay, insecure work and pushing families into in-work poverty. Both Governments are failing Scotland’s children. Can the Minister explain now what he is doing to try to resolve the shocking levels of child poverty in Scotland to show that this Tory Government really do care and to actually try to deal with some of the SNP’s failings in Holyrood?

Iain Stewart: The hon. Gentleman rightly refers to the OECD report, which came out this week and which I have read. It does contain some very worrying findings. It is yet another reason why the Scottish Government should be focusing on the day job of improving services for people in Scotland, rather than obsessing about constitutional matters. On the wider point he makes about child poverty, throughout this Government’s period in office we have done a huge amount of reform to increase the take-home pay of people at the lower end of the income scale. For example, we have massively increased the personal tax allowance, which allows people to keep more money in their pocket. However, that is just one example; there is much more work to do, and I work regularly with ministerial colleagues across Government looking at the cost of living and what steps we might take to improve matters.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): What progress the Government has made in establishing the UK shared prosperity fund. [901453]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack): The UK shared prosperity fund will be the successor to EU structural funds, with decisions about how taxpayers’ money is spent being taken in the United Kingdom,

rather than in Brussels. The £220 million community renewal fund, for which applications closed last week, will lead us up to publishing the shared prosperity fund prospectus later this year. We look forward to working directly with local authorities in Scotland on applications for the new UK shared prosperity fund. They know best what their communities need. This is real devolution in practice.

Cherilyn Mackrory [V]: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer. Can he assure me that Scotland and all the other coastal and rural areas of the United Kingdom, including all the way to my constituency in Cornwall, will get their fair share of shared prosperity funding, and will he ensure that the money is distributed in a fairer way, better tailored for our economy?

Mr Jack: The Prime Minister has previously provided assurances that our plans to replace structural funds will at least match the figures of the EU funding. We are confident that will start with the community renewal fund this year, and will lead next year into the UK shared prosperity fund, as I mentioned earlier, in April 2022. That will reach £1.5 billion in total, and I can assure my hon. Friend that her area will be receiving its fair share.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Under the EU structural funding arrangement, the Scottish Government played a role in determining the allocation of that funding. This ensured that funding was allocated based on the democratic choices of the people of Scotland, reflecting the priorities that they voted for. Will the Secretary of State now commit the UK Government to giving the devolved Governments a formal say in the delivery of the SPF to ensure that democratic working continues?

Mr Jack: What we are doing is working with all responsible delivery partners in Scotland, as I have said, and the community renewal fund will be an example of real devolution at work. We will be working with local communities and local authorities in ensuring that the projects respond to local wishes and meet local needs.

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con) [V]: Lasting prosperity requires successful business people and, sadly, my constituency in Scotland lost one of our finest examples on Monday, when Alasdair Houston, the entrepreneurial chairman of the Gretna Green Group and a leading figure in Scottish tourism and agriculture, lost his long battle with cancer at the age of only 59. Alasdair will be remembered not just for his own zest for life and the transformational impact he had on his own businesses in the Gretna area, but for his passion for the Star of Caledonia, an iconic environmental structure being built on the Scotland-England border that will surely be his lasting legacy. Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to our friend Alasdair’s many achievements, but will he also agree that, whatever form the shared prosperity fund takes, it should reflect his spirit and support inspirational projects such as the Star?

Mr Jack: I join my right hon. Friend in paying tribute to my close friend Alasdair Houston, and I send my deep sympathies to his family. Ali was a proud Scot, a

lover of Dumfries and Galloway, and a formidable champion for Gretna, his home town, and the Star of Caledonia would be a very fitting tribute to him. He will be missed by many.

Covid-19: Guidance on International Travel

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): What discussions he has had with (a) Cabinet colleagues and (b) the Scottish Government on harmonisation of covid-19 guidance on international travel. [901455]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (David Duguid): I and other UK Government Ministers are in regular contact with the Scottish Government and other devolved Administrations to try to secure the harmonisation particularly of covid-19 guidance when it comes to regulations on international travel, while at the same time of course respecting devolved competence in matters such as public health.

Wendy Chamberlain: Golf tourism plays a major part in the local economy of North East Fife, particularly as St Andrews is the home of golf. There is a whole ecosystem built up around golf tourism, including accommodation, hospitality and inbound tour operators. The majority of these tourists come from north America and then travel to other golf courses around the UK, and there are concerns about the incoherent travel rules between the four nations and restrictions within the four nations deterring those visitors. Can I therefore ask the Minister to outline what steps he is taking to reach consensus, particularly in relation to the US?

David Duguid: I thank the hon. Lady for her question, which is pertinent not just for golf tourism but for whisky tourism and tourism in general across Scotland. The UK Government are committed to full alignment with the devolved Administrations, because we recognise the importance of such alignment for public compliance, as well as for business confidence and for tourism. We share the data, and we have created the structures to make that happen. However, we also respect the right of the devolved Administrations to make their own decisions on devolved matters. Thankfully, the differences in the exemptions, particularly for international travel, are not currently that material and can be justified as legitimate differences, but I do take on board the comments she made about golf tourism specifically.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): This morning we heard that as a direct result of the baffling and inconsistent travel ban placed on Scots going to Greater Manchester, easyJet has cancelled its newly announced route from Aberdeen to Manchester, putting at risk many jobs in north-east Scotland. What work is being done, and may I beg the Minister and the Scotland Office to ensure that in the reopening of international travel, the same rules and regulations will apply around the entirety of the UK, instead of leaving the Scottish aviation sector and the thousands of people it employs at the mercy of a Scottish Government who have completely abandoned them?

David Duguid: My hon. Friend and I share a lot in common, not least the regular use of Aberdeen airport, to which he refers, and the fact that we both have wives

who were not born in this country and unfortunately have not been able to visit their families for the last year and a half. That aside, on the specific issue about easyJet and the flight to Manchester, it has made a commercial decision, announced today, in response to the Scottish Government's decision to regulate to prohibit travel to Manchester. The Scottish Government decision has been widely criticised as disproportionate; clearly Scottish Government Ministers will be keeping travel regulations under constant review, and there are calls for this regulation in particular to be reviewed in closer consultation with all interested parties. The Scotland Office would be happy to facilitate that, if helpful.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): UK Government Ministers talk about a single approach, but, if we cast our minds back just a couple of months ago, travellers from India into Scotland faced managed hotel quarantine whereas the same travellers into England did not, and the consequences of that inaction are clear for all to see with the delta variant now dominant right across the UK. So I ask the Minister, does he regret the damage caused to Scotland's covid-19 recovery as a result of his Government's failure to follow Scotland's lead?

David Duguid: What I regret, particularly considering the hon. Gentleman's constituency, is that the Scottish Government did not, despite the repeated calls from the oil and gas industry, from MSPs, and from MPs who, like him, represent constituencies in the north-east of Scotland, give the same allowance for oil and gas workers from amber list countries that was allowed to them by the rest of the UK.

Strengthening the Union

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): What steps he is taking to strengthen the Union. [901457]

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): What steps he is taking to strengthen the Union. [901461]

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): What steps is he taking to strengthen the Union. [901463]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr Alister Jack): The value and strength of the Union has never been more important or more apparent. The United Kingdom Government have supported all parts of the UK during the pandemic; that includes the furlough scheme, which at its peak supported nearly 1 million jobs in Scotland, the help of our fantastic military, and the UK-wide vaccination programme which means we can now see light at the end of the tunnel. The UK Government will lead our recovery from the pandemic, investing in communities right across the United Kingdom, getting young people into jobs and improving connectivity between all parts of our country.

Mark Fletcher: The UK Government have been unwavering in supporting Scotland through the pandemic, from providing £14.5 billion in additional Barnett funding to protecting nearly 900,000 jobs through our furlough scheme. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this shows how the UK Government and the Treasury have protected lives and livelihoods across every part of this country?

Mr Jack: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The support provided by the broad shoulders of the United Kingdom Treasury is staggering and simply unprecedented in peacetime. As he said, there are jobs being supported by furlough and an extra £14.5 billion provided to the Scottish Government through Barnett funding, and I would point out that 530,000 claims have been made in Scotland under the self-employment income support scheme, so far totalling around £1.5 billion.

Mr Harper: Is it not the case that the success of our vaccine programme, which was a combination of successful UK Government procurement and then an NHS roll-out in the individual nations of the United Kingdom, is a fantastic example of the two Governments in Scotland—the UK Government and the Scottish Government—working together, which is exactly what we should see in the future? That demonstrates the strength of our Union, and we should fight to keep it in place.

Mr Jack: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend. The vaccine programme has been a huge success, and it was UK-wide procurement delivering vaccines on a UK-wide basis.

Peter Gibson [V]: The A68 links Darlington with Edinburgh and serves as an economic and cultural link between England and Scotland. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should be celebrating and strengthening connections between our two nations, and will he lend his support to the proposed improvements to the artery in my constituency as a means of strengthening our precious Union?

Mr Jack: Yes, and Darlington has also been supporting the Scottish football team over the last few weeks. It is vital that we have good connectivity between all parts of the United Kingdom. Sir Peter Hendy, in his review, is looking at how we can improve that, and he will publish his report later this year, but I must say—I put it on the record again—that I was disappointed that the Scottish Government told their civil service not to engage in this work because, as ever, they want to put a grievance ahead of improving Scotland's economy.

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) successfully pursued a two-year campaign calling on this Government to publish the results of the secret polling that they commissioned, using public funds, to ask people in Scotland how they feel about the Union. Can the Secretary of State confirm that that information will be published in the next three weeks, as the tribunal has ordered the UK Government to do?

Mr Jack: The hon. Lady makes a point that is one for the Cabinet Office to answer, but the Cabinet Office is very clear that it does not spend money on political polling or research.

Mhairi Black: I will move on from that rather bizarre answer. Today, we learned that the UK Government have used emergency covid funds to publicly fund further polls on the Union, in a contract given to close associates of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Would the Secretary of State say that that is an appropriate use of emergency funds, and will he back the SNP's calls for an inquiry into this misuse of funds?

Mr Jack: Again, I say that the hon. Lady should be at Cabinet Office questions asking the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to answer for his Department. Again, I have spoken to the Cabinet Office about this. It does not engage in political polling, and it is very clear about that.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It seems to me that this Government's plan to strengthen the Union is to first sell out the fishing industry and then betray Scotland's farmers. Can the Secretary of State explain how the Australia trade deal, which allows the UK market to be flooded with thousands of tonnes of cheap, factory-farmed, inferior-quality beef and lamb, is the golden opportunity the Prime Minister promised? How will it help Scottish farmers' business?

Mr Jack: The SNP has never found a trade deal that it likes.

Brendan O'Hara: Answer the question!

Mr Jack: I am going to answer the question very clearly. The SNP voted against or abstained on all trade deals in the European Parliament and the one we have just done with the European Union. It is an isolationist party. The reality on the Australia trade deal is that it is upholding animal welfare standards. Under the World Organisation for Animal Health, Australia gets five out of five. We have safeguards in place to stop the market being flooded with beef or any collapse in price. We are very clear that we will protect our farmers, and this leads us into the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, worth £9 trillion. That will be a huge win for our farmers, and all the members of the farming community I have spoken to understand that. The SNP should see the big picture and understand that we are not going to reduce our animal welfare standards, that we are not going to flood the market, and that it will be seen very clearly in a few years' time to have cried wolf.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

[901680] **John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con):** If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 23 June.

Mr Speaker: Before we get under way, I point out that a British Sign Language interpretation of Prime Minister's questions is available to watch on [parliamentlive.tv](https://www.parliamentlive.tv).

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): Today marks five years since this country voted to leave the European Union. It has allowed us to take back control of the issues that matter to the people of the United Kingdom. It has given us the freedom to establish eight freeports across the country, driving new investment; to develop the fastest vaccine roll-out in Europe; to protect and invest in jobs and renewal across every part of the UK; to control our immigration system, and to sign an historic trade deal with Australia. It will allow us to shape a better future for our people. Over 5.6 million EU citizens have already applied to our EU settlement scheme, and I would encourage anyone who may still be eligible to apply ahead of the deadline next week.

This week is Armed Forces Week, and I am sure that colleagues from across the House will wish to join me in thanking our fantastic armed forces and their families for their service to our country.

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.

John Stevenson: Prime Minister, we are to host COP26. Our goal is net zero by 2050. To achieve that target will require innovative policies and a free market approach would help. Therefore, if we were to make solar panels compulsory for all new residential builds, we immediately create a large market. It will lead to innovation, lower prices, job creation and contribute towards our 2050 target. Will the Prime Minister support such a policy initiative?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a very interesting suggestion which I will certainly look into, though I should caution that some homes do not have enough space on their roof or indeed have their roofs angled in the right way to make solar panels viable. What we are already doing is tightening our standards to ensure that new homes produce at least 75% lower carbon dioxide emissions compared to current standards, on our way to net zero by 2050.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Why, under this Government, has the number of rape convictions and prosecutions fallen to a record low?

The Prime Minister: One of the first things I said when I came to the Dispatch Box as Prime Minister was that I thought that rape prosecutions and convictions were too low. That is why we have the end-to-end rape review, that is why we have been investing in independent sexual violence advisers and domestic violence advisers—another £27 million—and that is why we have been investing more in the Crown Prosecution Service, with another £85 million. We are also dealing with the misery experienced by rape victims and survivors who have to hand over their mobile phones, which I think has been one of the evidential problems that have arisen in prosecuting rape cases. What we have also been doing is imposing tougher sentences for serious sexual and violent offences. It would have been good to have some support in that from the right hon. and learned Gentleman and from those on the Opposition Benches.

Keir Starmer: We all agree that the figures are appalling. The question is why. The Government's own review makes it clear that rape convictions and prosecutions have halved since 2016—halved. We know that that is nothing to do with the pandemic, because this is a five-year trend and we know it is not because there are fewer rape cases being reported, because that number has gone up significantly, so let me return to the question that the Prime Minister has not answered: why does the Prime Minister think that rape prosecutions and convictions have plummeted on his watch?

The Prime Minister: Because, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows very well because he has some experience of this matter, there are considerable evidential problems, particularly in recovering data from mobile phones, and that has been an obstacle to the

speedy preparation of cases. Too often, let us be frank, cases go from the police to the Crown Prosecution Service not in a fit state. Too often, those cases are not in a fit state when they come to court and there is not a good enough join-up across the criminal justice system. That is exactly what we are addressing by our investment and with our end-to-end rape review. What would be good, Mr Speaker, is if we had some support from the Opposition for tougher sentences for rapists and serious sexual offenders. What kind of a signal does it send when they will not even back tougher sentences?

Keir Starmer: The Prime Minister knows very well why we voted against his Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill: precisely because it did more to protect statues than women. But since he has brought it up, let us address the central question. Prime Minister, 98.4% of reported rapes do not end up in a charge—98.4%—and therefore the question of sentence never arises in those cases. Since he has brought up the Bill—it is his main defence, it seems—can he point to what provision, what clause, what chapter, what part of that Bill will do anything to change the fact that 98.4% of reported rape cases do not end in charges and do not get to sentence? Which clause, part, chapter or words in that Bill? Point to one thing.

The Prime Minister: Let me point to sections 106 and 107 of that Bill, which Labour voted down, which would have stopped the early release of rapists at the halfway point of their sentences. What kind of signal or message does that send to people who commit crimes of rape? It is very important that the message should go out from this House of Commons that we will not tolerate serious sexual violence. I am afraid that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has not been supporting that message.

What we are doing now is bringing forward measures by investing in independent domestic violence and sexual violence advisers to ensure that victims and survivors of the crime of rape have people in whom they can confide and trust throughout that miserable period when they are in the criminal justice system. Another thing we are doing is recruiting record numbers of police officers, and I am proud to say that 40% of our new recruits are female, which I believe will be of great consolation and use to those who are victims and survivors of rape.

Keir Starmer: What an appalling answer. I asked the Prime Minister why 98.4% of cases are not getting into the system and he talks about sentence. That is the problem. If he thinks that is the answer, that is why we have got these terrible rates of conviction and of prosecution. The answer is: there is nothing in that Bill. The truth is, victims of rape are being failed. Those are not just my words; they are in the Government's own report:

“Victims of rape are being failed.”

There is no escaping that appalling figure: 98.4% of rape cases ending without anybody being charged, and those that do get into the system take years to go through. Does the Prime Minister accept that cuts to the criminal justice system have contributed to that appalling situation?

The Prime Minister: No, because we have increased the numbers of people in the CPS by at least 200, and they are specifically dedicated to helping to prosecute

the crime of rape and sexual violence. We are absolutely determined to stamp it out. This is a problem that has been getting worse because of the evidential difficulties caused by the data recovery process and a lack of unity and joined-up thinking between all parts of the criminal justice system. That is something that the Government are now addressing by more investment, by putting more police out on the street and by having tougher sentences. Finally, it would be good to hear the right hon. and learned Gentleman support it.

Keir Starmer: I spent five years as Director of Public Prosecutions, prosecuting thousands of rape cases. I do not need lectures, but I do know the impact of cuts in our criminal justice service. The Government cannot make significant cuts to the Crown Prosecution Service, 25% cuts to the Ministry of Justice, close half the courts in England and Wales and now pretend that a small budget increase will solve the problem.

This is about more than just cuts. The rape review is welcome, but it is weak. The Government's Victims' Commissioner described the review as "underwhelming" and said it could have been "10 times stronger". That review is littered with pilots and consultations on proposals that have literally been discussed for years and years. It is so unambitious. Is it not the case that despite these shameful figures—they are shameful—the Government are still not showing the urgency needed to tackle the epidemic of violence against women and girls?

The Prime Minister: No, because we have also brought in the landmark domestic violence Bill—again, it would have been good if we had had wholehearted support from the Labour party—and no, because the Government have brought in much tougher sentences for serious sexual and violent offenders. No matter how much the right hon. and learned Gentleman wriggles and squirms, he cannot get away from the simple fact that, on a three-line Whip, he got his party to vote against tougher sentences for serious sexual and violent offenders. That is weak.

Keir Starmer: You can always tell when he is losing, Mr Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. It is a very, very emotive and important issue and I need to hear the question and the answers. I certainly do not expect shouting from the Back Benches.

Keir Starmer: On the Prime Minister's watch, rape prosecutions and convictions are at a record low, court backlogs are at a record high, victims are waiting longer for justice and criminals are getting away with it. This was not inevitable; it is the cost of a decade of Conservative cuts. Even now, the Government are not showing the urgency and ambition that are needed. The Justice Secretary has done the rarest of things for this Government and apologised, but I note that the Prime Minister has not done that today. It is time that he did—that he took some responsibility and backed it up with action. Will he do so?

The Prime Minister: As I said to the right hon. and learned Gentleman—and I fought to have tougher action against rapists and sexual offenders throughout my time as Mayor of London; and, of course, to all the victims of rape and sexual violence, all the victims and

survivors, of course I say sorry for the trauma that they have been through, the frustration that they go through because of the inadequacies of the criminal justice system. We are fixing that. We are fixing that by investing another £1 billion in clearing the court backlogs and ensuring that they have people that they can listen to and trust who will help them through the trials of the criminal justice experience. But above all, we are helping them by getting our courts moving again. The fastest, most efficient way to do that, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, is to get our country moving again, which is what we are doing with the fastest vaccination roll-out anywhere in Europe. We are getting on with the job. They jabber, we jab. They dither, we deliver. They vacillate and we vaccinate.

[901681] **Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con) [V]: The levelling-up fund is a superb opportunity for local areas like Calderdale Council to improve infrastructure and relieve the misery in local areas. With that aim, will my right hon. Friend take a serious look at Calderdale's submission, which lacks support, has no consultation nor consensus with partners, and instead of relieving infrastructure problems, ploughs on with one of the council's failed and doomed projects, which does nothing at all to level up and has no support locally?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. The levelling-up fund has the potential to do massive good for Calderdale, and indeed the whole country, and I hope that Calderdale Council has listened to his strictures this afternoon and will act.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): This morning, *The Herald* newspaper revealed that, in the middle of a pandemic, Tory Ministers secretly directed funds from an emergency covid contract to carry out polling on the Union. This evidence was uncovered in official documents submitted to the High Court, so the Prime Minister would be well advised to be very careful in his answer to this question. And it is a very simple question: did the UK Government use a £560,000 emergency covid contract to conduct constitutional campaigning on the Union?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid I am not aware of the contract to which the right hon. Gentleman refers, but what I can tell him is that I think that the Union, and the benefits of the Union, have been incalculable throughout the covid pandemic, and that for the vaccine roll-out, which I just mentioned to the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), vaccines have been pioneered in Scotland, brewed in Oxford, bottled in Wales and rolled out throughout the UK. I think it is a tribute to the Union that the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) seeks to undermine.

Ian Blackford: The Prime Minister has just demonstrated, not for the first time, that he has not got a clue. The answer to the question is yes. Whether it is redecorating the Downing Street flat or siphoning off covid funds for political campaigning, the pattern is clear: the Tories simply can't be trusted. Let us be very clear as to what happened here: these emergency covid contracts were supposed to be used for things like personal protective equipment for our brave doctors and for nurses fighting

covid. Instead, during the height of this deadly pandemic, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster used these emergency contracts to commission political research on—and I quote—

“attitudes to the UK Union.”

What is worse, he handed these lucrative contracts to long-term friends and former employees. In essence, this was a UK Government contract that sanctioned corrupt campaigning, Prime Minister. If the Prime Minister has even a shred of credibility, will he now commit to a full public inquiry on this gross misuse of public funds?

The Prime Minister: I cannot think of a better use of public funds than making sure that the whole of the UK fights the covid pandemic together, and that is what we are doing. Thanks to the UK Treasury, we were able to spend £407 billion supporting jobs and families in Scotland. We were able to use the British Army to send vaccines throughout the whole of the UK. I believe that the story of this last two years has shown the incalculable value of our Union and the strength of our Union, and that we are better together.

[901683] **Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): The Prime Minister’s groundbreaking 10-point plan for a green industrial revolution has ambitious targets for a switch to zero-emission electric vehicles, and the UK’s automotive manufacturers are ready to deliver, with vehicle manufacture taking place close to where batteries are made, because of the high proportion of an electric vehicle’s cost and weight being made up by the battery. Coventry is the historic home of the car industry and the headquarters of Jaguar Land Rover, who made the car in which the Prime Minister travelled to Parliament today, so will he give his support to the proposal to build a gigafactory at Coventry airport?

The Prime Minister: I have fond memories of visiting my hon. Friend’s constituency and using an electric taxi. They thought that was impossible 15 years ago, but we got it done and we will make sure that his constituency and constituencies across the country are in the lead in building new electric vehicles for this country and for the world.

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): In Chesham and Amersham, several people told me how they struggle week in, week out to care for family loved ones while trying to hold down a job. They told me that they felt the Prime Minister was not interested in them, that he was not listening to them and that he did not care about them. Such inspiring working family carers are not unique to Chesham and Amersham. There are thousands in every constituency—no doubt in every seat across the so-called Conservative heartlands—with an estimated 7 million people juggling unpaid care and jobs last year. What is the Prime Minister going to do to make these people’s lives a little bit easier? When is he going to stop taking working family carers for granted?

The Prime Minister: I salute working family carers and people who look after loved ones, as they have done throughout the pandemic. What we have tried to do, as I have just said, is to look after families through the last 18 months to the best of this country’s ability, supporting them with furlough and with all sorts of schemes, in addition to putting unprecedented sums into social care.

But there is nothing any Government could do, and there are no words that I could express, that would be enough to requite the care and love that is given by family carers to those they look after.

[901686] **Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): We are currently experiencing a housing crisis in Cornwall, where local people are being priced out of the market, whether to buy or rent, by prices being inflated due to the huge demand from people wanting to move to Cornwall to live or buy a holiday home. This is a long-standing problem, but in recent months it has become the worst it has ever been. As the Government bring forward their reforms of the planning system, can my right hon. Friend assure me and the people of Cornwall that this will not be about building lots of homes for wealthy people to buy, and that it will ensure that the people of Cornwall are able to access the homes that they need?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises a point that has been raised repeatedly with me in Cornwall, and we are absolutely determined to address the issue in question and to work with Linda Taylor, the leader of the newly Conservative Cornwall Council, to ensure that we build local homes for local people so that young people growing up in Cornwall have the chance of owning their own home.

[901682] **Julie Elliott** (Sunderland Central) (Lab) [V]: While football clubs, charities and mums and dads in Sunderland and across our country were searching for that old laptop in the cupboard to give a child the data and device needed for learning during the pandemic and lockdown, the largest company in the world was throwing brand-new tech into landfill. Amazon does not pay its fair share of tax, it treats its staff badly and now it denies internet access to our poorest children. Will the Prime Minister join me today in unequivocally condemning that appalling practice by Amazon?

The Prime Minister: I was shocked and amazed to hear that computers were literally being sent to landfill in the way the hon. Lady describes, and I think the whole House would agree that the practice is bizarre and unacceptable. I am sure Amazon will wish to rectify it as fast as possible, but one thing that we are doing—to get to her second point—is ensuring that tech giants and other companies pay their fair share of tax on their sales within this country, thanks to the agreement that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor struck at the G7.

[901687] **Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): With new houses comes the need for new infrastructure, and in Aylesbury we particularly need better transport links, to cope with our growing population. Will my right hon. Friend therefore ensure that the Aylesbury spur of East West Rail is approved? There is a better business case for it than there is for HS2, and the spur has the great advantage of being the railway we do want, rather than the one we do not.

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can confirm to my hon. Friend that the Department for Transport’s review is looking at the design and construction of the Aylesbury spur, but I have to caution that the cost of construction of that spur is currently very high and we need to look at the numbers to ensure that they come down. I hope he may be helpful in that matter.

[901684] **John Nicolson** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP) [V]: Every day, the Prime Minister strengthens the case for Scottish independence. His recent trade deal sees food producers in Ochil and South Perthshire subjected to unfair competition from low-welfare Australian producers—this is a country where animals can be transported to slaughter for two days in the baking heat, without water. So farmers join seafood producers, musicians and those in a host of other sectors who realise that his Brexit assurances were substance-free hot air. But may I ask him when he is planning his next covid-safe visit to Scotland? Please will he come soon, because every visit is a tonic for us and toxic for his Scottish Tory apologists?

The Prime Minister: I do not want to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but I am seldom away from Scotland and cannot wait to be back there as soon as possible, after the record poll secured by Scottish Conservatives at the recent election. Yet again we hear this abuse of Australia, which has high animal welfare standards, and a negative attitude to the opportunities that free trade offers this country and the people of Scotland. When is the hon. Gentleman going to stop running down Scottish agriculture and the potential of Scottish farming?

[901688] **Mrs Heather Wheeler** (South Derbyshire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking Derbyshire police for their excellent work in rounding up, arresting and charging people involved in the recent incidents of stabbing, where one young man was murdered and others were badly hurt? The murder in Swadlincote, a very rare event, has caused concern among residents, but the very swift action taken by our Derbyshire police has taken the perpetrators off the street. Clearly, more police in South Derbyshire would be very much welcomed by our residents.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right to raise the issue of the appalling murder in Swadlincote. We are making sure with our Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill that such crimes are dealt with in a more expeditious way, with greater powers for the police. As I say, we are also recruiting 20,000 more police, including, she will be pleased to know, an additional 85 in Derbyshire.

[901685] **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP) [V]: During the Brexit referendum the Prime Minister promised that there would be no change in the rights of EU citizens in the UK, yet in a week's time those without settled status will lose the right to work, rent a flat or access free healthcare. This Government have demanded repeated grace periods during the Brexit process, so will he now finally agree to extend the deadline for EU citizens?

The Prime Minister: The EU settlement scheme has been one of the great successes of our recent Brexit negotiations, and it has produced 5.6 million applications already; I seem to remember that we were told there were only 3.2 million or 3 million to begin with. Everybody knows what the deadline is. I hope people will come forward and do what 5.6 million other people have already done.

[901689] **Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): Large sections of the Waen, near St Asaph in my constituency, have very poor broadband connections.

Top-up gigabit vouchers, provided via community fibre partnerships, have the potential to raise much of the £200,000 needed to address the situation, but there is a 24% shortfall. What can my right hon. Friend do to assist my constituents who are stuck in this position?

The Prime Minister: BT Openreach recently extended its offer of commercial coverage for gigabit broadband to services in my hon. Friend's area—in the community that he mentions—and that is partly because of the super deduction in taxation in respect of investment that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced recently at the Budget.

[901691] **Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): The Electoral Commission performs an important independent role in the regulation of UK elections. Whether it is investigating dark money or attempts to undermine our democracy, its role is critical to ensure public confidence in our democratic processes. With the Government seeking to neuter the Electoral Commission, what exactly is the Prime Minister planning that requires his Government to attempt to be able to direct the independent regulator?

The Prime Minister: For the sake of brevity, I think I can say absolutely nothing.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend had a chance to review the recent Foreign Office announcement that Britain is to cut its support for tackling neglected tropical diseases by a staggering 95%? That will not only write off quite a considerable investment by British taxpayers in this important work, but mean that 280 million drugs, tablets and vaccines will have to be written off and burned or destroyed. Does he know that the World Health Organisation has said that this one act will lead to the maiming, the blinding, the disruption of the lives and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people?

Will my right hon. Friend accept and respect the statement that Mr Speaker made from his Chair on Monday 7 June, when he said that there must be a meaningful vote in this House on this matter? Will my right hon. Friend see whether such a vote can be brought forward before the end of term and the summer recess? If not, will he ensure that the 0.7% commitment is brought back from the start of next year?

The Prime Minister: I am told by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that there will be an estimates day debate on overseas aid, but I must say that I just do not accept the characterisation that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell)—for all his expertise and learning in this matter—has just given of this country and our contribution to the fight against disease around the world. In spite of all the difficulties we face, we are contributing £10 billion in official development assistance this year—in spite of the colossal expenditure that the British state has been forced to make to look after jobs and families around the country. In addition to that, we are spending £1.6 billion on supporting COVAX and £458 million on supporting Gavi. Colleagues should remember that one in three of the COVAX vaccines that are, as my right hon. Friend knows, saving lives around the world is the direct result of the actions of the UK Government. The people of this country should be very proud of what we are achieving.

[901694] **Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): Yesterday was Windrush Day, the 73rd anniversary of the arrival of Caribbean people from Commonwealth countries in 1948, yet this year it is a reminder of the appalling failure of the Government's Windrush compensation scheme, which has been so disturbingly slow and extensively bureaucratic that at least 21 people have died while waiting for justice and only 687 people have received any payment at all. Given the repeated delays and the failure of the Home Office to provide justice for the Windrush generation, does the Prime Minister now accept that the scheme must be handed over to an independent body to prevent prolonged suffering?

The Prime Minister: I accept the injustice that was done to the Windrush generation and renew the apologies on behalf of the Government for our share of responsibility. Yes, I do want to make sure that the compensation scheme is accelerated; I spoke to the people responsible for distributing it just the other night. I also said—I hope the House would agree—that I hope that in due time the name Windrush will be associated not just with that injustice, though it was appalling, but with the amazing contribution, sacrifice and effort of the Windrush generation to this country, that Windrush is a positive name for the people of this country, and that, indeed, Windrush is regarded as the Mayflower of our country.

[901692] **Esther McVey** (Tatton) (Con): When High Speed 2 was first proposed, the estimated cost was £37.5 billion. The latest estimate is over £150 billion, and rising fast. Is there a price at which the Prime Minister will accept that High Speed 2 is no longer value for money, or is he determined to build it irrespective of the final cost, whatever that will be? Would it not be better to put this white-elephant project out of its misery and get rid of High Speed 2, and instead deliver high-speed broadband—reliable 1 gigabit capability—at a fraction of the cost to every household? That would be much more useful for everyone in all our communities.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right about the importance of gigabit broadband. That is why the coverage has gone up, just since I have been Prime Minister, I think from 9% of our country to 60% this year. We hope to get up to 100% in the course of the next few years. I cannot agree with her, however, about HS2. The House did vote for it. It has the potential to do a massive amount of good in levelling up across the whole UK. Indeed, I think even the Liberal Democrats voted for it—I see the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey) there—although you would not think it to judge from some of their recent campaigns, would you, Mr Speaker? But that is the thing about the Liberal Democrats: they can vote for one thing, then say another when it comes to elections.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab) [V]: When the covid-19 pandemic exploded, scientists warned that with rapid transmission more dangerous variants would emerge and that vaccines could lose efficacy in the face of mutations. Now variant upon variant has sparked surge testing, further lockdowns and the recent delay to the end of restrictions, with 41 people already reported to have the more virulent delta-plus variant. The Prime Minister held his vaccine donation as putting people squarely above profit, but that is lousy in the face of the fact that intellectual property is driving global supply shortages. Does he therefore understand why it is no use for the G7 to promise 1 billion doses at some point in the future when people are dying now, and when the success of our vaccination programme is under threat from emerging variants now? Will he reconsider his negligible vaccine donation policy and join over 100 countries in supporting the vaccine intellectual property waiver?

The Prime Minister: I really think it is satirical to say that the G7's efforts have so far been negligible. What the G7 agreed at Carbis Bay was another billion, on top of the billion that has already been contributed. The UK is putting in, as the hon. Lady knows, another 100 million up to June next year. As for the points she makes about variants and vaccines, she should know that all the advice we have at present is that the vaccines are effective against all the variants that we can currently see.

[901693] **Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Can the Prime Minister promise that the forthcoming planning Bill will not restrict the right of residents to have their say over what is built in their neighbourhood?

The Prime Minister: Yes, indeed. What we want to ensure—[*Interruption.*] Yes, because I will not have this misrepresented by the Liberal Democrats in the way that they do. I will not have it misrepresented by anybody, because what we want to do is ensure that we give young people in this country the chance of home ownership, which the Labour party would ruthlessly deny them. What we want to do, by our levelling-up agenda, is to help young people across the country and to make sure, by the way, that we relieve pressure on the overheating south-east and ensure that we build back better across the whole UK. That is the objective of our planning Bill.

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

12.39 pm

Sitting suspended.

Social Care Reform

12.44 pm

Mr Speaker: Before I call Liz Kendall to ask the urgent question, I want to wish Helen a very happy birthday. It is a delight to be able to do so.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State to make a statement on the Government's plans for social care reform.

The Minister for Care (Helen Whately): I thank the hon. Lady for her question, and for giving me the opportunity to talk about social care reform. I start by paying tribute to carers, paid and unpaid, for all they do in looking after people in their homes and in care homes every single day with kindness and compassion. To any who may happen to be watching or listening today, I say "Thank you for what you do."

Over the past year in government, we have rightly focused on supporting social care through the pandemic. This has included an extra £1.8 billion of funding, sending more than 2 billion items of free personal protective equipment to care providers, distributing more than 120 million covid tests to social care and vaccinating hundreds of thousands of care home residents and most of the care workforce.

While the pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges to social care, it has also strengthened the argument for reform, and we now have the opportunity to build back better in social care. We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build a care system for the future, and I am hugely ambitious. I want a care system in which we can be confident, for our grans and grandads, mums and dads, brothers and sisters, children and grandchildren and, indeed, ourselves. I want people to be able to get the care that they need when they need it, and to have choices—to live life to the full in the way they want, living independently and part of a community for as long as possible, without facing an astronomical bill.

I want to join up health and care around people, so that it works as one system dedicated to meeting the needs of individuals, and giving them the personal care they want and need to live their lives to the full. I want the care workforce to be properly recognised and valued for what they do—for their skills, their compassion and their commitment. I want them to have more training, more opportunities and more prospects for career progression. I am committed to supporting unpaid carers not only in the care they provide, but with their own health and wellbeing, so that they can live their own lives as well as caring for others.

We are already taking steps on the road to reform. The health and care Bill will introduce Care Quality Commission oversight of local authorities' provision of social care. It will also help to join up health and social care by putting integrated care systems on a statutory footing. We are working on our long-term plan for social care, and we will bring forward our proposals for social care reform later this year.

Liz Kendall: It has been 100 weeks since the Prime Minister promised to
"fix the crisis in social care"

with a plan he had already prepared, to give people the dignity and security they deserve. Since then, almost 42,000 care home residents have died from covid-19.

Two million people have applied for support but have had their requests refused, and tens of thousands have had to sell their homes to pay for care. Families have hit breaking point, and staff have been appallingly let down. Even after all the horrors of the pandemic, nine out of 10 councils say that they face care budget cuts this year.

This week, we learned that Ministers cannot even be bothered to have a meeting to finally come up with the goods. That is not delivering dignity; it is abdicating responsibility, so can I try again with the Minister? When precisely will we see the Government's plan? A vague commitment to some time later this year will not convince anyone, after all the delays and broken promises. Will the plan include a cap on care costs, so people's life savings are not wiped out? That has been repeatedly promised and was legislated for seven years ago, but it has still not been delivered. Will there be proper proposals for people with disabilities, who make up a third of the users and half the budget for social care, but have been entirely absent from the debate? Where is the decent workforce plan to ensure that frontline carers get the pay and conditions they deserve, and that we end endemic staff shortages? Will unpaid family carers finally get the help they need, so that their own health does not suffer and they are not forced to choose between holding down a job and caring for the people they love?

In the century of ageing, we cannot build back a better future for Britain without a decent system for social care. This is as much a part of our infrastructure as the roads and railways are. Our country urgently needs a plan. The time for excuses is over. When will the Government deliver?

Helen Whately: Of course we have focused on supporting social care through the pandemic over the past 18 months; that absolutely had to be the right thing to do when facing an unprecedented challenge. During the pandemic we not only supported social care, including, as I said, over £1.8 billion of extra funding direct to the care sector, but supported local authorities with over £6 billion of extra funding. But yes, we are determined to bring forward proposals for social care reform. We have been absolutely clear that we shall do that. The hon. Lady asked about particular meetings. Actually, the Health Secretary and the Prime Minister talk about social care reform all the time. In fact, I spoke to the Prime Minister only last week about social care reform. These are complex matters. The hon. Lady will know that nearly 25 years ago, Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair said that we needed reform of social care, but during the 13 years of Labour government, was there a plan for social care reform? No, there was not. We are the Government who are going to bring forward social care reforms. I would welcome her support for that. We are a Government who deliver. We have delivered Brexit, we are delivering vaccinations at a phenomenal pace, and we will deliver social care reform.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): I know that the Minister is working hard behind the scenes to get a resolution to these issues, and I thank her for her efforts to do that. Does she agree that the NHS will fail in its objective to deal with the covid backlog if the social care system continues to export its most vulnerable patients to our hospitals, filling up hospital beds that cannot then be used to deal with the enormous backlog

[Jeremy Hunt]

of cancer and other operations that we have? Does she also agree that the founding principle of the NHS—that no matter who you are, rich, poor, young or old, you should be able to access the care you need—is fundamentally undermined by the way we treat people with dementia, whereby people who are wealthy are able to pay expensive care home fees but people of limited means find that they are cleaned out of absolutely everything when a loved one gets dementia?

Helen Whately: I thank my right hon. Friend for his support for our determination to reform social care. He makes the important point that we have to look at the NHS and social care together as the two parts of the system affect each other. That is one important reason why the health and care Bill needs to improve the join-up between health and social care. On his point about dementia, it is true that some people who suffer from dementia need care for very many years and this is extremely costly. That is one of the things we want to address as part of our social care reforms.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: It is noticeable that while the UK Tory Government failed to mention social care reform in last month's Queen's Speech and have yet to deliver the long-awaited social care Bill, by contrast, under limited devolution, the SNP Government are establishing a national care service backed by a 25% increase in social care investment. What lessons has the Minister learned from this Scottish example? What recent consideration have the UK Government given to exempting the Scottish Government's £500 thank-you payment for health and social care staff from tax and benefit deductions? As the settled status deadline fast approaches, the SNP is calling on the UK Government to automatically grant post-Brexit residence status to prevent a cliff edge for EU nationals and a black hole in Scotland's care sector. Will the Minister urgently discuss this with Cabinet colleagues?

Helen Whately: The Queen's Speech reiterated our commitment to reform of social care, and that commitment has been reiterated many times by the Prime Minister and the Health Secretary. On the hon. Gentleman's question about looking at other systems, of course we look and learn. We look at what works across and within England and around the UK, and in fact around the world. This is a complex thing to achieve and we are determined that we will bring forward our ambitious plans for social care reform later this year.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): My interests are in the register.

I was delighted to hear the Minister confirm that the reform announcements will come later this year, and obviously a centrepiece of that will be the key question of how we get significantly more money into the social care system. But can she guarantee that the proposals will cover issues such as workforce planning, the need for changes in the housing stock to enable people to live in their own homes for much longer than they can at the moment, and the use of technology to ease their daily burden, all of which are essential for a sustainable and civilised social care system?

Helen Whately: My right hon. Friend makes an important point about the breadth of the reform that is needed. I can confirm that we are looking at how we can support the workforce further, including by raising skills and improving training opportunities and career progression, and how technology can be used to support better care and more independence as well as providing more time for the workforce to do personal care rather than administration. On housing, most people want to live behind their own front door for as long as possible, surrounded by their own things and in their own communities, so that is also absolutely part of our reform.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD) [V]: New analysis for the Care and Support Alliance found that since the Prime Minister stood on the steps of Downing Street some two years ago and promised to “fix...social care once and for all”,

2 million requests for formal care and support from adults over 18 have been turned down by their local council; that is the equivalent of 3,000 requests being turned down every day, putting immense pressure on unpaid carers as well as the NHS. This shows the human cost of dither and delay, so will Ministers stop their internal spats and off-the-record briefings and commence cross-party talks immediately with the sector so that we can fix this issue?

Helen Whately: We have of course had to focus on the pandemic over the last 18 months, but we are already working on reform. We are already consulting widely with the sector; the Department and I have together met and spoken to more than 70 different organisations and representatives of the care sector, from care providers to local authorities, and including care users and carers themselves. We will be working with this broad range of people, including parliamentarians; we need to build a consensus not only across Parliament but in society as a whole for our social care reforms.

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): Over the past couple of years I have spoken to many families across the Bolsover constituency who are affected by social care and all the challenges that we know the sector and those who work in it face. Does my hon. Friend agree that this should not be a matter of party political point scoring and that what we need is a sustainable solution? Will she commit to delivering that solution this year so that we can have a social care sector that is fit for purpose for many years to come?

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend is clearly having conversations in his constituency, and he makes an important point about the scale and number of people who have involvement in the care system. There are over 1.4 million people who receive care, over 1.6 million people in the care workforce, and over 5 million unpaid or family carers. The scale is huge and is growing as more people need care. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that this is not a party political issue; we need to come together and build a consensus across Parliament, but also across society as a whole—and, yes, we will bring forward proposals for reform later this year.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her statement today on social care reform. An issue close to my heart is support for carers in the form of

respite; in particular we have generations of young carers who need a break after the isolation of the pandemic. Will the Minister commit to making funding available specifically to provide respite overnights for carers who carry out their activities 24/7 and need support more than ever right now?

Helen Whately: The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point about respite for carers. Being a carer is hard and back-up support and respite services help make it more possible, but frustratingly, during the pandemic many of those services have not been able to function as normal. I am currently working with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Ministers to help local authorities across England ensure that day services and respite care are fully restarted as that is very important, and I would like to see that across the whole of the UK.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I appreciate this is very difficult for the Minister, because until we actually know what the Government's proposals are, she is answering questions based on assumptions and guesswork, but she will know that the main concerns of families are twofold: that they get adequate care; and that they will not have to sell their family home to provide that care. What assurance can she give that the Government will take into account the fact that people want to hold on to their family home? On the assumption that the value of assets will play some part in whatever formula we come up with, what account will be taken of the vast difference in prices of property in London compared with, for example, Cleethorpes?

Helen Whately: I hope my hon. Friend will forgive me if I am not drawn on the assumption point that he made in the second part of his question, but what I can say to him is that the Prime Minister has been clear that he wants a social care system where no one needing care should be forced to sell their home to pay for it.

David Johnston (Wantage) (Con): On Friday I met my constituent Phil, whose mother, given the state of her dementia, has gone to into a care home. The day before I met my constituent Denise, who is trying to keep her mum, who has Alzheimer's, in her own home. I think they are pretty typical of most of our constituents, because in addition to the cost issue, they are dealing with the complexity of a system they do not have experience of, as well as trying to get the right quality of care. Can my hon. Friend confirm that the issues of cost, complexity and quality of care will all be dealt with in the reform proposals?

Helen Whately: Yes, I absolutely can. We know that cost is a real problem, but there is also a real variation in quality of care. In fact, we are already taking steps on that. That is one reason why the health and social care Bill introduces an assurance or oversight system of the provision of care commissioned by local authorities. Yes, the breadth of the issues that my hon. Friend refers to is being considered in our reform proposals.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab) [V]: The 2018 Equality and Human Rights Commission report, "Housing and disabled people: Britain's hidden crisis", found that disabled people in the UK were not getting

the support they needed to live independently. Three years on, we still have not seen any sign of the national strategy for disabled people which was promised this spring. Does the Minister agree that that is long overdue, and can she tell the House what her Government are currently doing to support people to go into independent living?

Helen Whately: One thing I am very aware of is that often the debate about social care reform is a lot about care for older people, but that we should also make sure we are thinking at least as much about care for those of working age with disabilities. I and the Government certainly do think about that. We are working on the national disability strategy, which I have contributed to. It will be coming forward shortly.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): The Fed at Heathlands Village in my constituency is an amazing example of what care can and ultimately should look like, so I want to start by extending an invitation to the Minister to walk around The Fed with me to see what services really should look like. What can we do to ensure that The Fed is not just a torchbearer, but the norm?

Helen Whately: I thank my hon. Friend for his invitation. I do my utmost to get out and about—at the moment, mainly virtually—but I am looking forward to being able to go on more visits in the weeks and months ahead. Absolutely, what I want to see is a high standard of care available for everybody across the whole country.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): It is nearly two years since the Prime Minister promised to fix social care. In the intervening period, we have had the false promise that there was a ring of protection around social care homes. The Government's treatment of people in care homes, their families and the workers in that field of public service is appalling. This is a highly politically charged issue. We tried to fix it when we were in government and were attacked by the Opposition. The Government have had a similar experience. The only way forward on this is for the Government to have cross-party talks on how we find a solution to this problem. Will she commit to doing that?

Helen Whately: I would just remind the hon. Gentleman of the unprecedented level of support we have given to the social care sector during the pandemic, as I mentioned a moment ago. I know it has been extremely hard, but that is why we provided over £1.8 billion-worth of funding, free personal protective equipment, access to testing, and, of course, priority in the vaccination roll-out. On his point about needing to build a consensus around social care reform, I am already talking to parliamentarians across parties. In fact, just a couple of weeks ago I had a really helpful session with the all-party parliamentary group on adult social care. I look forward to continuing to work with colleagues across the House.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con) [V]: Will the Minister ensure that quality of care for the person needing it is central to the review? Can we learn lessons over the safe discharge of people from hospital into care settings? Will the NHS ensure that in future GP and nursing care, where needed, is available to support those patients on discharge?

Helen Whately: One thing I will say is that during the pandemic GPs and primary care in general have really stepped up to support those in care homes in particular, with every care home having a point of contact in primary care to ensure the support from GPs that those residents require. Yes, quality is at the centre of our proposals for social care reform.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: We all know that commissioning in social care is broken. The price paid for care is too low, the wages paid to carers are too small and there is a lack of training and professional development for carers. I would like the Minister to address the issue of home care being commissioned by the minute—it is the only publicly funded service commissioned or measured by time. Will the social care plans address that? She could do worse than look at the GMB's ethical care commissioning charter to see a way forward.

Helen Whately: Some really interesting and important work has been done on commissioning, looking at the outcomes of care rather than being so focused on inputs, which sometimes leads to the situation described by the hon. Member. One of the opportunities of the oversight system that we propose through the health and care Bill is that it will shine a light on the different ways in which local authorities commission care and give more visibility to what works. Authorities whose ways of commissioning do not lead to such good outcomes can therefore learn from others. We look forward to seeing an improvement in how care is commissioned and, therefore, the care that people receive.

Robert Largan (High Peak) (Con): Fixing our social care system is the biggest long-term challenge facing the country. However, for all the scale and complexity of the issue, fundamentally it comes down to money. We must find a way to fund our social care system fairly and sustainably. Will the Minister assure the House that she will work on a cross-party basis to bring forward reforms as soon as possible so that we can prevent the appalling situation in which people are forced to sell their home to pay for care?

Helen Whately: I can absolutely assure my hon. Friend on that point. One of the things we are committed to addressing is the situation where people may have worked all their lives to purchase and own a home and pay off a mortgage but then find themselves faced with a care bill of a size that uses up the value of their home when, perfectly reasonably, they want to be able to pass something on to their family.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): When I was a care worker, I was lucky enough to work alongside care workers from across the world. We know the sacrifices that all care workers have made during the pandemic and how care home residents were put at risk by the Government's covid response. There has now been over a decade of empty promises. When will there be a plan for social care that offers more for these heroes than just a badge, some bin bags for PPE and a failure of an NHS boss in waiting who does not value the efforts of overseas healthcare workers?

Helen Whately: I absolutely respect the experience that the hon. Member brings to this House, but I do not agree with quite a bit of what she said. We have done

our utmost to support the more than 1.4 million members of the social care workforce during the pandemic, and our thinking about the care workforce puts them front and centre of the social care reforms that we are developing. That, of course, is because the quality of care is so much dependent on that fantastic workforce. I am determined that they will continue to be front and centre of our work on reform. As I said, we will bring forward proposals for reform later this year.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): A world-class healthcare system cannot exist without effective and sustainable social care. The health and care Bill is an important step, but will my hon. Friend ensure that the social care reforms go further in integrating health and social care so that everybody who needs care can get the tailored support that they need?

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The proposals in the health and care Bill are just a step on the road to reform, but they are an important step. That step includes the joining up of health and social care in integrated care systems and putting those on a statutory footing, and the oversight arrangements for social care provided and commissioned by local authorities. We will be building on those plans in our long-term plan for social care reform.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I am sure the Minister will agree that the two conditions that people most fear getting at some point in their lives are probably cancer and dementia. Yet, if someone gets cancer, the NHS will take care of them and the taxpayer will fund their treatment; if they get dementia, broadly speaking that is not the case. As has been said already, surely the only way through this is a significant injection of money. That means being honest with the British people that, collectively, we will have to pay for it. Does she agree that we would be right to say to the British people that they should pay an extra penny on income tax for social care, so that people do not have to lose their home and their dignity if they lose their health?

Helen Whately: I would not want to upset the Chancellor by talking about tax policy at the Dispatch Box, but, as I have said to colleagues—and, in fact, as the Prime Minister has said—one of the things that we are committed to as part of our social care reforms is ensuring that nobody should have to sell their home to pay for their care.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): People across our country will have breathed a huge sigh of relief when the Prime Minister stood on the steps of Downing Street and exclaimed that he had a “clear” and “prepared” plan to solve the social care crisis, but almost two years have passed and there is still no plan in sight. Indeed, the Minister has said today that the Government are still working on a plan. What is the hold-up? Who is obstructing the Prime Minister—or was he simply misleading the nation as usual?

Helen Whately: The hon. Member asks about the hold-up. As I have said quite clearly, we have had a pandemic, which has been an unprecedented challenge for our country, our Government and our social care system. In fact, all those working on social care in the Department have been focused on our pandemic response

for most of the past 18 months— perfectly rightly, I think the House would say. Thankfully, as we emerge from the pandemic—thanks to the fantastic vaccination efforts across the country, meaning that a huge number of those in care homes and care workers have been vaccinated against covid—we are now able to focus our attention on social care reform. That is why we will be able to bring forward our proposals for reform later this year.

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con): Despite repeated promises by successive Governments, our social care system has not received the attention it deserves, and my constituents want to see that attention. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government will honour the promise that we made to the British people and deliver the long-term solution that the sector needs?

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; reform has been talked about by many Governments. One of the challenges is that people say, “Social care is broken and we must fix it”, but different people mean different things. Some are particularly concerned about what are called catastrophic costs, including the problem of people selling their home to pay for their care. Others are much more concerned about care—and rightly so—for working-age adults and the increasing costs for those of working age with disabilities. For other people, it is about questions of housing or technology. We are hugely ambitious about our social care reforms and want to bring this all together into a long-term plan for social care.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab) [V]: Instead of bringing forward plans to fix the social care crisis as the Prime Minister has promised, the Government intend to put in place a legal framework for a discharge to assess model, whereby NHS continuing healthcare and NHS-funded nursing care assessments can take place after an individual has been discharged from acute care, instead of before. The Government have told me that an independent evaluation of the implementation of the hospital discharge policy is currently under way, and that it is due to report this autumn. Will the Minister tell us why the Government are pressing ahead with this policy, despite not yet fully understanding the impact that it is having on patients and unpaid carers?

Helen Whately: I would not see this as either/or. We have said that we will bring forward proposals for social care reform. To the hon. Lady’s point about discharge, it is well known at that, particularly for an older person, spending a long time in hospital can be harmful to their prospects of recovering and living a good quality of life. I have seen that in my own family as well as knowing that it is a long-standing challenge across our health and social care system. It is absolutely right that we should take steps to support people to be discharged from hospital to home when they are clinically ready.

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): I very much welcome the plans for integrating the NHS, local authorities and social care providers. Can the Minister assure us that the plans will not lead to any more centralisation or bureaucracy in the system, and that, on the contrary, we will see more local flexibility, more choice and control for patients and, crucially, more support for the families and community groups that are so important in the delivery of social care?

Helen Whately: Yes, absolutely. One of the strengths of our social care system is its huge diversity, with the different forms of social care and the different ways it works in different communities. In fact, that has been one of the challenges for the Government during the pandemic, because we are reaching out to over 25,000 different organisations, but actually that diversity is a positive thing, so I will continue to support it in the years ahead.

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): Today marks 700 days to the day since, on the steps of Downing Street, the Prime Minister told the nation that

“we will fix the crisis in social care once and for all with a clear plan we have prepared”.

For clarity, this was before the global pandemic hit. I know, and the Minister knows, that the market has failed, and that that failure has been exacerbated by the pandemic, not created by it. Is it not time for the Minister to face the inconvenient truth that the only way to fund social care is through progressive taxation, with a diverse range of in-house services guaranteeing workforce standards and service user choice, under the umbrella of local government?

Helen Whately: The hon. Lady is right to say that when we went into the pandemic, the social care system already needed reform. That was well recognised, and that was why the Prime Minister made a commitment back in 2019 that we would bring forward social care reforms—[*Interruption.*] I am not going to talk about tax policy here, but I can reassure her that we are working on our social care reforms and will bring forward the plan later this year.

Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con) [V]: The report of the joint Health and Social Care and Housing, Communities and Local Government Committees, of which I was a part, left open the possibility of insurance-type solutions for adult care funding, as successfully operated in many countries comparable to our own. That would have advantages of finance, focus and structure. Given how hugely ambitious my hon. Friend has said she is on this, can she confirm that both insurance-based solutions and an enhanced role for local government remain options for her and the other key decision makers when they are determining the way forward for adult care?

Helen Whately: I thank my hon. Friend for his involvement on the Health and Social Care Committee, whose reports I find really helpful; they provide great insight and contribute to the conversation. He alludes to the different models for paying for social care, and clearly there are many different approaches. We have been considering them, but I am not able to go into detail here and now. I will have to ask him to wait until we publish our proposals for social care reform.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab) [V]: This pandemic has starkly demonstrated the unequal footing of social care alongside the NHS in this country. The Prime Minister’s announcement back in 2019 that he had a social care plan ready to go has been clearly shown to be untrue, and according to Age UK, 1.5 million older people are going without the care they need. People living in areas with a low council tax base, such as Newcastle, have seen their local council tax precepts rise because the Government have shifted

[Catherine McKinnell]

the burden of paying for social care on to those who can least afford it. I agree with the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall), that the time for excuses is over, so what is the Minister doing to ensure that the Prime Minister and the Health Secretary stop making empty promises so that we can start building much-needed cross-party consensus on this issue without any further delay?

Helen Whately: We are working on our proposals for social care reform, and we are working across the sector. As I have said, I am already talking to and meeting those across the sector—care providers, representatives and, in fact, users of the care and carers themselves. This is complex. There are reasons why there have been discussions about this for many years without proposals for reform being brought forward. We are hugely ambitious, and we want to get it right. That is why I make no apologies that we are taking some time, but as we have said, we will be bringing forward our proposals for reform later this year.

Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con): Across Sedgefield—from Hurworth to Thornley and Piercebridge to Bishopthorpe—many people are concerned about the cost of social care and how they are going to cope with it. With property prices in my constituency at about 30% of London ones, any use of that property value to pay for care just becomes catastrophic. The average weekly cost of care is substantially more than average earnings, so I understand the concerns they all have. Can I press the Minister again on ensuring that we do not leave them in a situation where they have to sell their house to fund such care?

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Care is expensive, and about one in seven people end up spending more than £100,000 on their care. Many people do not realise that care may cost them that sort of amount. It can take them by surprise, so people are not ready for that kind of cost. Yes, people who have worked hard and saved all their lives for their home can be devastated by the value of that home going on the cost of their care. That is why we are determined that this will be one thing that we address in our social care reforms.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab) [V]: The 42,000 care home residents who have died of coronavirus during the pandemic are, sadly, just a recent example of how our social care system is failing. The Prime Minister stood on the steps of Downing Street 700 days ago and promised to fix the social care crisis. The bereaved families and everyone whose family depends on our wonderful social care workers deserve answers. Social care staff cannot do this on their own. Those who need the crisis to be fixed need certainty, not the ambiguity of “later this year”. So Minister, no more delays—give us a date. Tell us: when will the Government finally publish their plan and fix the social care crisis?

Helen Whately: Let me say to the hon. Member: we have said we will publish proposals for social care reform, and we will; we have said we will set out a long-term plan for social care, and we will; and we have said we will reform social care, and we will.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): Residents in Blackpool spend a higher percentage of their income on council tax than those anywhere else in the whole country. Although allowing councils to implement the social care precept has brought in much-needed revenue, it has in some cases placed a disproportionate burden upon ratepayers. While the case for reforming social care is clear, does the Minister agree that we require a national funding model to meet the costs, and that they cannot fall disproportionately on councils in deprived areas?

Helen Whately: I thank my hon. Friend, and I recognise the situation right now. That is one reason why we are providing £3.8 billion in grants for adult and children’s social care this financial year, which has gone up from £3.5 billion in the previous financial year. Of course, looking ahead in our reforms, we do have to make sure that the way social care is paid for is fair across the country.

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab) [V]: I was a carer for my daughter Maria for almost 27 years, so I know the demands that carers face every single day caring for those they love. Does the Minister really believe that £67 a week carer’s allowance is a fair amount for round-the-clock care, and will this amount be raised under the Prime Minister’s “prepared” plan for social care?

Helen Whately: I pay tribute to the hon. Member for the hours, the love and the effort that she has put into caring herself. She knows, from her own experience, the experience of carers across the country and what it takes in time, physical effort and emotional effort.

Carer’s allowance is not intended to be somebody’s income; it is intended to support people with some of the costs of caring. It is primarily led by the Department for Work and Pensions, but I can say that I am committed to ensuring that there is support for unpaid carers and family carers, and, as I said earlier, ensuring that, as well as caring for and looking after others, those individuals should be able to have time for themselves to lead their own lives.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that a Dilnot-style proposal would reward and incentivise people who had not saved or used financial planning to pass their assets and savings on to relatives or to trusts? A German-style social care premium would be a much fairer system. We would all pay a small amount to cover those who were hit by the catastrophic costs to which she has referred. When she makes proposals, will she include perhaps two or three, including a social care premium, so that we can have a proper debate on this important issue and try to achieve cross-party consensus?

Helen Whately: I do not on this occasion agree with my hon. Friend, but I do very much appreciate his consistency and his commitment to ensuring that we have an informed conversation about the funding options for social care, as well as his well-informed drawing on international examples.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): From providers to staff to those cared for, the sector really feels abandoned, and has been abandoned, by the

Government during the pandemic. In Warwickshire, we have lost 347 people during the past year or so. We have heard that two years ago the country was promised by the Prime Minister an oven-ready plan. There was nothing. Globally, we are the sixth wealthiest country. Other, less prosperous nations have resolved the issue. Why cannot we, and when will the Government publish their plan?

Helen Whately: I remind the hon. Member about the unprecedented support we have given social care during the pandemic: extra funding of £1.8 billion, over 2 billion items of free PPE delivered to providers, a new system of distributing PPE direct to care homes and other care providers across the country, distributing over 120 million covid tests to care providers, and vaccinating hundreds of thousands of care home residents and the care workforce. We have been supporting the social care sector to our utmost during the pandemic, and we will introduce our proposals for reform of social care.

Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con): May I reiterate the point made by the hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) about the importance of hospital discharge and of assessment happening while someone remains in hospital? As one who has experienced this at first hand, I know that in taking care of a loved one it is important that accountability and pathway care structures remain in place. Does my hon. Friend agree that the time for action on adult social care reform is now, that we must be bold and courageous, and that we must put an end to the second-class service many disabled adults and elderly people are receiving right now?

Helen Whately: It is really important that discharge is carefully planned and that there is care and support at home for somebody when they are discharged from hospital, but it is also really important that we ensure that people are discharged when they are ready to leave. I saw that with my own grandmother, who ended up spending months in hospital owing to problems with her being discharged. Goodness, I wish that she had been discharged sooner—that would have been so much better for her. It is right that we support the ability of people to be discharged when they are ready to go home, and we should press ahead with doing that, although we must also ensure that support is there for people in their home.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): If we are truly to see the full integration of health and social care, that will require us also to see the full integration of the funding of health and social care—free at the point of need, contributed by all. When the Minister brings forward her proposals, will she ensure that that is an option we can consider? Will she bring forward those proposals ahead of debating the health and care Bill, so we actually know what we are trying to debate in that piece of legislation before talking about social care?

Helen Whately: I cannot at this point go into the details of the proposals that we are working on for social care reform. I have tried to give the House today a sense of the breadth and scale of our ambition. As to the point on timing, the way I see it is that the health and care Bill is a step on the road to reform, including the statutory role of integrated care systems and the development of the assurance system. I do not see them

tied together in the timing in the way that the hon. Lady sets out. What I can say is that we will be bringing forward our proposals for social care reform later this year.

Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con) [V]: First, I wish the Minister a happy birthday. Can she reassure the House that the focus will remain steadfast on patient outcomes and happiness as part of the health and care Bill?

Helen Whately: I thank my hon. Friend very much for his birthday wishes. I was not particularly planning to spend my birthday in this way, but it is a pleasure to talk about social care reform because I feel strongly about it and am clearly spending a great deal of time working on it. What really matters is making sure that the outcomes and the experience of care are better for people. What really matters is that people get to live their lives to the full, whether they are of working age or older, and get to live as independently as possible, as part of a community and with their own front door for as long as they can. It is the outcomes of care that really matter.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): The Minister's responses today further confirm that social care and the millions who rely on it are simply not a priority for her or this Government. It was recently reported that the Minister leaned on Public Health England to alter its proposed advice to care homes in the pandemic, from ensuring that those discharged from hospital tested negative for covid to not requiring any testing of patients at all. That led to more than 30,000 deaths. Will she take this opportunity to apologise to those who lost loved ones?

Helen Whately: Actually what the hon. Member has just read out is completely untrue, completely misleading and does not reflect for a moment what has happened. I am very disappointed to hear her read it out.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con) [V]: Rotherham Council is benefiting from the £120 million that this Government are making available to councils to boost staffing levels, which helps residents across Rother Valley to receive the best-quality care. Does my hon. Friend agree that, as we begin to work to build a world-class care system, ensuring care homes have the staff they need is a vital first step?

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. At the heart of care is the workforce. They are the individuals who are providing the care and who make the difference day in, day out for those who need their important care. Absolutely, I want to make sure that we have the workforce across social care. We need to ensure we have the training there and greater career progression opportunities for those who work in social care.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab) [V]: It has been reported that the Prime Minister is in favour of finally implementing the cap on care costs legislated for in 2014. While that would be welcome, it would do nothing to support working-age adults with a disability to live independently, nothing for the 1.9 million older people with unmet needs and nothing to improve pay and conditions for care staff. Does the Minister recognise

[Barbara Keeley]

that a cap on care costs alone does not go far enough, and can she confirm that further measures to deal with these other needs will be part of any reforms?

Helen Whately: I hope the hon. Lady will forgive me if I am not drawn on specific models of funding or paying for care, but the Government and I recognise that we have on the one hand the challenge of catastrophic costs and the problems some people face of having to sell their home to pay for their care, which many Members have mentioned already today, but also we have the other part of the system, which is those who receive care funded by the state. Many of them are of working age, as well as there being older people. She is right: in our social care reform, we need to look across the breadth of the system.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): I thank the Minister for her responses to the questions so far. As part of Warrington's £22 million town deal, the town is launching an innovative social care academy, in partnership with Warrington & Vale Royal College, to tackle the shortage of trained carers, so that residents in my constituency receive the best quality care. Does she agree that initiatives such as that, which address an identified skills gap, will mean that both care homes and in-home care in Warrington will have tailored and targeted support? Would she like to come to see the academy when it is up and running?

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend outlines a fantastic example: that is a really good use of town deal funding by Warrington. The academy—there are examples around the country—does an important thing in raising the profile of the social care workforce and developing their skills, which are so important. I absolutely support this initiative and, as and when the time is right, I would be delighted to visit.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the Minister for responding to the urgent question, and I am suspending the House for two minutes.

1.36 pm

Sitting suspended.

UK Military Personnel Serving Overseas: Vaccination

1.38 pm

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the vaccination of UK military personnel serving overseas.

The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heapey): As soon as our hugely successful covid vaccination programme was launched, I wanted to ensure that our armed forces would have access to vaccines as quickly as possible, so we tasked the Department with ensuring that nobody would be disadvantaged by serving our country abroad. This means people would be offered vaccinations no later than they would have been at home, and that those who needed to would be vaccinated before they left the UK.

Our critical outputs, including the continuous-at-sea deterrent crew and the quick reaction alert air crew, have rightly been prioritised. We have also in recent days completed 100% vaccination for our carrier strike group. I can confirm today that sufficient vaccines for all of our people in all overseas locations have now been dispatched. We are in the process of getting the few remaining people who are awaiting their vaccines their jabs. For those on active operations overseas, we have administered first doses of vaccine to 95% of those eligible and 61% of them have had their second dose. I can assure the House that every single eligible person across Defence, at home or abroad, will have been offered at least their first vaccine dose by 19 July, in line with the national programme.

Mr Ellwood: I am grateful for that reply but it does miss out a lot of detail. It gives me no pleasure whatsoever during Armed Forces Week, when we celebrate the military's invaluable contribution to our nation, to raise this urgent question as to why we do not have a bespoke vaccination programme for our personnel who are deployed overseas.

In our national battle to tackle covid here in the UK, we have relied on our military from the start—in building Nightingales, driving ambulances, mass testing and, of course, running hundreds of vaccination centres across the country—and yet, when we ask them to return to their day job, those deployed overseas are not fully vaccinated. A reported outbreak of 80 cases in our recent UN mission to Mali illustrates the dangerous consequences. This outbreak would have devastated our operational capability and, indeed, the safety of the mission.

It is standard protocol to inoculate prior to deployment. If we protect our troops against yellow fever, anthrax, malaria, typhoid and a host of other infectious diseases, why not covid when we have these vaccines now? Our NATO allies are doing just that. The USA, France, Holland and Germany have all fully vaccinated their deployed troops, so why have we not? I understand that our NATO partners have in fact expressed concern that the Queen Elizabeth battlegroup departed without all personnel having received two vaccines and, indeed, our Gulf allies have also registered their concern that our personnel based in their stations abroad are without the vaccines.

This is an easy call to get right, but it is also an irresponsible one to get wrong and arguably a potential breach of the armed forces covenant and our duty of care to our valiant armed forces. However, the picture would be incomplete without registering the MOD's internal attempts to address this. We must make that clear, but I hope that Whitehall is now listening, and I am sure that the country would want to see key worker status granted to all personnel currently overseas. That is what would resolve this issue. With this challenge now out in the open, in supporting this call, can I ask the MOD to fully vaccinate all our sailors, soldiers and air personnel as a matter of urgency?

James Heappey: I thank my right hon. Friend for asking the urgent question. I have not had any representations from NATO partners or Gulf partners sharing any concerns over our vaccination programme, so he may wish to share with me or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State any such representations that he has received so that we can discuss those with our colleagues in other Ministries of Defence. I am also slightly surprised that the MOD's vaccination programme has become such a matter of urgent attention for him and others in the House, because we have had a series of parliamentary questions on this matter over the last six months, and in all of them, we have been very clear that the MOD's position is that people would receive their vaccinations overseas in line with their age cohort here in the UK.

Mr Ellwood: That was wrong. It was absolutely wrong.

James Heappey: Whether that was right or wrong can be a matter of debate, but the MOD position has been very clear throughout. I happen to believe that it is the right decision, because there was no decision to prioritise other professions beyond those within the NHS—military medics, it is important to say, were all vaccinated as a matter of priority alongside their NHS colleagues while they were working in high-risk covid environments.

The other thing that I would just pick up on in my right hon. Friend's response to my initial answer is his assertion that 80 people on our deployment to Mali had covid. That is simply not the case. The correct figure, as was stated in a parliamentary answer last week, is that cumulatively, since the deployment began, 24 people have tested positive for covid. If you will indulge the detail of that, Madam Deputy Speaker, there were six positive tests in March, two in April and one in May for the Chinook detachment, and two in December, six in January, one in February and six in March for the long range reconnaissance group.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): This is frankly shocking. Defence Ministers have failed in their first duty to our armed forces, which is to ensure that they are properly trained, equipped and protected when they are deployed overseas, especially in conflict zones such as Mali. Six months ago, when Labour called in this House for Ministers to ramp up testing and to set out a clear plan to vaccinate our troops, the Defence Secretary said:

"We are working on a list right now of who we can prioritise".—
[*Official Report*, 12 January 2021; Vol. 687, c. 189.]

Why was it not done? Why was top priority not given to troops sent overseas?

The Minister has just said it is only being done in line with the national programme. The MOD has been clearer, saying recently:

"UK personnel have been vaccinated in line with national priority guidelines...which saw vaccines rolled out to priority groups in order of age and risk."

These are guidelines for civilians in Britain, not for troops fighting terrorists, 3,000 miles from home, in countries with jab rates among the lowest in the world—it is still at only 0.2% in Mali. I say to the Minister that that is wrong. How on earth did the Defence Secretary not stand up for the forces he deployed to Mali, Kenya, Oman, Afghanistan and elsewhere? These troops train together and fight together; they should be jabbed together.

How many and what proportion of UK military personnel deployed abroad, country by country, have contracted covid? How many have now been double-jabbed, and when will all of them be done? Have all those deployed on core defence tasks, such as the continuous at-sea deterrent, now been double-jabbed?

Will the Minister comment on the circumstances of HMS Defender in the Black sea today?

Finally, will the Minister now make full vaccination mandatory before overseas deployment? The Australians made that commitment in February, and it is high time British Ministers now did the same.

James Heappey: The detail of vaccines and positive tests by country is held, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I am not sure you would indulge me if I were to go through the spreadsheet. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would accept it if I were to write to him and place a copy in the Library, so it can be a matter of record.

The headline stat, as I said in my answer to a parliamentary question last week, is that 98.6% of people deployed overseas have had their first dose, and 56% have had their second dose. I accept that there could be a debate on all professions, whether they be clinicians in the NHS, teachers or members of the armed forces. We made a judgment that, where the medical facilities are sufficient to safely administer the vaccine in a deployed environment, those people would receive their vaccine in line with their age cohort in the general UK population. Where it is not possible to do that, such as with the continuous at-sea deterrent, they were fully vaccinated before deployment.

I am also grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising the activities around HMS Defender in the Black sea earlier today. No warning shots have been fired at HMS Defender. The Royal Navy ship is conducting innocent passage through Ukrainian territorial waters, in accordance with international law. We believe the Russians were undertaking a gunnery exercise in the Black sea and provided the maritime community with prior warning of their activity. No shots were directed at HMS Defender, and we do not recognise the claim that bombs were dropped in her path.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): While it is, of course, welcome that 98.6% of our service personnel overseas have been vaccinated, just for the reassurance of those men and women serving overseas and their families back here in the UK, can my hon. Friend confirm that it is now and will be a priority

[Andrew Bowie]

of the Ministry of Defence, if it is not already, to ensure that all those serving overseas in our name, for this country, have access to both their jabs as a matter of urgency?

James Heappey: First, let me just correct myself for fear that I have inadvertently misled the House: the figure for all overseas deployments is 95%; 98.6% refers to the deployment in Mali. I apologise for that inaccuracy.

My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Given where we are in the national vaccination programme, one might argue that that is now the case, as everybody is within days of receiving their first jab. In fact, the way that the vaccination programme was administered whereby everybody over 50 received their jab in one go towards the front end of the priority groups at home meant that many in their 50s and 60s overseas—although in the defence population that is not very many—ended up receiving their jabs ahead of their age group in the UK. Likewise, for those under 40, jabs were effectively being rolled out in line with people in their 40s here in the UK. That means that many of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and airwomen who were in their late teens or 20s were getting their jab well ahead of their contemporaries.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I think many of us are shocked to hear some of the Minister's comments today. He seems proud of the numbers testing positive in Mali. We should not have any testing positive at all because they should have received a double vaccination.

When we are sending troops into a conflict situation, they must be given appropriate personal protective equipment, including vaccination against whatever the threat is, and clearly covid is a big threat at the moment. The Government have a duty of care to those in the armed forces to ensure that they are able to carry out their duties and that operations are not threatened by illness. There is a potential threat to national security as well. Why have the Government not prioritised the armed forces for vaccination, regardless of whether they are serving at home or abroad? Can the Minister assure me that from this point on, personnel will not be deployed overseas without receiving both doses of vaccine? How many Royal Navy ships have had to restrict their operations due to covid outbreaks?

James Heappey: First, I would like to challenge the hon. Lady: I am not sure that correcting the assertion that there had been 80 positive cases with the fact that there had been 24 shows pride in that fact; it is just correcting the record in response to the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) in the first place.

It is certainly the case that everybody who is deploying on operations now has been jabbed. That goes without saying given that we are now at the stage where everybody under the age of 40 has had their jab. It is not necessarily the case that everybody has had two jabs and not necessarily possible to accelerate that. The Royal Anglian battlegroup, for example, who have just deployed to Mali, have had their first jab. They will receive their second when the appropriate period of time has passed between jabs. Otherwise there is no point in jabbing them because the effectiveness of the vaccination will

not be as high as it should be. However, we have certainly reached a point in the vaccination programme where everybody who is being deployed has been vaccinated.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Clearly we must make sure that there is availability of vaccinations, and we must do everything we can to build public trust right across society, including our armed forces, in the effectiveness of the vaccinations. There has recently been some press comment about what the Government might do with those in the armed forces who refuse to accept the vaccine. I seek two reassurances from the Minister: first, that the maximum will be done to persuade them of the advisability of having a vaccination; and secondly, that they will not have their careers damaged because of their refusal to accept the vaccine.

James Heappey: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. It is not in our gift to order people to take a medication should they not wish to do so. Prior to deployments where we have been seeking to fully vaccinate beforehand, we have been having a conversation with those who have expressed concern to try to reassure them that the vaccine is entirely safe and that it is in their interest to take it. I can absolutely assure him that anybody who needs to be removed from an operational deployment because of their unwillingness to take a vaccine is not in any way career-fouled as a consequence.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con) [V]: The reports of events in the Black sea remind us of why families worry when they have serving personnel at sea or serving abroad. Can my hon. Friend reassure the constituents who have contacted me on this issue that the vaccine roll-out programme to our brave men and women is going well and will hit the targets he has outlined?

James Heappey: I certainly can. The second doses will all be deployed so that everybody overseas gets them as soon after their first dose as is medically advisable. Achieving that is not without challenge: getting these doses forward can require quite a logistical effort given some of the locations in which our people serve, but that has gone well and it is testament to military planners in the Ministry of Defence and the Defence Medical Services that that is the case.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): It is obviously deeply troubling, no matter how many service personnel who have been deployed have now got covid—whether the number is 80 or 28 or whatever the clarification the Minister has given—that there are also media reports that those personnel did not have enough test kits or enough space in order to self-isolate. Can the Minister clarify that he is doing all he can to get test kits out to those service personnel who are defending us, as it should be the first duty of Ministers to protect service personnel who are protecting us, and can he ensure that any troops deployed in the coming months on operations will have everything they need in terms of testing and space to self-isolate if, unfortunately, they contract covid-19?

James Heappey: We do not recognise the reports in the press about lack of access to testing equipment; I have been assured that testing equipment was available in all theatres. The article to which I think the hon.

Gentleman refers was about Mali, and there was certainly sufficient testing equipment in Mali at the time the article refers to.

The ability to self-isolate is slightly more challenging in some military settings than in others; in submarines, for example, it is quite hard, but in many other deployments it is perfectly possible. We do our best to make such provision available, but obviously field conditions are at times a slightly austere environment, in which case that is not always possible.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): I welcome the update on vaccinations for our forces. While the MOD has a clear responsibility to protect its people, does the Minister agree that our forces will always get on with the task in hand and will generally be comfortable with risk in the face of adversity, a lesson that can perhaps be extended more broadly to our fight against the pandemic today?

James Heappey: My hon. Friend is right of course that people in our armed forces do accept a heightened risk. However, the risk that they offer to accept is ordinarily one that is posed by the enemy, and we in the MOD certainly do not assume that they are willing and able to accept a higher risk of infection from a virus. The judgment that was made was not around their acceptance of risk; it was made around the fact that military personnel are invariably young, fit and healthy, so when decisions were made about the prioritisation of vaccine it felt correct—and I stand by this now—to prioritise the vaccination of those who were more elderly and vulnerable at home rather than those who were younger, fitter and healthier and serving overseas.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): We are all aware of the rigid, dogmatic vaccination policies of the Health Department bureaucrats and the utter failure of the Health Ministers to inject some common sense—they really are hopeless—but the Minister's pitiful response today shows that Defence Ministers have meekly gone along with this. So the real question is why did our Defence Ministers not show some backbone by standing up for our troops and insisting on vaccines before deployment, if necessary forcing a decision from the Prime Minister? Can the Minister explain that failure?

James Heappey: I think I have answered the question already. We made the case for priority vaccination for those who we felt needed to be vaccinated because it was unrealistic to vaccinate them other than as a priority right at the start of vaccination programmes—the nuclear deterrent quick reaction alert aircrew for example. Thereafter it was perfectly possible to safely vaccinate members of the armed forces in line with their age cohort, and the correct judgment was made in prioritising those who were more elderly and vulnerable at home.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con) [V]: We now have a clear position whereby two vaccinations are required, with a period of time obviously required between those vaccinations to maximise the efficacy of the vaccine. Will my hon. Friend give me an assurance that when we are vaccinating our armed forces, we are ensuring not only that the intervals between the jabs are maintained, but that we are allowing a period of time

after the second jab is provided before our armed forces are sent on deployments, so that they are given the maximum possible protection from covid-19?

James Heappey: I cannot do that, because we have made sure that our forces have received their first jabs in line with or ahead of their contemporaries in the general population. They will receive their second doses at the appropriate time thereafter—once deployed, in the case of those recently deployed to Mali. I think that is an appropriate way of doing this. These are young, fit and healthy people, and they will get both their first and second doses well ahead of their contemporaries at home.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Can I say to the Minister that there is a clue in his title: Minister of State for the Armed Forces? It is about standing up for our armed forces. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar), I find it astounding that the Minister has just followed Department of Health guidance, rather than saying that there is a priority need, as the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) said, for people to have been vaccinated before overseas operations.

Let me ask the Minister directly about the 28 personnel—or whatever the number is, because he gave me a different one in a written answer about Mali the other day. What operational effect did that actually have on our contribution to the multinational force that is out there, because that is the key test? I just find it unacceptable that we did not vaccinate people against covid before they went.

James Heappey: First, there is an important point of fact: the battlegroup to which the right hon. Gentleman refers deployed in December 2020, before any vaccine had been certified. It would have been impossible to have vaccinated the Light Dragoons battle group before they were even deployed.

Mr Kevan Jones: Not true.

James Heappey: It is true; they deployed in December 2020, and I believe that the first vaccination of a civilian in the UK was in December 2020. I do not see how the right hon. Gentleman could expect that to have been the case. He also asked a question about operational output, which is the right question to ask. As the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) and others who were briefed by the commanding officer of the Light Dragoons last week will perhaps be able to reassure him, there was no impact on operational output.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): Although this is a question about defence personnel overseas, it would be remiss of me not to take a moment to thank the members of the armed forces who have helped with vaccine roll-out at home, including those from Leuchars, based in my constituency. May I ask the Minister, what discussions did the MOD have with deployed military personnel—such as the British Armed Forces Federation and other associations for military personnel—before deciding on the strategy that has clearly been the subject of this urgent question?

James Heappey: I echo the hon. Member's thanks to all those military personnel who have been involved not just in the vaccine taskforce, but in all other parts of the

[James Heappey]

response to the covid pandemic, particularly those in her constituency. Clearly, decisions such as this are initially decisions for policy makers in Government. I think that I have been very clear about our willingness as a ministerial team to own the decision that we took; I think it was the right one. I know that the chain of command have every confidence that the vaccination programme that we have set ourselves to deliver is indeed delivering. There were no conversations beyond that with any of the agencies or organisations that she mentioned.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): My hon. Friend will be aware that there are a good number of British troops deployed in the Kurdish region in northern Iraq, training the peshmerga in their ongoing military fight with Daesh, and we know that Daesh seeks to capitalise on some of the chaos of the pandemic to make advances. I understand that our deployment in Iraq will be growing slightly over the next year, so will my hon. Friend assure me that anybody deployed there will be fully vaccinated, and that the troops who are training and who are still engaged in military operations have equal access to the vaccine?

James Heappey: I can reassure my hon. Friend that 96% of people currently serving on Op Shader—that will include those who are based in Cyprus as part of the aircrew—have been vaccinated, and 31% have had their second dose. I can assure him that they will receive their second doses as soon as it is medically advisable for them to do so. I cannot, however, tell him that it is policy to vaccinate the troops with whom they are partnering.

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): Will the Minister publish details of the risk assessment that was undertaken to determine why our troops were not fast-tracked for vaccine before deployment in high-risk areas?

James Heappey: I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) [V]: Look, this is just wrong and the Minister should admit it. Our service personnel deserve full vaccination before deployment on overseas missions. When the US, France, Germany and others have fully vaccinated their forces, it does not seem right that we are behind the curve on this. He says that all personnel are now single-jabbed but there is no point in providing second jabs unless the required time has elapsed for them to be effective. I get that, but can he make it clear to the House whether that is the 12-week extended gap that the public have to wait for, or the three-week gap that the vaccine manufacturers recommend?

James Heappey: I will write to the hon. Gentleman if this is incorrect, but I believe that we are working on around a four-week gap.

Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con) [V]: I thank the Minister for his reassurance that HMS Defender was not coming under fire earlier today in the Black sea. In Armed Forces Week, when we thank and celebrate our whole armed forces community, will the

Minister join me in thanking all who were involved so invaluable in the vaccine roll-out in all four nations of the United Kingdom? Will he reassure me that, from the youngest recruit to those approaching retirement, all our armed forces will be prioritised for vaccinations?

James Heappey: I certainly join my hon. Friend in celebrating all who serve and have served in our nation's armed forces, and in thanking them for doing so. She will have heard in my responses to previous questions that we are vaccinating the vast majority of the armed forces community, with the exception of those involved in nuclear deterrence and other niche tasks, in line with wider priorities. In reality, the way that delivery has taken place means that the vast majority of our armed forces, who are in their late teens and 20s, are being vaccinated ahead of their contemporaries in the general population. The decision was taken some months ago that we would not vaccinate the armed forces ahead of the general population, and that we would instead prioritise those who are more elderly and vulnerable.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): We now come—

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Oh, I am so sorry! How could I possibly miss out the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)? I would never wish to do so.

Jim Shannon: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I saw you looking around, and I wondered whether you would look for me in my usual spot.

We have so much to thank our service personnel for, and they put a lot on the line to serve, in terms of their family life. Those families back home have grave concerns about their service personnel who are serving overseas, and those who are serving overseas have concerns about their families back home. What has been done to assure the members of those families, both at home and away, that they will be safe and sound and will see each other again?

James Heappey: The hon. Gentleman was probably waiting for you to start the Adjournment debate before he intervened, Madam Deputy Speaker, as is his normal fashion. He raises an important point; as someone who served overseas on operations, I knew I was okay until I was not, but for those who are left behind—the families of our serving personnel—there is a daily worry about their safety and the threats they are facing. Indeed, many colleagues in the House have written to me on behalf of parents and loved ones of people deploying to seek reassurance about the vaccination programme, and we have made sure that that has been given to them, so that families understand that their loved ones will be vaccinated while in theatre. The families of our armed forces are as vital a part of the armed forces community as those who serve, and the hon. Gentleman has given me an opportunity, in Armed Forces Week, to remark on their steadfastness and the important role they play in maintaining the fighting power of our armed forces.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): That concludes the urgent question, and I thank the Minister.

Point of Order

2.10 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. First, I would like to apologise to you and to the House. I was not expecting to be in the Chamber today and my attire is that of somebody who does not like the heat in London, so first I should apologise for that. I wanted to ask whether you could enable me to seek an apology from the Prime Minister—who has inspired me, in my attire, to come to the Chamber today—for referring today at Prime Minister's Question Time to questions about the pitiful rape conviction rate in our country as “jabber”. When questioned about the falling rape conviction rate, the Prime Minister asserted that this was merely “jabber” and not something that sees, for every 60 people who come forward to say that they have been raped, one charge—and that does not even cover convictions.

I would also like to ask you whether you could help me correct the record on some of the other things that the Prime Minister said today at Prime Minister's questions. He asserted that clauses 106 and 107 in the new Bill would increase convictions. They have absolutely nothing to do with that; they are about sentencing, and I speak as an expert in the field. He also stated that the Labour party had not supported the Domestic Abuse Bill. As one of the key authors of many of the clauses in it, I must say it was a huge surprise to me to hear that the Labour party had not supported the Domestic Abuse Bill, so I am not entirely sure why the Prime Minister asserted that. But more than anything, what I seek today is an apology from the person who is meant to keep our streets safe. Currently, if you are a woman or a girl in this country, the Government are failing.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order, and for giving me notice of her intention to raise it. May I also say that I greatly appreciate her apologising for her attire, which of course in places other than this Chamber would be perfectly chic, but she is right to note that there is a certain dress code for the Chamber, which it is important that we all observe. However, I fully appreciate that the hon. Lady was not planning to come to speak in the Chamber today, and there is always the exception that proves the rule.

As to the very serious matter that the hon. Lady has raised, she asked me if I can take steps to correct the record about what the Prime Minister said, and the answer to that is no; answers given and statements made by Ministers, or indeed by any other Member of this House, are not a matter for the Chair. The hon. Lady clearly has one opinion and the Prime Minister has a different opinion, and the purpose of this Chamber is to allow both of those opinions or evaluations of the facts to be freely expressed. The hon. Lady has taken the opportunity to put her interpretation of the facts and to point out that that differs from the Prime Minister's interpretation of the facts.

The hon. Lady raised another matter which is of importance, and that is the use of language. It was so noisy in the Chamber today—I suppose that is refreshingly good in some ways, because at last we can have a significant number of Members present—that I certainly could not be quite sure exactly what was said at any one

point, but if it is the case that the Prime Minister or, indeed, anyone else speaking in this Chamber is in danger of giving offence by the actual words that they have used, especially on a very sensitive subject—undoubtedly, the subject of rape and the prosecution of rape is the most sensitive—I simply encourage all Members to remember the words of “Erskine May”:

“Good temper and moderation are the characteristics of parliamentary language”,
and that moderation should be observed at all times.

Having said that, the hon. Lady has made her point very well and I am sure that it will have been noted not only on the Treasury Bench but more widely. I thank her for that.

BILLS PRESENTED

PLANNING (PROPER MAINTENANCE OF LAND) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Jonathan Gullis presented a Bill to make provision for increased fines for failures to comply with a notice under section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 14 January 2022, and to be printed (Bill 130).

PLASTIC POLLUTION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Alistair Carmichael, supported by Ed Davey, Wendy Chamberlain, Wera Hobhouse, Tim Farron, Layla Moran, Sarah Green, Daisy Cooper, Jamie Stone, Christine Jardine, Munira Wilson and Sarah Olney, presented a Bill to set targets for the reduction of plastic pollution; to require the Secretary of State to publish a strategy and annual reports on plastic pollution reduction; to establish an advisory committee on plastic pollution; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 February 2022, and to be printed (Bill 131).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Did the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) say the 14th of February?

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The fourth day. I have other plans for the 14th. [*Laughter.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am glad to hear that—so do I.

I will now briefly suspend the House in order that arrangements can be made for the next item of business.

2.16 pm

Sitting suspended.

ARMED FORCES BILL: PROGRAMME (NO. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the Order of 8 February 2021 in the last Session of Parliament (Armed Forces Bill: Programme) be varied as follows:

(1) Paragraphs 4 to 6 of the Order shall be omitted.

(2) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House on recommitment, any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall be taken in two days in accordance with the following provisions of this Order.

Committee of the whole House

(3) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House shall be taken on the first day and shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the first day.

Consideration and Third Reading

(4) Any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall be taken on the second day.

(5) Any proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the second day.

(6) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the second day.—(*James Morris.*)

Question agreed to.

Armed Forces Bill

[*Relevant document: Special Report of the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill of Session 2019-21, The Armed Forces Bill, HC 1281.*]

Considered in Committee.

Not amended in Select Committee.

[DAME ELEANOR LAING *in the Chair*]

2.21 pm

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Eleanor Laing): Before I ask the Clerk to read the title of the Bill, I should explain that in these exceptional circumstances, although the Chair of the Committee would normally sit in the Clerk's seat, in order to comply with social distancing requirements, I will remain in the Speaker's Chair, which is so much more comfortable and from which I can see better, although I will be carrying out the role not of Deputy Speaker, but of Chairman of the Committee. The occupant of the Chair should, in Committee, normally be addressed as the Chair, rather than as Deputy Speaker.

Clause 1**DURATION OF ARMED FORCES ACT 2006**

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The Chairman: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Clauses 2 to 6 stand part.

Amendment 7, in clause 7, page 4, line 27, at end insert—

“(4A) Guidance under subsection (3)(a) must provide for charges of murder, manslaughter, domestic violence, child abuse and rape to be tried only in civilian court when the offences are alleged to have been committed in the United Kingdom.”

This amendment would ensure that the most serious crimes – murder, manslaughter domestic violence, child abuse and rape – are tried in the civilian courts when committed in the UK.

Clause 7 stand part.

Amendment 1, in clause 8, page 9, line 19, at end insert—

“(aa) a relevant government department;”.

This amendment, with amendments 2, 3 and 4, would place the same legal responsibility to have ‘due regard’ to the Armed Forces Covenant on central government and the devolved administrations as the Bill currently requires of local authorities and other public bodies.

Amendment 39, in clause 8, page 10, line 2, at end insert—

“and

(g) in relation to accommodation provided to service people in England, a requirement for that accommodation to meet the Decent Homes Standard.”

The intention of this amendment is to ensure that all service housing is regulated in line with the minimum quality housing standard which pertains to whatever part of the United Kingdom that housing is situated in.

Amendment 2, in clause 8, page 11, line 18, at end insert—

“(aa) a relevant department in the devolved administration in Wales;”.

See explanatory statement for Amendment 1.

Government amendment 8.

Amendment 40, in clause 8, page 11, line 38, at end insert—

“and

(e) in relation to accommodation provided to service people in Wales, a requirement for that accommodation to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.”

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 39.

Government amendment 9.

Amendment 3, in clause 8, page 12, line 32, at end insert—

“(aa) a relevant department in the devolved administration in Scotland;”.

See explanatory statement for Amendment 1.

Amendment 41, in clause 8, page 13, line 9, at end insert—

“and

(e) in relation to accommodation provided to service people in Scotland, a requirement for that accommodation to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.”

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 39.

Government amendment 10.

Amendment 4, in clause 8, page 14, line 4, at end insert—

“(aa) a relevant department in the devolved administration in Northern Ireland;”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 1.

Government amendments 11 and 12.

Amendment 42, in clause 8, page 14, line 27, at end insert—

“and

(d) in relation to accommodation provided to service people in Northern Ireland, a requirement for that accommodation to meet the Decent Homes standard for Northern Ireland.”

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 39.

Government amendments 13 to 15.

Amendment 6, in clause 8, page 18, line 7, at end insert—

“343AG Section 343AF: report

The Secretary of State must lay a report before each House of Parliament no later than three months after the day on which this Act is passed on how the powers in section 343F (Sections 343AA to 343AD: power to add bodies and functions) will work in practice.”

This amendment would require the Secretary of State to set out how powers in the Bill could be used to widen its scope to address all matters of potential disadvantage for service personnel under the Armed Forces Covenant including employment, pensions, compensation, social care, criminal justice and immigration.

Clauses 8 and 9 stand part.

Government amendments 16 to 23.

Clauses 10 to 13 stand part.

Government amendments 24 to 30.

Clauses 14 to 26 stand part.

New clause 1—*Waived fees for indefinite leave to remain for serving or discharged member of the UK armed forces—*

“(1) The Immigration Act 2014 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 68, after (11) insert—

“(12) No fees may be charged in respect of a serving or previously serving member of the UK armed forces, or their family members, applying for indefinite leave to remain under Appendix Armed Forces of the Immigration Rules.”

This new clause would amend the Immigration Act 2014 to waive the fee for indefinite leave to remain applications for any current or previously serving Members of the UK Armed forces, and their families.

New clause 2—*Duty of care to service personnel—*

“(1) The Secretary of State must establish a duty of care standard in relation to legal, pastoral and mental health support provided to service personnel involved in investigations or litigation arising from overseas operations, as defined in section 1(6) of the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans Act 2021).

(2) The Secretary of State must lay a copy of the duty of care standard under subsection (1) before Parliament within six months of the date on which this Act is passed.

(3) The Secretary of State must thereafter in each calendar year—

(a) prepare a duty of care update, and

(b) include the duty of care update in the Armed Forces Covenant annual report when it is laid before Parliament.

(4) The duty of care update is a review about the continuous process and improvement to meet the duty of care standard established in subsection (1), in particular in relation to incidents arising from overseas operations of—

(a) litigation and investigations brought against service personnel for allegations of criminal misconduct and wrongdoing;

(b) civil litigation brought by service personnel against the Ministry of Defence for negligence and personal injury;

(c) judicial reviews and inquiries into allegations of misconduct by service personnel; and

(d) such other related fields as the Secretary of State may determine.

(5) In preparing a duty of care update the Secretary of State must have regard to, and publish relevant data in relation to (in respect of overseas operations)—

(a) the adequacy of legal, welfare and mental health support services provided to service personnel who are accused of crimes;

(b) complaints made by service personnel or their legal representation when in the process of bringing or attempting to bring civil claims against the Ministry of Defence for negligence and personal injury;

(c) complaints made by service personnel or their legal representation when in the process of investigation or litigation for an accusation of misconduct: and

(d) meeting national standards of care and safeguarding for families of service personnel, where relevant.

(6) In subsection (1) “service personnel” means—

(a) members of the regular forces and the reserve forces;

(b) members of British overseas territory forces who are subject to service law;

(c) former members of any of Her Majesty’s forces who are ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom; and

(d) where relevant, family members of any person meeting the definition within paragraph (a), (b) or (c).

(7) In subsection (1) “duty of care” means both the legal and moral obligation of the Ministry of Defence to ensure the wellbeing of service personnel.

(8) None of the provisions of this section may be used to alter the principle of combat immunity.”

This new clause will require the Secretary of State to establish a duty of care standard in relation to legal, pastoral and mental health support provided to service personnel involved in investigations or litigation arising from overseas operations.

New clause 4—*Report on dismissals and forced resignations for reasons of sexual orientation or gender identity—*

“(1) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a report on the number of people who have been dismissed or forced to resign from the Armed Forces due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

(2) The report under subsection (1) must include cases where—

- (a) there is formal documentation citing sexuality as the reason for their dismissal; or
- (b) there is evidence of sexuality or gender identity being a reason for their dismissal, though another reason is cited in formal documentation.

(3) The report under subsection (1) must include recommendations of the sort of compensation which may be appropriate, including but not limited to—

- (a) the restoration of ranks;
- (b) pensions; and
- (c) other forms of financial compensation.

(4) The report must include a review of the cases of those service personnel who as a result of their sexuality have criminal convictions for sex offences and/or who are on the Sex Offenders Register.

(5) The report must include discharges and forced resignations back to at least 1955.

(6) The first report under subsection (1) must be laid no later than 6 months after the day on which this Act is passed.

(7) The Secretary of State may make further reports under subsection (1) from time to time.

(8) In this section, “sexuality or gender identity” includes perceived or self-identified sexuality or gender identity.”

This new clause requires the Government to conduct a comprehensive review of the number of people who were dismissed or forced to resign from the Armed Forces due to their sexuality and to make recommendations on appropriate forms of compensation.

New clause 6—Duty of care for alcohol, drugs and gambling disorders—

“(1) The Armed Forces Act 2006 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 20(2)(d) insert—

- ‘(e) the person is dependent on, or has a propensity to misuse, alcohol or drugs.’

(3) After section 20(3) insert—

‘(3A) The Secretary of State has a duty of care to offer a specific pathway for support and treatment for current and previously serving service personnel who experience—

- (a) a propensity to misuse, alcohol and drugs,
- (b) alcohol or drug dependency, and
- (c) gambling disorder.

(3B) The Secretary of State must include in the annual Armed Forces Covenant report—

- (a) the number of people accessing treatment and support as set out in section (1), and
- (b) the current provisions for rehabilitation facilities for Armed Forces personnel who are experiencing a propensity to misuse or have a dependency on alcohol, drugs and gambling.”

New clause 7—Indefinite leave to remain payments by Commonwealth and Gurkha members of armed forces—

“(1) The Immigration Act 2014 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 68 (10), after ‘regulations’ insert “must make exceptions in respect of any person with citizenship of a Commonwealth country (other than the United Kingdom) who has served at least four years in the UK armed forces, or in respect of any person who has served at least four years in the Brigade of Gurkhas, such exceptions to include capping the fee for any such person applying for indefinite leave to remain at no more than the actual administrative cost of processing that application, and”

This new clause will ensure that Commonwealth and Gurkha veterans applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain following four years of service will only pay the unit cost of an application.

New clause 8—Armed Forces Federation—

“(1) The Armed Forces Act 2006 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 333, insert—

‘333A Armed Forces Federation

(1) There shall be an Armed Forces Federation for the United Kingdom for the purpose of representing members of the Armed Forces in the United Kingdom in all matters affecting their welfare, remuneration and efficiency, except for—

- (a) questions of promotion affecting individuals, and
- (b) (subject to subsection (2)) questions of discipline affecting individuals.

(2) The Armed Forces Federation may represent a member of the Armed Forces at any proceedings or on an appeal from any such proceedings.

(3) The Armed Forces Federation shall act through local and central representative bodies.

(4) This section applies to reservists of the Armed Forces as it applies to members of the Armed Forces, and references to the Armed Forces shall be construed accordingly.

333B Regulations for the Armed Forces Federation

(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations—

- (a) prescribe the constitution and proceedings of the Armed Forces Federation, or
- (b) authorise the Federation to make rules concerning such matters relating to their constitution and proceedings as may be specified in the regulations.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), regulations under this section may make provision—

- (a) with respect to the membership of the Federation;
- (b) with respect to the raising of funds by the Federation by voluntary subscription and the use and management of funds derived from such subscriptions;
- (c) with respect to the manner in which representations may be made by committees or bodies of the Federation to officers of the Armed Forces and the Secretary of State; and
- (d) for the payment by the Secretary of State of expenses incurred in connection with the Federation and for the use by the Federation of premises provided by local Armed Forces bodies for Armed Forces purposes.

(3) Regulations under this section may contain such supplementary and transitional provisions as appear to the Secretary of State to be appropriate, including provisions adapting references in any enactment (including this Act) to committees or other bodies of the Federation.

(4) A statutory instrument containing regulations under this section shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.

(5) This section applies to reservists of the Armed Forces as it applies to

members of the Armed Forces.”

This new clause would create a representative body for the Armed Forces, akin to the Police Federation, which would represent their members in matters such as welfare, pay and efficiency.

New clause 9—Investigation of allegations related to overseas operations—

“(1) In deciding whether to commence criminal proceedings for allegations against a member of Her Majesty’s Forces arising out of overseas operations, the relevant prosecutor must take into account whether the investigation has been timely and comprehensively conducted.

(2) Where an investigator of allegations arising out of overseas operations is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence of criminal conduct to continue the investigation, the investigator must within 21 days refer the investigation to the Service Prosecuting Authority with any initial findings and accompanying case papers.

(3) An investigation may not proceed after the period of 6 months beginning with the day on which the allegation was first reported without the reference required in subsection (2).

(4) On receiving a referral under subsection (2), the Service Prosecuting Authority must either—

- (a) order the investigation to cease if it considers it unlikely that charges will be brought, or
- (b) give appropriate advice and directions to the investigator about avenues of inquiry to pursue and not pursue, including—
 - (i) possible defendants to consider,
 - (ii) possible explanations to consider for the circumstances giving rise to the investigation, and
 - (iii) overseas inquiries and seeking the help of overseas jurisdictions.

(5) Where the investigation proceeds, the Service Prosecuting Authority must monitor and review its progress at intervals of three months and must on each review make a decision in the terms set out in subsection (4).

(6) On the conclusion of the investigation, the investigator must send a final report with accompanying case papers to the Service Prosecuting Authority for the consideration of criminal proceedings.

(7) After receipt of the final report, the facts and circumstances of the allegations may not be further investigated or reinvestigated without the direction of the Director of Service Prosecutions acting on the ground that there is new compelling evidence or information which might—

- (a) materially affect the previous decision, and
- (b) lead to a charge being made.

(8) The Judge Advocate General may give Practice Directions as he or she deems appropriate for the investigation of allegations arising out of overseas operations.

(9) For the purposes of this section—

‘case papers’ includes summaries of interviews or other accounts given by the suspect, previous convictions and disciplinary record, available witness statements, scenes of crime photographs, CCTV recordings, medical and forensic science reports;

‘investigator’ means a member of the service police or a civil police force.”

That schedule 1 be the First schedule to the Bill.

That schedule 2 be the Second schedule to the Bill.

Government amendments 31 to 38.

That schedule 3 be the Third schedule to the Bill.

That schedule 4 be the Fourth schedule to the Bill.

That schedule 5 be the Fifth schedule to the Bill.

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty): It is a privilege to speak to the Armed Forces Bill before a Committee of the whole House. Indeed, it is fitting that the Bill should come before the Committee during Armed Forces Week, when we celebrate and commemorate Her Majesty’s armed forces.

Before speaking to the Bill, I want to express my gratitude to the members of the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill, some of whom are here today, and to thank them for their rigorous and professional approach to the work of that Committee. I commend their published report.

In simple terms, the Bill’s primary purpose is to renew the Armed Forces Act 2006—

Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Leo Docherty: I will.

Stuart Anderson: I thank the Minister for giving way. I wanted to get in early to mention the armed forces covenant, which means a lot to me, as I will explain later.

We have many proud veterans in Wolverhampton who have given so much for this country, and the armed forces mean loads to them. When the diary permits, will my hon. Friend come to Wolverhampton to meet those veterans and hear at first hand what the covenant means for their lives?

Leo Docherty: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, and I would be delighted to accept an invitation to Wolverhampton. I acknowledge and applaud the magnificent work he does in Wolverhampton to support his veterans. I hope the Bill is well received by them, and we thank them for their service.

The Bill will deliver improvements to the service justice system and, most importantly, it delivers on our commitment to enshrine the armed forces covenant in law.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I thank the Minister for giving way so early in his speech. Unlike the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson), I can say that I was delighted to see the Minister when he came to Northern Ireland last week. I am glad that Northern Ireland got ahead of Wolverhampton on the issue—no offence to my colleague.

Will the Minister spell out clearly at this early stage that veterans in Northern Ireland will be treated equally to veterans from any other part of the United Kingdom, and that no impediment will be allowed to get in the way of veterans being treated fairly and equitably across the United Kingdom, which they should and must be? Will he assure us that the legacy issues will be brought before the House before it rises for the summer?

Leo Docherty: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I was very pleased last week to meet several veterans’ groups, both of home service and of overseas service, to hear about their experiences. The Government are committed to driving towards parity of provision for all veterans, whether they be of home service or overseas service. In terms of legacy issues, he will know that work is ongoing within the Northern Ireland Office, and the Government are absolutely committed—and full of resolve—to delivering the closure that our veterans need with honour and finality.

Ian Paisley: I really appreciate what the Minister is saying. He knows how vital this issue is. I do not underestimate the Government’s commitment, but I am concerned about the dead hand of officials and political activists in Northern Ireland. Will there be finality on this matter in July? Will a statute of limitations be introduced then?

Leo Docherty: I cannot get into the timing, and it would not be useful for me to do that at this time. I know that work is continuing apace and that it is a top priority for both the Prime Minister and the Northern Ireland Office. I share the hon. Gentleman’s sense of urgent desire to see this delivered.

The covenant was introduced in its current form a decade ago, and it has undoubtedly had an enormous and very beneficial impact for many within our service community. However, too often, the experience of the covenant depends on where someone lives, so more

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does need to be done. The Bill delivers for our service personnel and veterans by, for the first time ever, creating a duty for relevant public bodies across the whole of the United Kingdom to pay due regard to the principles of the covenant in the areas of housing, healthcare and education. The Bill represents a significant milestone and delivers on a key manifesto commitment to enshrine further the covenant into law.

In the area of housing, the duty will cover those bodies that are responsible for social housing, homelessness policy and the administration of disabled facilities grants, which can be vital for injured veterans. In education, we know that our service families sometimes face challenges due to their mobile lifestyles in accessing suitable school places for their children, including those with special educational needs. The duty will therefore ensure that the needs of service children are properly understood. In healthcare, much has already been achieved, but service families and veterans still sometimes experience disadvantage, often caused by their mobility or by healthcare requirements resulting from service. The duty will apply to all bodies that are responsible for commissioning and delivering healthcare services across the UK. Housing, healthcare and education are the essential areas, but to future-proof the Bill there is a provision to allow the scope of the duty to be expanded beyond those areas.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Leo Docherty: I am delighted to give way.

Mr Jones: When the Command Paper was launched in 2005 by Bob Ainsworth, we had cross-Government work and armed forces champions in Departments because it was about central Government standing up to help veterans as well. Why, therefore, does the scope of the Bill exclude central Government Departments?

Leo Docherty: It does not need to include Government Departments, because that provision is already made. There are Ministers in every Department holding the lead for veterans' issues, and the Secretary of State is accountable in his annual report. Therefore, the provision for making central Government accountable is already in place.

Mr Jones: The Minister says that, but in effect it is not in place, because there is no redress. I must say that I am disappointed with the powers of redress in the Bill even in the areas where they are included. What are the powers of redress against Departments in respect of the covenant—not in respect of any other type of complaint there might be? How would a veteran ensure that the covenant was implemented by the Department of Health and Social Care at a national level, and what redress is there?

Leo Docherty: The right hon. Gentleman knows that, in terms of all national provision, Ministers are accountable, as I am being accountable right here, right now. What we are dealing with today is the local provision. If individuals feel that they have not had adequate provision and are disadvantaged, they could pursue the route of judicial review in the worst case. We believe that, at the local level, most local authorities want to get this right, and we are just laying out best practice examples for them to follow.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Will the Minister give way?

Leo Docherty: I will give way one last time before I make some significant progress.

Jamie Stone: Can the Minister give me the same reassurance when it comes to Departments in the devolved Administrations, such as the Scottish Government?

2.30 pm

Leo Docherty: Absolutely I can, and I am very pleased to.

I turn to the technical amendments. Amendments 8 to 15 relate to the armed forces covenant, amendments 16 to 23 and 31 to 38 amend the service complaints provisions, and amendments 24 to 30 relate to the provision on driving disqualification.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Leo Docherty: I am delighted to give way to my right hon. Friend.

Dr Murrison: Can the Minister confirm, before he gets technical, that the overriding consideration in all this is that servicemen, servicewomen and their families should suffer no disadvantage by virtue of their military service? There will be test cases arising from the guidance to which he has referred in which people say, "Look, I've been disadvantaged because I'm in the armed forces." The acid test has to be what they would have got from the system if they had not been serving. Surely that is the guiding star in all this.

Leo Docherty: My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. That is the fundamental basis of all this, and that is at the heart of the statutory guidance. We are confident that local authorities will bear that in mind in the way they afford provision in the critical areas that I have described, but of course there may be test cases and we will take note of them if they arise.

A number of Opposition amendments and new clauses have been tabled. I want to concentrate on the key ones that specifically relate to the service justice system and the armed forces covenant. Amendment 7 seeks to ensure that the most serious crimes are automatically tried in the civilian courts when committed by a serviceperson in the UK, thereby undermining the current legal position that there is full concurrent jurisdiction between the service and civilian justice systems. The amendment would mean that the most serious offences, when committed in the UK, could never be dealt with in the service justice system, even though the Lyons review recommended that the most serious offences could and should continue to be tried in the service justice system with the consent of the Attorney General.

The Government have a more pragmatic approach. We are confident that the service justice system is capable of dealing with all offences, whatever their seriousness and wherever they occur, bolstered by improvements recommended by the Lyons review, such as the creation of the defence serious crime unit and improvement to the support to victims. The service police, prosecutors and judiciary are trained, skilled and experienced. Victims and witnesses receive comparable support to that provided in the civilian system, for example through the armed forces code of practice for victims of crime, which we continue to keep updated in line with civilian practices.

The amendment would remove the valuable role of independent prosecutors in allocating cases to the most appropriate jurisdiction.

Clause 7 improves and strengthens the protocol between service and civilian prosecutors to determine where cases are tried. That improvement will bring much-needed clarity on how decisions on jurisdiction are made and will ensure transparency and independence from the chain of command and Government. To be clear, the aim of this approach is not to increase the number of serious crimes being tried in the court martial. The civilian prosecutor will always have the final say. I therefore urge the Committee to reject amendment 7.

Amendments 1 to 4 would create a duty on central Government and devolved Administrations. Clause 8, as it stands, covers public functions in healthcare, housing and education exercised by the local or regional bodies that are responsible for those services. Those are the key areas of concern for our armed forces community. Central Government's delivery of the covenant is regularly scrutinised, as I referred to in my answer to the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), and the Armed Forces Act 2006 requires the Secretary of State for Defence to lay an annual report before Parliament. Devolved Administrations and other bodies are given an opportunity to contribute their views to that report. That duty to report will remain a legal obligation, and it remains the key, highly effective method by which the Government are held to account for delivery of the covenant.

Amendments 39 to 42 seek to ensure that all service housing is regulated in line with the local minimum quality. These amendments are unnecessary because, in practice, 96.7% of MOD-provided service family accommodation meets or exceeds the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's decent homes standard. The amendments would introduce an unhelpful disparity across the UK and would not achieve their intended effect, because local authorities that fall within the scope of the current duty are not responsible for the provision of service accommodation, so these amendments should be withdrawn.

The provision of high-quality subsidised accommodation remains a fundamental part of the overall MOD offer to service personnel and their families. Over the past decade, we have invested £1.2 billion in single living accommodation and another £1.5 billion will be invested over the next 10 years. Additionally, we are rolling out the future accommodation model to improve choice, and I am pleased to report that the forces Help to Buy scheme has helped more than 24,000 personnel to buy a new home over the past seven years.

New clause 9 seeks to introduce artificial timelines for the progress of investigations. These are operationally unrealistic. They do not take account of the nature of investigations on overseas operations and could put us in breach of our international obligations, including under the European convention on human rights, to effectively investigate serious crimes. The right hon. Member for North Durham will be aware, following my letter to him on 7 June, that the detail of this new clause has been provided to Sir Richard Henriques for consideration as part of his review into investigations, and I am confident that Sir Richard will consider this matter very carefully.

Mr Kevan Jones: I thank the Minister for his letter, but let us be honest, we are in this mess because of his predecessor, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), who promised that the issues around time limits and investigations would be in this Bill. When I address my amendments, I shall read them out at length. I welcome the fact that they have been referred to Judge Henriques, but the question is: when will they then be implemented? Are we going to have to wait another five years for a new Armed Forces Bill before that happens? Otherwise, the Minister is going to have to find legislative time to implement them. There is an opportunity to do it now and, frankly, we should do it now.

Leo Docherty: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's intervention. I think we have to wait and see what Sir Richard Henriques reports. It is not appropriate to propose changes while his review is ongoing, so we will wait and see, and we will respond when he formally reports.

Mr Jones: Will the Minister give way?

Leo Docherty: Yes, I would be delighted to give way before I crack on and make progress.

Mr Jones: I accept what the Minister is saying, but his predecessor promised, when he got into a real mess on the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill, that this issue would be addressed in this Bill. It is clearly not going to be, and has now been kicked into the review. My concern is the real issues that will leave members of the armed forces open to vexatious accusations for another five years. The only way to deal with that would be to find legislative time to bring in a new Bill, but I urge the Minister to just do it now.

Leo Docherty: We have to do it the right way round. We totally acknowledge the central importance of getting investigations right in terms of delivering for our people. We will not seek to reverse-engineer the schedule of work that is before us; we will wait for Sir Richard Henriques to report, then we will calmly consider the best way forward. What I will commit to today is an absolute resolve to deliver a rigorous and sound investigation system, because it is the lack of such provision that has bedevilled our armed forces people over the last 20 years. We do take this very seriously indeed.

Moving now to new clause 2, the Government take very seriously their duty of care for service personnel and veterans under investigation. This was debated at length in the other House during the passage of the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill, and I have engaged with Lord Dannatt, who tabled the original amendment. I therefore wish to highlight two brief points. First, service personnel are entitled to receive comprehensive legal support; and secondly, a full range of welfare and mental health support is routinely offered to all our people. This support is available both while someone is serving and through the dedicated support to veterans through the NHS's Op Courage in England and its devolved equivalents. We are striving for a gold standard of care and the Secretary of State's written ministerial statement on 13 April details the significant progress made.

In the case of veterans, we continue to deliver further improvements through the veterans' strategy, so new clause 2 is unnecessary and could result in unintended

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consequences. A duty of care standard risks becoming a one-size-fits-all approach, leaving personnel without the right support at the right time. The difficulties of drafting such a duty of care would inevitably mean the involvement of the courts and additional litigation. We are clear on our duty to provide the correct support to our personnel, both serving and veterans, and I urge the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan) to withdraw new clause 2.

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak from the Dispatch Box on this important legislation ahead of Armed Forces Day on Saturday. This Armed Forces Week is a chance to recognise and celebrate the service of our nation's forces at home and abroad, past and present. Up and down the country, physical and virtual events will be held while the Armed Forces Day flag is flying proudly on buildings and famous landmarks around the UK. I was delighted to attend the flag-raising ceremony here in the House on Monday, where Mr Speaker set an example by signing the covenant. I look forward to events this weekend in my home city of Portsmouth, the heart and home of the Royal Navy.

Today is also Reserves Day, so I would like to take the opportunity to celebrate their contribution to our national defence and resilience. This year in particular has seen reservists contribute to the covid support force, providing medical and logistical support, as well as deploying skills from their professional lives. They remain a unique asset, the hidden heroes among us, balancing work and training. It is vital that they are better integrated into our forces.

It is timely that the Bill comes back before the House today. Labour supports our armed forces and welcomes the principles behind the Bill, which provides a rare opportunity for the Government to deliver meaningful improvements to the day-to-day lives of our forces' personnel, veterans and their families. Its unusual legislative journey means that we have had a chance to consider it in detail and have a genuine cross-party discussion on how improvements can be made. That is the spirit in which Labour has approached the Bill. We have worked with service personnel, veterans, service charities and colleagues from across the House to get the very best for our forces in this once-in-a-Parliament piece of legislation.

I want to pay tribute to the local authorities, service providers, charities and voluntary organisations that are working hard to make the covenant a reality across the United Kingdom. I also want to thank those who served alongside me on the Bill Select Committee and the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) for his leadership in the Chair. Despite that considered and expert input, however, the Government have consistently refused to hear and address fundamental concerns about the Bill. In doing so, they are missing an opportunity to deliver real improvements to the day-to-day lives of service personnel, veterans and their families. Labour's amendments offer Ministers a fresh opportunity to get that right.

Turning to amendments 1 to 4 and 6, first, evidence from charities such as the Royal British Legion and those delivering services for veterans on the ground has reinforced Labour's concerns that the Bill is too weak and too narrow. The Bill piles new and vague legal

responsibilities to deliver the covenant on a wide range of public bodies, but mysteriously they do not apply to central Government. In practice, this would create a farcical reality where a chair of school governors has a legal responsibility to have due regard to the armed forces covenant, but Government Departments, including the Ministry of Defence, do not. As the Legion itself has pointed out, many of the policy areas in which members of the armed forces community experience difficulty are the responsibility of national Government or based on national guidance. Ministers must not be allowed to outsource the delivery of important promises in the armed forces covenant. Also, the Bill's limited focus on housing, healthcare and education risks creating a two-tier covenant. This could start a race to the bottom on standards in other areas and will bake in the existing postcode lottery on access to services. Social care, pensions, employment and immigration are among the long list of areas we know will not be covered by this once-in-a-Parliament piece of legislation as it stands.

2.45 pm

The exclusion of the Ministry of Defence from the responsible public bodies also means the Bill offers little to actively serving personnel, who have gone above and beyond to support our frontline response to a pandemic in the past year. This Government will thank them by missing this crucial opportunity to make long overdue improvements in the standard of service accommodation and handing most of them another real-terms pay cut this year. Labour's amendments 1 to 4 would force Ministers to take the same legal responsibility for delivering the promises of the covenant as is placed on other public bodies, and amendment 6 would compel the Secretary of State to set out how and when he plans to use powers granted to him by the Bill to widen its scope.

Turning to new clause 7, the Bill does nothing to address the shameful scandal of visa fees for non-UK personnel. Under current rules, Commonwealth personnel face a fee of £2,389 per person to continue to live in the UK after having served at least four years. To add further insult, they are given just 28 days following their discharge in which to pay it. This leaves many facing financial ruin and feeling abandoned by the country that they served with courage and distinction.

During the Bill's Select Committee stage, we heard evidence from Citizenship 4 Soldiers, which has been a tireless advocate for non-UK personnel. It described how such personnel have had to get second jobs if they want to bring family members over, or are simply priced out of being able to stay in the UK. Those without indefinite leave to remain have no recourse to public funds, leaving them destitute and desperate. It was aware of at least one case where a veteran was forced to live in his car in a Tesco car park. Others have had to return to their home countries where standards of post-combat healthcare do not match our own. These concerns continue to be echoed in the House by colleagues from all parties, including my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis), among others. It is dishonourable, unfair and certainly no way to repay the bravery and sacrifice of non-UK service personnel.

Disingenuous proposals from Ministers currently under consultation would help just one in 10 of those affected. Figures from the MOD suggest that this would apply to just 20 of the 200 non-UK personnel who left the regulars in 2019-20, with the majority serving between

four and 11 years. To put that into further context, if the average length of service for all UK armed forces leavers has been 10 years since 2015, why should non-UK service personnel have to serve two years longer than the average length of service across all forces to earn the right to live in a country for which they have fought? Labour's new clause 7 would see those who have served more than four years pay only the cost price of their application for ILR—£204, down from £2,389. That is a 90% reduction, and a long overdue step towards ensuring that these veterans can live in the country they fought for.

The new Veterans Minister proudly supported similar proposals as a Back Bencher. In 2019, he signed a letter with more than 60 Conservative MPs urging the then Chancellor to drop the fees. Our new clause 7 gives the Minister the chance to deliver on his promise to veterans, so I wonder whether he and others who I know are sympathetic will keep the courage of their convictions when they come to vote this afternoon.

Amendment 7 is on access to justice for service personnel, and I want to focus on this important part of the Bill. Labour has welcomed efforts to implement key recommendations of the Lyons review, but the Government continue to oppose the recommendation that civilian courts should have jurisdiction in matters of murder, rape and other serious offences committed in the UK. Civilian courts have a much better record of trying such cases, and adopting the Lyons recommendations would align the UK with other comparable service justice regimes in Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Ministry of Defence figures show that, between 2015 and 2019, the conviction rate for rape cases tried under courts martial was just 10%. During the same period, the conviction rate was 59% in civilian courts, with considerably more cases being tried each year. Almost half the sexual assaults in the armed forces in 2019 took place in the UK and more than three quarters of the victims were women. Almost half the victims held the rank of private. Emma Norton from the Centre for Military Justice, whose advocacy for victims has been inspirational, rightly pointed out the contradiction that sudden-death cases are dealt with by the civilian police while other serious offences remain under the jurisdiction of courts martial. The only group on the other side of this issue are Ministers in this Government and senior figures in the service justice system itself.

Labour's amendment 6 challenges the Government to recognise the weight of evidence from the figures, the experts and campaigners. Trying the most serious offences in civilian courts would help to improve conviction rates, but Ministers refuse to recognise this reality and seem content with a fudge that will leave personnel vulnerable. Only Labour's proposals will provide appropriate support, protection and access to justice for all our armed forces.

With regards to reducing the appeal time limits, I draw attention to the proposals in clause 10(4). That provision reduces the time that service personnel have to make appeals in service complaints cases from six weeks to two weeks. Evidence from the survey of armed forces communities, including in the Bill Select Committee's work plan at Labour's request, emphatically rejected those proposals. Almost half the 3,307 service community responses to the survey said that the provision would remove the safeguards needed for fair treatment. I note

that, since then, Government amendments 10 to 16 have built on those commitments and seem to give Ministers the ultimate responsibility to arbitrate on appeals. I hope that they will be picked up by colleagues in the other place so that we can continue to protect the rights of service personnel.

I turn to new clause 2 on the duty of care to service personnel. While ensuring that we have the personnel we need to keep our country and the world safe, we must protect them as they do so. New clause 2 would establish

"a duty of care standard in relation to legal, pastoral and mental health support provided to service personnel involved in investigations or litigation arising from overseas operations".

For too long, forces personnel and their families who have been put through the trauma of long-running investigations have been offered little to no legal or welfare support from the MOD. There is no effective duty of care recognised by the MOD to service personnel who are subject to legal action. The Government's flawed Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act 2021 failed to prevent the cycle of reinvestigations; it dealt only with prosecutions. Of the more than 4,000 criminal investigations and allegations arising out of Iraq and Afghanistan since 2000, only 27—less than 1%—ever got to prosecution and all 27 were brought within three years. At the same time, of the approximately 1,000 civil claims out of Iraq, only a third were struck out or withdrawn. The rest were settled or are under investigation. That Act would do nothing to help personnel in these cases.

I think that all Members would agree that vexatious claims and repeated investigations against British personnel have become a problem. Labour wants to see that fixed in a lawful and effective way, yet the Government have so far failed to do so. In the meantime, the duty of care outlined in new clause 2 is essential if the MOD is to be a responsible employer.

Mr Kevan Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that that provision is vital? In the evidence sessions for the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act we heard moving testimony from Major Bob Campbell, who was reinvestigated over many years. One stark thing that he said was that he felt abandoned by the MOD. Supporting individuals who are going through these investigations is vital, and without what is being proposed, individuals such as Major Campbell will continue not to get the support that they deserve.

Stephen Morgan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that point. He was a tireless advocate for the points that he raised in the Bill Committee and I know that we will continue to work together to make sure that the Government listen to our demands.

Ian Paisley: I am delighted that the shadow Minister will continue to pursue that matter. Will he ensure that the principle then extends to those who have served at home, to make sure that the commitments that have been made about resolving the legacy issues and addressing these vexatious issues that have arisen from some very contemptible people will be addressed expeditiously? Will he join me in encouraging the Government to get that matter on to the Floor of the House before the summer recess?

Stephen Morgan: I thank the hon. Member for his remarks. I know that he has also been expressing these concerns for quite some time. It is unsatisfactory that we are still hearing from the Government that they are thinking about this. We need certainty for those affected, and I hope the Government bring forward proposals as soon as possible.

New clause 4 would begin to repair the damage done by the previous treatment of LGBT+ veterans. The Committee will know that the ban on homosexuality in the British armed forces was lifted in January 2000 by the then Labour Government. During the ban, many were dishonourably discharged or forced from service, losing access to pensions and benefits. Some were also stripped of medals that they had earned during their service.

There are practical impacts from that discrimination, such as the loss of pension and the inability to wear ceremonial uniforms or medals. Those are all humiliations that should not be endured by anyone who has served our country. Some may still be on the sex offenders register, which is simply outrageous, but there will also be untold challenges for mental health and wellbeing. I therefore take this opportunity to thank Fighting With Pride for its compassion and courageous work to support those impacted by this issue and for working with us on the new clause. I also place on record my appreciation for the campaigning of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) on this issue.

In February 2020, the Government announced that former armed forces personnel who were dismissed from service on the basis of their sexuality could apply to have their medals restored. That is an important first step towards justice for those who were thrown out of the armed forces simply because of their sexuality. New clause 4 encourages Ministers to continue that work first by setting out the numbers affected, and then by considering the restoration of ranks, pensions and other forms of compensation that would be appropriate. Only then can we be appropriately honouring those who have served our country with courage and distinction.

Finally, new clause 8, titled “Armed Forces Federation”, would establish a representative body for the armed forces akin to the Police Federation. It would represent its members in matters such as welfare, pay and efficiency. It has been clear for some time now that the armed forces need independent advice and representation. Witnesses who came before us on the Bill Select Committee have reinforced that, and we continue to hear shocking stories of abuse within units. We have also heard that continued delays discourage the use of the service complaints system and concerns persist that careers will be under threat if personnel complain.

Most members of the armed forces have endured a real-terms pay cut for most of the last decade. Given the renewed emphasis that Ministers appear to be placing on the value of people as assets to our national defence, the time has come to formalise representation and support for service personnel on issues such as welfare and pay. The federation would not be equivalent to a trade union for the armed forces, in that it would not conduct or condone any form of industrial action or insubordination with the armed forces. The federation would work with the Ministry of Defence to put in place a form of understanding that could deal with such issues. It would also recognise the importance of the chain of command. Although the proposal might be

seen as radical or dangerous by some, other nations including the United States and Australia already have similar models embedded in existing command structures. Our armed forces give their lives for us. Ministers should seize this opportunity to give them a real voice.

In conclusion, taken together, Labour’s amendments would truly deliver improvements for our forces personnel, veterans and their families. It would be the height of hypocrisy if the Government were to heap well-deserved praise on service communities to mark Armed Forces Week while voting against their interests in the Commons today. Labour continues to stand squarely behind our armed forces, and we take the delivery of the promises made in the covenant seriously. For us it is not about a performative show of support at a politically convenient moment, but an enduring commitment to honour the promises our society has made to those who serve. The Tories like to talk up their commitment to our armed forces, but it is Labour that is working with colleagues across the House to make sure we get the very best for them, for today and tomorrow.

During Armed Forces Week, this Government should not just celebrate and thank; they must also deliver for our forces communities.

3 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): It is appropriate that this Bill has come back to the House in the week in which we celebrate Armed Forces Day. I add my thanks to members of the armed forces who are currently contributing to our fight against covid, and I pay tribute to them for their service. It was disappointing to hear earlier that members of our armed forces are still being deployed overseas without being fully vaccinated.

I take this opportunity to give a shout out to the team from Kayak 4 Heroes, who are currently undertaking a journey of 1,400 km from Land’s End to John O’Groats, by kayak, around the coast of the United Kingdom and along some of our canals and waterways. I am sure the whole House will join me in wishing them the very best of luck in their endeavours.

I have made it clear throughout the passage of this Bill that it lacks the punch required to make a real difference, and the Bill’s commitment to the armed forces covenant falls far short of what it ought to be. Many stakeholders, including the Royal British Legion, have argued that the Bill should go further in strengthening the covenant in law, but many areas have been missed out, such as visas for Commonwealth personnel, pay, DWP issues and proper representation for serving personnel.

I join the shadow Minister in paying tribute to the group from Fighting with Pride, Caroline Paige and Craig Jones, for working so hard to undo some of the injustices of the past. Labour’s proposed new clause 4 is an opportunity to take this further. We have started to recognise that there have been injustices, and we know that many individuals who were convicted of sex offences in the armed forces lost their pensions and continued to have the label of “sex offender” in civilian life, for undertaking a consensual relationship with another person. There are real issues here that still have to be addressed.

Many people were also discharged from the armed forces following spurious allegations that were not related to their sexuality, although their sexuality was the real reason for it. It will be very difficult for us to capture the

number of people involved, so I urge the Minister not just to take proposed new clause 4 seriously but to look at how we identify these individuals and put right the wrongs that have been done to them.

Labour's amendment 7 addresses the service justice system, and the Minister has given us assurances this afternoon that he will be implementing many of the recommendations of the Lyons review. That is good, but I still argue that sexual assaults would be better dealt with in civilian courts, which have far greater experience of such cases. We do people an injustice by continuing to go through a military system, where that experience is not always present. While the Minister is implementing some of the recommendations of the Lyons review, I ask him to undertake an annual review of how it is operating in practice.

The Minister also gave us assurances on service accommodation, but these accommodation issues are repeatedly raised, year on year, by serving personnel. The recent National Audit Office report on single living accommodation describes a litany of neglect, and accommodation for families often falls far below the standards we would expect.

Anum Qaisar-Javed (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I am listening to my hon. Friend with great interest. Does she agree that those who are dedicating themselves to service should receive a cast-iron guarantee of decent accommodation?

Carol Monaghan: It seems totally obvious that decent service accommodation should form the absolute basis of any agreement and any expectation that personnel have, so I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend.

It is incredible that the Bill as it stands will not strengthen the accommodation offer. Our series of extremely modest amendments—amendments 39 to 42—asks that service accommodation matches the standards that are set for civilian housing in each of the four nations of the UK. This should be a matter of straightforward agreement across the House. We should not be asking service personnel to put up with accommodation that we would not ask civilians to accept. I therefore do not see this proposal as being in any way controversial, and I hope that Members will support it.

Many of the veterans and families who contact me do so because of a lack of support from the Department for Work and Pensions on pension issues, including widows' pensions, but all these things are out of scope of the Bill. In fact, it seems that all the most pressing and difficult issues for veterans are out of scope. This really is a missed opportunity.

The SNP has for a long time advocated a far more comprehensive way of representing the interests of the armed forces. We look at the examples of many of our NATO allies, which benefit from armed forces representative bodies that personnel can use to make sure that their needs are catered for. We are used to hearing arguments from Members on the Government Benches that we could not possibly countenance such a body as it could undermine the chain of command or encourage strike action. However, as the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan) said, such a federation would be like the Police Federation. It would not allow strikes and it would not impact on the chain of command, but it would give a voice that, at the moment, is sadly

lacking. When we are looking at ensuring that the covenant is properly fulfilled, such an organisation would substantively carry out that role. I believe, despite the Government's arguments, that the real reason for resistance to this is that it would give our forces and veterans a voice. I am pleased that Labour has joined us in our position, and we will support its new clause 8 because it would go a long way towards addressing some of these issues.

The Scottish Government have taken a number of their own initiatives in areas that are covered in the Bill. On housing, they offer funding from affordable housing programmes to deliver homes for disabled ex-service personnel. On employability, service leavers are offered fixed-term appointments in the Scottish Government. On education, Skills Development Scotland is retraining Scottish veterans to address the skills gap, particularly in the nation's cyber-security workforce. On health, the Scottish Government have committed to ensuring that all personnel and veterans can access the best possible care, and have provided funding to Combat Stress and Legion Scotland for mental health first aid training. Of course there is always more that we can do, but the UK Government should be looking to mirror these examples of good practice.

Jamie Stone: Giving credit where it is due, I am of a similar opinion that the Scottish Government's move to offset the bedroom tax by their own hand—from their own money—has been of considerable help to veterans who might not be in the best medical condition, because a loved one can stay overnight and help them out. Would not all of us in Scotland agree that we encourage the UK Government to follow suit?

Carol Monaghan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his recognition of the work that has been done around the bedroom tax. He will understand that it is often vital for veterans who have been injured in service to have an additional supposed "bedroom" that can actually hold equipment that is required for them to deal with their injuries and possibly help with their rehabilitation. Again, it seems a very easy thing to take on to help those who need this support.

We will also be supporting Labour's new clause 7 on capping fees for Commonwealth and Gurkha veterans. There is great support across the House for this group of veterans. It seems grossly unfair that we should welcome these individuals into our military, ask them to put their lives at risk and then hit them with thousands of pounds of fees, because it is not just about the cost for themselves; if they have family overseas who they want to bring over to the UK, they are suddenly faced with fees of thousands and thousands of pounds. That is simply not good enough. I hope that the Government are learning lessons from things such as the Windrush scandal when looking at people who have come to this country to help and contribute, in whatever way that is. Given that there is such widespread cross-party support for the Commonwealth veterans, I urge the Government to accept the new clause.

The time and effort spent on this Bill should have been an opportunity significantly to improve our offerings to the armed forces, but I am doubtful. Without the ability to enforce—without the teeth it needs—the Bill will sadly fall short. If this is a once-in-five-years or once-in-10-years opportunity, many of us will be disappointed,

[Carol Monaghan]

but we will continue to engage with the Government and the Minister in the hope that we can make a real change for those who are serving. I think it is recognised throughout the House—this is one thing on which we can all agree—that we want to improve the circumstances in which our forces serve and the practical problems that they hit. I thank the Committee for listening and hope we can move forward in as consensual a way as possible.

Stuart Anderson: As many Members will have gathered now, I have a passion for defence, having served as a young soldier in the Army and spent most of my adult life in and around the defence arena. I have also been fortunate to sit on the Armed Forces Bill Select Committee. I pay tribute to all Members across the Committee for the way in which we worked together for the good of our armed forces; it has been an enjoyable and eye-opening experience. Today I want to discuss the amendments relating to the armed forces covenant, which, as hon. Members will see, is very personal to me and I think will massively support our armed forces.

Prior to being an MP, I was an armed forces champion. I got to see the difficulties that regions could have in trying to put forward the armed forces covenant, and how much it would impact different people. Enshrining it in law is a massive step forward. I also have first-hand experience of the benefits of the armed forces covenant, and I think it is right to draw the attention of the Committee to the fact that I received treatment at one of the trauma units that were brought forward through the armed forces covenant.

I have spoken in the House in the past about when I was shot and the after-effects, which ended up in me wanting to take my own life. Having been told that I was no longer the Army's problem when I had left and had to fund treatment myself, I was not in a good place.

The Committee can imagine, then, how happy I was to hear about the armed forces covenant. I felt that somebody actually cared. Sadly, it came too late for me, because I had to battle those demons for 15 years before I could get away from the problems that I faced. I thank God that I came through that dark period.

3.15 pm

I speak about this issue with experience, having come through it, and I wear the scars. I would never have been able to speak about my experience when they were not scars but open wounds. It was too painful. Nobody would have got close to me. I know that many of my friends are now battling with open wounds. Many have sadly lost that battle—some of my friends, who I knew well, are no longer with us. They leave behind family, friends—an empty space that was once filled with laughter, joy, good times and fond memories.

The number of suicides among armed forces personnel and veterans is already a major concern. I have seen it across all the services. The Rifles, which is made up of my former regiment, are seeing a huge number of riflemen lost to suicide—two in the last few weeks. This is just not acceptable.

I pay tribute to General Patrick Sanders, with whom, I have to declare, I served. Not only has he shown his vulnerability by speaking out about his personal battles that he faced after a hard time, but he has written to all

the riflemen to say, “Look after each other”. By showing this vulnerability at a senior level, in my mind and according to those in the armed forces community I have spoken to, he has shown true leadership. I want to honour all the service personnel, veterans and anybody who is supporting the armed forces, because they are looking after their colleagues and doing what General Sanders has asked.

I regularly see, on Facebook and in some of the groups I am in, All Call Signs alerts to the vast number of people who are rallying round their brothers and sisters in desperate times. This is happening on a very regular basis. They do this in the form of things such as veterans breakfasts, one of which I will be attending this weekend in Wolverhampton. There are many, many outstanding organisations, one of which is Elysium Memorial, and I will announce shortly a fundraising event that I will be doing to support its mission to raise awareness of veterans' suicide.

Let me go back to the beginning of my speech, when I talked about how I felt abandoned. When I was able, through the covenant, to access the healthcare that I needed, that made me feel that people cared. Not only did it give me the treatment that I needed—I had been funding it myself—but it made me feel that I was not forgotten. We need to try to put that into our minds, because we all see what happens when someone is shot or blown up—we see the wounds that they face—but we do not see the battles that people face in the mind when they feel they are forgotten and abandoned and that nobody cares. For a veteran, this can mean the difference between winning and losing that battle in their mind. When they lose the battle, we talk about how they have taken their life, which is a horrible place to be.

To summarise, the armed forces covenant should have been enshrined in law decades ago. It is good to stand up in this place and see that everyone supports our armed forces. I am not talking about a few years ago, while the Conservatives have been in government; this should have been done years and years ago. Every Government have had an opportunity to do this. If we had done it earlier, we would have been in a far better place than we are now to support our armed forces and our veterans. It is a long journey. I thank the Minister and everybody involved in getting things to where we are now. I ask that this is not the destination but merely a checkpoint along the way of making sure that we can honour our service personnel and veterans as they truly deserve.

Mr Kevan Jones: May I say what a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson)? He is a fellow member of the Defence Committee and always speaks with authority and passion. Do I agree with him? Yes, I do. I do not wish to make a party political point, but the genesis of the covenant was the Command Paper from the Labour Government in 2005 and the work that Bob Ainsworth—I pay tribute to his work on this issue—took forward, resulting in the covenant. It was sad that, in respect of one of the Armed Forces Acts—I think it was in the early years of the coalition Government—when we asked for the covenant to be put into statutory law the Government at the time opposed it.

I believe I have served on every Armed Forces Bill for the past 20 years, either as a Minister or as a Back Bencher. Like others, I pay tribute to the members of

our armed forces, as we come up to Armed Forces Week. This is an important day in terms of saying thank you, but we should have in our mind every day the work they do for us to keep us safe.

I rise to speak to my new clause 9, and I do so with frustration and disappointment that this issue has not been addressed. I have spoken on many occasions to say that we need to make sure that our armed forces are not faced with these frivolous and vexatious claims, but the Government have made a complete mess of this.

We had the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act, a piece of legislation that was not necessary at all. The issues in it could have been covered in this Armed Forces Bill, but, as with the worst legislation we see in this House, it came out of rhetoric and election slogans and when it came into practice it did not do what it said on the tin. That was a missed opportunity.

When we took evidence in the Committee that considered the overseas operations Bill, it was clear, and not just from Judge Jeff Blackett, a former Judge Advocate General, that we stop frivolous and vexatious investigations and stop the torture—I will use that word—of reinvestigation that people such as Major Bob Campbell went through for 17 years by sorting out the investigation process. That is not—the Minister alluded to this in relation to my new clause 9—to say that we should just ignore accusations or wrongdoing. We should not do that, but we have to have a proper managed system, which is overseen by judges, to ensure that there is timely investigation, and those investigations that are not found to be of any veracity should be dismissed at an early opportunity. We could do that through the proposals in my new clause.

I tabled similar amendments to the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill—I believe they were new clauses 8, 6 and 7—which would have put time limits on investigations, as I say, not dismissing evidence, but making sure that the investigators need, after a certain period of time, to bring their evidence before a judge to see whether it warrants further investigation. That would have been a way forward. That Bill was oversold to a degree that was obscene at times, with people believing that it would stop investigations and the ambulance-chasing solicitors. It did nothing of the sort. It did not get to the root cause, which is investigations. As Judge Jeff Blackett said in evidence to that Committee:

“The Bill is effectively looking at the wrong end of the telescope.”—[*Official Report, Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Public Bill Committee*, 8 October 2020; c. 120, Q246.]

It was looking at the prosecutions—limiting prosecutions—rather than dealing with the investigations.

I am on record as saying that, like most Members of this House, I would not want members of our armed forces to face vexatious claims or investigations. However, when I moved those new clauses, the Minister at the time, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), said that those issues, which had been raised not just by Judge Jeff Blackett but by many other campaigners, would be dealt with in this Armed Forces Bill. This new clause today is an attempt to address those issues.

I think that it is worth recapping what the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View said last November on Second Reading of the overseas operations Bill in response to the concerns raised by my right hon. Friend

the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), who raised the idea of time limits. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View stated that

“time and again the issue of the investigations”—

comes up,

“but he knows that they are for the forthcoming armed forces Bill and will be addressed there.”—[*Official Report*, 3 November 2020; Vol. 683, c. 258.]

He then went on to accuse my right hon. Friend of being disingenuous for raising the matter. I ask the Minister today: when will these matters be addressed? A clear promise was given then that they would be included in this Bill. [*Interruption.*] Well, they were not, because the Government got into a right pickle. Having not addressed them in the overseas operations Bill, if that was where they wanted to do it, they then set up the Henriques review, which was a good civil service way, as we have seen over the years, of kicking things into the long grass, but it has left a gap. These issues were not addressed in the overseas operations Bill and they are not going to be addressed in this Armed Forces Bill either.

That leaves a real issue: when will that legislation come forward? These are sensible proposals, which were put forward in evidence to the overseas operations Bill by Judge Jeff Blackett and others. As I have said, those proposals would have ensured that we had judicial oversight of investigations to ensure we did not have a rerun of what we have had with the Iraq Historic Allegations Team, or Operation Northmoor. Those allegations went on for years, which meant that armed service personnel who were being accused of torture suffered, in some cases, long delays while their cases were being looked at. I suggest that Members read the evidence of Major Bob Campbell to the overseas operations Bill, because that poor man not only went through long delays, but reinvestigations, investigations and investigations. That should have gone at an early stage. My new clause would do that. We would have judicial oversight. May I just re-emphasise this point for anybody who is listening carefully? This is not about putting members of our armed forces above the law. The new clause is saying that these matters should be investigated. It is saying not that we should have no investigations, but that those investigations should be timely and dealt with.

We have now got into this mess where we have the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act in place, which does not deliver on most of the hype that went with it. We also have the Armed Forces Bill going through, but, clearly, the Government will resist putting anything in it about investigations as they have kicked it into the ongoing review. Again, we do not know when that review will report. As a veteran of the last 20 years of Armed Forces Bills, I know that they come round every five years. If I am still in the House in five years' time, I shall no doubt be dragged into the next one. But five years is a long time for people to wait for this legislation. The only other option is that the MOD will secure Government time to bring in a specific Bill on investigations. You will know, Ms Winterton, that Government time is very precious and trying to fight and argue for a Bill will be very hard, so I do not see that this matter will be addressed for another five years. That is just not acceptable.

This leads me on to another issue that was raised earlier, which is the issue around Northern Ireland veterans. One of the worst things that we can ever do in politics is to make promises to people and then not

[Mr Kevan Jones]

deliver. What has happened both with the overseas operations Bill and the claims that have been made to our Northern Ireland veterans is a disgrace. It is clear to me that the Government will not bring forward a Bill before the summer recess; I struggle to understand how they are going to bring such a Bill forward. That is not just letting people down, but being completely dishonest with people. Brave servicemen, mainly, from ordinary working-class backgrounds across this country went to Northern Ireland to do their duty, to protect not only the citizens of Northern Ireland but those of the UK, and we are letting them go through this tortuous process. I would have more respect for the Government if they came out and said, “We can’t do it, so we are just going to leave it”, rather than what we have got at the moment.

3.30 pm

It galls me to see the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View parading in front of courts in Northern Ireland and talking about defending veterans, when he did very little, or nothing, to advance their cause when he was a Minister. At that time, he had the power and the influence to do something, but he just moaned afterwards that he was not being listened to. Anyone who saw his performance during proceedings on the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill and at the Armed Forces Bill Committee will not be surprised that he was ignored, because frankly he made very little attempt to engage actively with colleagues. He made a lot of promises about listening, but basically sat and read out his civil service brief without taking many interventions from Members on either side of the Committee, who raised quite legitimate concerns. I think it was the laziest performance I have seen from a Minister during the 20 years I have been in this House.

The Government now need to be straight with veterans and say when they will deal with the issue around investigations. It is not going to go away, and it is relatively simple. On Northern Ireland, if they are not going to do anything, they must just be honest with people. I accept that in politics, people sometimes say things in the height of enthusiasm, but I have spoken to some of the Northern Ireland veterans, who were expecting a lot from this Government, and I think they will be sorely let down.

The Armed Forces Bill is always a unique opportunity; I refer to it as a Christmas tree Bill, because we can add things to it. Because of the performance of the Minister who guided the Bill through Committee, however, very few of the sensible ideas suggested by Bill Committee Members were added to it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne mentioned the effects on members of the armed forces who were dismissed because of their sexuality. There are outstanding issues there, which must be addressed. When the Committee took evidence from *Fighting With Pride*, we heard that there are people who were prosecuted and still have related offences on their criminal record, or who were put on the sex offenders’ register, and it is affecting their employment today. That cannot be right, and it has to change. There was an opportunity to do that in the Bill Committee, but because the Minister was not prepared to listen to anything that had not been written down by his civil servants and put in front of him, the opportunity was missed.

The other missed opportunity will be around the covenant. As someone who introduced the welfare pathway that led on to the covenant, I think it has been great in engaging local communities. I think the Minister is right; most local authorities and communities want to engage with it and want to do what they can in difficult circumstances. In most cases the lack of finance, which has been cut from local government, is hindering the work that they would like to do.

There is a gap in the covenant when it comes to central Government. It is all very well the Minister saying, “This goes in the annual report,” but I come back to the point—I remember having similar discussions when I produced the Green Paper in, I think, 2010 about how we should implement it in law—that if it is to be meaningful, we have to give it teeth. I do not think it has teeth. We had evidence from the ombudsman in Committee, and I would certainly have liked people to be given the opportunity to take failures through the ombudsman system, rather than through judicial review, as is the case now. I would have applied it also to Government Departments, because without that there is a disconnect. As I asked the Minister in my earlier intervention, how would someone take forward a complaint against a Department about the fact that they were not being given their rights under the covenant? He said, “Well, possibly judicial review.” No, that would be very difficult because the Departments are not covered. It is a missed opportunity. It could have been done easily. I understand why civil servants do not want to be opened up to scrutiny nationally, but, if they are prepared to recommend it for local government and other institutions, why is it not good enough for them?

The Government have got themselves into a real mess of their own making over investigations. I accept that the Minister is new. I have written to him on this matter and asked for a meeting. He clearly has not worked out how to get round his civil servants and insist that something goes in his diary, but he will learn. I have got to say that his intentions are good and he is taking a more grown-up and mature approach to the job. He has a real passion for making sure he does the best for our armed forces, but he must grasp the nettle of investigations. I will ask again for a meeting with him, but I would like to know how the Government propose to legislate when the review is finished. It cannot wait another five years for another Armed Forces Bill.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): After that speech, who on earth would be a Defence Minister? It is a great privilege to speak during Armed Forces Week. We have a clear responsibility in this place to support Her Majesty’s forces, so the timing is neat. As Chair of the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill, I am familiar with the Bill. It is a good Bill, but may I commend to hon. Members the Select Committee report and the subsequent statement made in this House on 22 April? Both were fully objective and the result of painstaking analysis and debate within the Select Committee. Yes, we did not agree on every issue. In fact, we did not agree on many issues.

Mr Kevan Jones: It was remiss of me in my contribution not to thank the hon. Member for chairing the Select Committee. He got thrown in at the deep end at the last minute, but I think all members of the Select Committee thought he did an excellent job and ensured that everyone

had their say. May I put on record my thanks, and I am sure that of other Members, to him for the way in which he chaired the Select Committee?

James Sunderland: I thank the right hon. Gentleman—my friend—for those kind words. It was a real pleasure to chair that superb Committee. The report was pretty good. I believe it to be a framework for what lies ahead and perhaps even a template for what we do with this standing legislation in five years' time. We are progressing all the time, and the future looks good.

I want to discuss two areas: the statutory guidance and the latest amendments to the Bill. First, I thank the Minister for his written response to the Select Committee report and for the draft statutory guidance, which we have now got. We must acknowledge that the covenant is already with us. It has been signed by the vast majority of councils all over the UK, including in Northern Ireland. In fact, it has its 10th birthday at this point in time, so what better present could there be than to bring it into statute?

The door is already open for the statutory guidance, and it is a good bit of work so far. I welcome the fact that it places a due regard on the placeholder, that it recognises rightful outcomes, that it reflects the unique sacrifices and obligations on HM Forces and that it places a legal obligation on the delivery of health, accommodation and local support from councils. It also provides examples of good practice and pragmatic guidelines on how that is to be provided.

I note that prescriptive performance targets are still absent, but it may be that it is impossible to apply any meaningful metrics and tools to this area. I do not believe that councils are in any doubt about what is expected of them after 10 years, but—it is a big but—it may be that guidance is still needed on how they will be held to account if they do not meet their obligations. I read with interest the line in the guidance that:

“Covenant duty does not mandate public specific delivery outcomes or advantageous treatment of the Armed Forces Community. It only mandates that consideration takes place...when exercising certain functions”.

That worries me, as the local authority complaints process does not cut it in terms of what I believe is still needed. Simply inviting disaffected personnel to contact their MP fills me with horror. I urge the Minister to please look again at this, dig deeper and do the right thing.

I turn to the amendments. I am comfortable with what the Government have tabled, and I want to talk to a handful of the others. New clause 1 would amend the Immigration Act 2014 to waive the fee for indefinite leave to remain applications for any current or previously serving members of the UK armed forces. Similarly, new clause 7 provides that foreign and Commonwealth veterans applying for indefinite leave to remain following four years of service will pay only the unit cost of an application.

I am clear in my mind that the Government have this key issue in hand, and I welcome the consultation recently announced by the MOD and the Home Office. I personally wish to see an amnesty for those F and C personnel who slip through the net, and I agree that it is right to abate the cost of visa fees as a function of time to incentivise longer service. As a former commanding officer of the largest and most diverse unit in the British Army, I say that is the right way to go, even though it may set a precedent for other Departments.

New clause 2 would require the Secretary of State to establish a duty of care standard in relation to legal, pastoral and mental health support provided to service personnel. The MOD takes very seriously its duty of care for service personnel and veterans, and over the years it has established a comprehensive range of legal, pastoral, welfare and mental health support for service personnel and veterans. We have come a long way from the early days of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, with which I am very familiar. The covenant has also been enshrined in law, so I think that the new clause may be redundant at this point.

New clause 3 would require the Government to publish a report on changes to personnel numbers across all services and to detail the impact of reductions on operational capabilities. However, none of that is a closely guarded secret. The MOD recently published its Command Paper “Defence in a competitive age” and noted that the size of the Army would be reduced. I believe that that new clause is also redundant; the information is out there.

New clause 4 would require the Government to conduct a comprehensive review of the number of people who are dismissed or forced to resign from the armed forces due to their sexuality and make recommendations on appropriate forms of compensation. Restorative justice is difficult due to the policies that were legally enforceable at the time, but I am comfortable, for now, that the Government are making strides to tackle this, not least by restoring medals and engaging much more broadly with the LGBTQ+ community. That is absolutely the right thing to do.

As for new clause 6, the duty of care for alcohol, drugs and gambling disorders is already there. It is called good leadership—and also the covenant, which is being enshrined in law.

Lastly, new clause 8 is laudable, but we are not there yet. The new clause would create a representative body for the armed forces, akin to the Police Federation, which would represent its members in matters such as welfare, pay and efficiency. The Government have not been persuaded at this point that there is a requirement or a groundswell of support for a federation along the lines that have been suggested.

The interests of armed forces personnel are already represented through a range of mechanisms, not least, again, the chain of command. Furthermore, the service complaints ombudsman provides impartial scrutiny of service complaints made by members of the UK armed forces regarding any aspect of their service life. However, for the Minister's benefit, I would, in this case, welcome an independent body to provide additional rigour for service complaints. In my experience, service complaints are very awkward, and it may just be that taking them out of units and out of the chain of command is the right thing to do.

To conclude, one of the main criticisms of the Bill is that it does not go far enough, but as an ex-serviceman I refute that. Any new legislation has to be deliverable, proportionate, pragmatic and responsible, and has to attract the necessary due diligence and analysis, for it needs to consider the effect on those it relates to, and no Government can write cheques they cannot cash, as they have to maintain the fundamental ethos and integrity of the organisation itself. Our armed forces are pre-eminent

[James Sunderland]

in their field and must be afforded the autonomy they need to do their job. So this is about evolution, not revolution, and I believe that we will get there in due course through what the Select Committee has recommended.

I say to those who wish to turn this unique organisation into what they would wish it to be by clipping its wings, softening its operational capability and ignoring its hard edge or negating the importance of the chain of command: please be careful what you wish for.

3.45 pm

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland), and I was privileged to serve on the Armed Forces Bill Committee; he was an excellent Chairman of it and it was a really worthwhile exercise. There are a couple of issues that I took an interest in and hope to talk a little about today. I am also looking forward to joining the armed forces community in Liverpool on Saturday.

New clause 4 seeks to right an historical wrong. Some 21 years ago, the ban on homosexuality and LGBT+ personnel serving in the armed forces was lifted. That ban inflicted staggering cruelty on those men, and some women, who had stepped forward to serve their country. Between the mid-1950s and 1996 the men of our armed forces who were thought to be gay were arrested, searched and questioned by officers trained for wartime interrogation. In many cases that went on for days before they were charged, often without legal counsel or support, and on many occasions arrest was based on little evidence. Heterosexual men were falsely accused by service police officers, losing careers and in some cases homes and families. And after harrowing investigations these men were led away to military hospitals, where they were subjected to degrading and shameful medical inspections conducted in accordance with confidential Defence Council instructions held by every unit of the armed forces. At court martial, in the moments before those convicted were sent down, operational medals and good conduct badges were ripped from their uniforms. They typically served six months in prison for the military criminal offence of being homosexual, and it is staggering that that continued until 1996, and that the administrative dismissal of LGBT+ personnel continued for a further four years, until January 2000.

As these members of the armed forces walked from prison they were dismissed in disgrace with criminal records as sex offenders, which from 1967 had no civilian equivalent. As they left through the main gate they were commonly given letters instructing them to never again use their military rank or wear items of uniform, for example in remembrance at the Cenotaph, and they continued to obey those letters. Their names were erased from the retired lists of the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force as though they had never existed. They were cast out of the armed forces family, outed to their own family and friends, and lost their homes and their financial stability. Their service record cards had the top corner clipped and were marked in red pen with the annotation, "Dismissed in disgrace", causing many a lifetime of employment issues. And in the past, in their moment of need they were shunned by military charities—something that has now changed.

However, there has been no such remedy from Government or the Ministry of Defence. The Committee heard at first hand from the charity Fighting with Pride—I believe the Minister has met them—accounts of those affected, and how they live today amidst the ashes of their former service careers.

LGBT+ veterans are scattered across the UK, often away from military communities and living a life starkly different from the one they hoped for when they joined the forces. In the 21 years since the ban was lifted, nothing has been done to support those individuals. As Canada, Germany, the United States and other nations prepare, assess, make reparation and put right a shameful wrong, it is long overdue for the UK, which persisted with the ban for longer and implemented it more zealously than many other countries, to do the same.

Those men and women deserve an apology on behalf of the nation from the Prime Minister in Parliament. They must be supported on the pathway to royal pardons, be restored to the retired list and have their medals returned. Prohibitions on their use of rank and on the wearing of berets at the Cenotaph must be revoked. They need resettlement support, which we offer to all other members of the armed forces, and they must be fairly compensated and have their pension reviewed in recognition of their service and the hardships they faced then and now. Until that is done, this will remain a matter of national disgrace, and it will stand in the way of the Government's stated wish to be a global exemplar for both LGBT+ and veterans' communities.

New clause 4 would place a duty on the Ministry of Defence to find out where those veterans are and how they have fared, and to make recommendations to Parliament on what must be done to right this wrong.

My own new clause 6, which touches on issues around addiction treatment, would place a duty of care on the Secretary of State. Just this week, it was reported in the *Daily Mirror* that more than 8,000 UK troops had needed medical support with respect to alcohol in the past six years. Here, I want to thank the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson) because I know that his talking so openly will help many people who are listening to him.

We know that rates of addiction among the armed forces population are much higher than those among the general UK population. The unique demands of military life, and the serious trauma, violence and loss, make that no surprise. A culture—I say this without judgment—in which harmful drinking rates are considered normal, where vulnerability is a weakness and seeking help is seen as failing to meet the demands of service makes treatment and recovery even harder. Too many veterans end up in mental health crisis, homeless, in prison or committing suicide.

The charity We Are With You provides specialist services for veterans through its Right Turn programme. The majority enrolled in its programmes are those who left service many years earlier, which poses the question for the Government, what more can be done to increase early intervention? For many people, asking for help with alcohol and drug use, however necessary, is incredibly difficult. Denial, fear, pride and shame stop people seeking the specialist support they need, and that is no different for our service personnel, veterans and their families. If anything, those barriers are all the more difficult to overcome.

I met with Adfam—a charity that supports family members of those with substance use problems—and we discussed its 2020 research report, produced in collaboration with the University of York and funded by the Forces in Mind Trust. Families shared the impact of the heavy-drinking culture in the armed forces, with many describing the use of alcohol as frequent, heavy, expected and normalised, and used as part of, and in response to, all situations and occasions. That normalisation means that problems with excessive drinking are not seen as problems.

Aside from the heavy-drinking culture, those families shared their experiences of another culture—the culture of silence. Families say that their loved ones were expected to be stoic, strong and infallible. Veterans and their families are too often left feeling further isolated and vulnerable.

A small number of charities provide specialist support to those veterans and their families. Tom Harrison House in Anfield, around the corner from my office, is the only residential veteran-specific treatment centre in the UK. I have got to know veterans there. I have heard of their experiences and their struggle to get the support and understanding they need. Many have co-occurring mental health diagnoses and complex needs, and have been struggling with addiction for many years. I have not met one person there who has told me that the support they got came with any help from the armed forces.

One veteran told me:

“From the Army, I went straight to prison and did a long spell there. I then went home for a year. I then lived on the streets for 12 years. During that time I was using drugs and drinking, I couldn’t stop drinking and became an alcoholic.”

Another veteran told me:

“I gave my life to service, I was trained to lack empathy; conditioned to survive; asking for help was a weakness; encouraged to drink and when there was nothing left for me to give, I was discharged, without any re-conditioning, no support; completely alone.”

Peer support is key in addiction treatment and key to the success of Tom Harrison House, and veteran-specific services are having great successes.

Stuart Anderson: I thank the hon. Member for his kind words earlier. I want to stand with him on Tom Harrison House. One of my friends with whom I served was literally at death’s door and it saved his life. Now, he is helping other people with addictions and the problems that he went through. Credit for having it in your constituency; it is an amazing organisation.

Dan Carden: I am delighted to hear that and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making the effort to let us know that in the Chamber.

Armed forces charities provide life-changing services, particularly for those with substance abuse problems, but access remains a postcode lottery. I think it is wrong that the state takes so little responsibility for ensuring that veterans receive the treatment they need. Requiring public bodies to give due regard to the principles of the covenant is not enough. The Bill was an opportunity to set measurable national standards that would end the current postcode lottery through the armed forces covenant. Once personnel have left service, they rely on the NHS and local authorities, and of course on the UK’s third sector organisations which provide excellent help and

support. Their work is fantastic, but the MOD has a responsibility to those men and women that it has shirked for too long.

For too many veterans, their service to this country has come at a devastating cost. Drink and drugs are often an escape; a way to cope, a way to manage or medicate mental health conditions and past trauma. One of the worst failings of the system is that many drug and alcohol services simply do not have the competencies to deal with mental health issues in-house and many mental health services are not able to offer support if a patient presents with substance use disorders. Being bounced between services effectively prolongs people’s suffering for longer and longer.

James Sunderland: I have listened with interest to the hon. Gentleman talking about veterans. I will make two points if I may. First, of course, not all veterans are mad, bad or sad. The picture you paint is very negative. The vast majority of veterans in this country live very successful, happy, fulfilling lives. My second point is this. I visited Veterans Aid yesterday in London, which is a very impressive organisation focused very much not on alleviating symptoms, but on outcomes. Do you agree that outcomes is the right way to go?

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I just offer a gentle reminder that we speak through the Chair, rather than directly.

Dan Carden: I take the hon. Member’s second point and I would not want to be painting a negative picture. I am speaking on behalf of the people I have met in my constituency who have come through Tom Harrison House and elsewhere, who have suffered a great deal in their lives.

I will finish on some points made by Dame Carol Black in her independent “Review of drugs: phase one report”. She says:

“The number of residential rehabilitation services have reduced significantly, removing a core treatment component for those that need it to support their recovery”,

and:

“Some areas are starting to ‘ration’ treatment, setting higher thresholds for those who can access it and/or just offering a minimum service due to workers having such large caseloads.”

The question for the Government is: if mental health services are failing the general population, what use is a law that gives due regard to service personnel and veterans? Regardless of people’s training or dedication to their duty, mental health disorders, including addiction, do not discriminate, and I simply want the MOD to take greater responsibility for and interest in these issues.

4 pm

Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con) [V]: Thank you for calling me, Dame Rosie. I am sorry not to be able to contribute to this debate in person, but laryngitis means I have to stay at home in Breconshire, and I apologise if my voice does not last the duration of this speech.

Like many others, I want to start by congratulating the business managers on the timing of this Bill, but in reality every week should be Armed Forces Week. Honouring those who have served as well as those who continue to serve should not be a one-off event. I am

[Fay Jones]

exceedingly proud of the UK armed forces, but in particular of those based in my constituency at Brecon barracks, Sennybridge training area and the Infantry Battle School—not least the soldier I live with, and here I declare an interest in that my partner is a serving member of the British Army.

Like so many this weekend, I will be joining Armed Forces Day events in the constituency. I am looking forward in particular to meeting the daughter of a true British hero in Builth Wells on Saturday. Violette Szabo initially joined the Women's Land Army when war broke out and the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1941. She worked for F section in the Special Operations Executive, but during a mission in France she was captured and imprisoned by the Nazis. She was executed in Ravensbrück concentration camp, and she was posthumously awarded the George Cross—the highest honour given to civilians. Walking along the Embankment in London, hon. Members will see a statue of Violette, one of the very few military women to be commemorated. I am deeply excited to be meeting her daughter, who now lives in Cilmeri in my constituency, and to have the opportunity to pay tribute to her mother and to all those who have served and continue to serve.

There is much to welcome in this Bill that will make a meaningful difference to the lives of serving personnel and veterans. However well intentioned they may be or however thoughtfully suggested by the same focus groups that advised the leader of the Labour party to start valuing the military, I will not be supporting the Opposition's amendments.

I particularly want to single out clause 8 of the Bill, which strengthens the commitment to the armed forces covenant. The covenant is 10 years old this year, and it is something we should all hold dear. I must also declare another interest in that my partner's mum is the chief executive of the Armed Forces Covenant Trust. His is something of a military family.

Clause 8 compels public bodies to have due regard to the covenant, and I would urge my local authority—Powys County Council—and the Labour-run Welsh Government to pay close attention to it. At present, Powys County Council is proposing to close Llanbedr school, which is a thriving primary school in my constituency. Along with my colleague in the Welsh Parliament, James Evans, I am deeply opposed to the closure of the school, but it is largely because a number of military families will once again find themselves displaced. That is deeply wrong. I spoke to a mum whose partner has recently started a two-year posting in Brecon, and if Llanbedr closes, they will be forced to find yet another school for their three children.

In campaigning against the school's closure, I have tried to learn more about the Welsh Government's plans for military families. I was directed to a specialist website, which does not work. People simply cannot find out what the Welsh Government want to do for military families who are searching for a consistent education as they move around the United Kingdom and even abroad. I know the Minister is powerless to keep the school open, but I would be keen to meet his officials to learn more about how the UK Government and Welsh Government could be working together to ensure that military families can rely on an uninterrupted education.

I cannot let the Minister escape without yet another plea for the decision to close Brecon barracks to be reversed. His colleague the Minister for Defence Procurement has kindly heard me a number of times and knows I warmly welcome the commitment to keep 160th Brigade in Brecon itself, but I will have to continue to bang on until this nonsensical decision is reversed. Brecon barracks is an integral part of the defence estate in Wales. It is the home of the Army in Wales and it deserves a permanent home—one that is fit for the future and that honours its history.

The Minister was in Wales this week and I am deeply grateful to him for his visit. It shows his commitment to the armed forces across the Union and his willingness to ensure that Wales is not left behind. However, with the number of service personnel and veterans living and working in Brecon and Radnorshire, I am concerned that the Welsh Government are content for them to be left behind. We have a large veteran population in Wales—around 140,000—but we are still the only nation in the UK not to have a dedicated commissioner for veterans. During this year's St David's Day debate, the Secretary of State for Wales confirmed that he was actively exploring ways in which the UK Government could establish Wales's first veterans' commissioner. However, the ball is now in the Welsh Government's court, and since February nothing has happened.

In Wales, we have eight armed forces liaison officers, who do fantastic work, but without one overarching commissioner there is no one to ensure that mental health provision, for example, is as consistent for those who live in Ystradgynlais as it is for those who live in Wrexham. At this point, I want to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Sarah Atherton), who has done so much work on this issue. I urge the Minister to continue his engagement with the Welsh Government and to get them to put the interests of veterans in Wales above the need constantly to frustrate the Conservative Government in Westminster.

I was incredibly moved to see a large parade of veterans streaming through Brecon a few weeks ago. They were there to support the former soldiers who face prosecution following their service in Northern Ireland. Although I could not join them in person on the day, I give them my full support. These vexatious prosecutions must end. Without any new evidence, there is no justification for the continued harassment of former soldiers.

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, of which I am a member, this morning heard from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who confirmed that he will be bringing forward a Bill shortly, but shortly is too slow; we cannot waste any more time. It was not appropriate to include Northern Ireland veterans in the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Act 2021 for the very obvious reason that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, but there must be no further obstacles to this legislation. All serving personnel should be treated equally and it is more than time that the Government righted the wrongs done to those who served in Operation Banner.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC) [V]: It is a pleasure to follow my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones), and to speak in support of several amendments that would improve the welfare of serving soldiers and former service personnel.

As we are in Armed Forces Week, I would like to pay tribute not only to the tireless campaigning of organisations such as the Royal British Legion, but to veterans in my constituency of Ceredigion. I pay particular tribute to the efforts of the Ceredigion armed forces community covenant partners, especially to Captain Colin Jones MBE and his work with the Ceredigion armed forces veterans hub. Together, they run regular breakfast clubs across the county and have organised a series of events to raise money for good causes, the most recent of which took place just last Saturday. Colin climbed Yr Wyddfa, the highest mountain in Wales, blindfolded, in aid of Blind Veterans UK—a feat that was followed in the evening by a friendly but very competitive football match between the old boys of Aberystwyth FC and the old boys of the Royal Welsh Regiment.

I support new clause 1, which would amend the Immigration Act 2014 to waive the unjust fee levied on current or former serving members of the UK armed forces and their families when they submit applications for indefinite leave to remain. Such a measure would cost very little. It has support on both sides of the Committee and would have a profound impact on those it affects. It would also, of course, signal the support of this place for service people and their families.

Furthermore, I welcome amendments 1 to 4, and particularly amendment 2, which would require the Welsh Government to pay due regard to the armed forces covenant. This amendment is crucial in ensuring access to housing and other sources of wellbeing for veterans in Wales, while respecting the devolution settlement. It is important because although the armed forces are clearly a reserved matter, many aspects of their care, from housing to healthcare to education—matters that have been discussed by other hon. Members this afternoon—are devolved, with responsibility for implementation lying either with the Welsh Government or at a local authority level.

It is therefore essential to establish what expectations the Bill places on the Welsh Government and local authorities. With that in mind, I hope the Minister will inform us of what discussions he has had with the Welsh Government to streamline access to these services and ensure parity across the four nations, particularly given that not all armed forces charities and support networks have as strong a presence as we would like in some parts of Wales.

Equally, I ask the Minister to respond to the Senedd's Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee's report on the Bill and its recommendation that amendments should be pursued requiring the Secretary of State to obtain the consent of Welsh Ministers before issuing or revising guidance under proposed new section 343AE of the Armed Forces Act 2006, as well as before making regulations under proposed new section 343AF. That is particularly important given that the Government are no longer seeking a legislative consent motion from the Senedd. If he is able to refer to those points in his summing up, I would be grateful.

I commend the amendments tabled by my hon. Friends in the SNP that would require accommodation provided to service people in the respective nations of the UK to meet certain standards. It is appalling that, while the Government oversee procurement disasters, trumpet budget increases and laud the sacrifices made by our armed forces, they are still to commit to providing basic

standards of accommodation for our service people. These amendments would address that, and I urge the Government to support them.

Finally, I support new clause 2, which would establish a duty of care standard for legal, pastoral and mental health support for service personnel in investigations or litigation arising from overseas operations. Establishing a duty of care in these instances is the responsible and right thing to do.

The new clauses and amendments I have addressed today would have a meaningful impact on the lives of current and former service personnel. They are all considered amendments and have been tabled in good faith, and I hope the Government will use the good will apparent on both sides of the Committee to ensure that the Bill works with the devolved Governments to improve the standards of care and support received by our armed forces community.

Jamie Stone: It is interesting how, when we listen to a debate, our own speech changes according to what we have just heard. To give credit where it is due, the description provided by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) of what it was like to be homosexual and serving in the armed services rang a very strong bell with me.

My father had a much-loved cousin—he is dead now—who rose to a fairly high rank in the armed forces. All his life he was a homosexual. I remember him describing to me, not long before he died, what it was like to live a lie, because he did not dare come out or admit to his sexuality. He eventually came out in his 80s and had a partner before he died, and it was great. That always sticks with me, so I compliment the hon. Gentleman.

What the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan), and the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) said about indefinite leave to remain, which has been mentioned many times in this debate, is very important. New clause 1 stands in my name, and I want to take it as far as possible. I hope the day will come when interpreters or anyone who has served Queen and country, and frankly risked their life, will be afforded the most assistance to become a permanent part of our country.

I have mentioned this several times in the past, and I want to make a point that I do not think other Members have touched on. In doing this sort of thing, word gets back to the countries these people originally come from, and that generates good will. Recruitment is the theme of my speech, and that good will helps us address a problem that I have heard about over and again in my four years in this place: that we are not recruiting the numbers that we need. We should never underestimate the importance of good will when it comes to recruitment.

I would be obliged if the Minister would pass on my thanks to his colleague, the Minister for the Armed Forces, the hon. Member for Wells (James Heappey), who kindly hosted a most interesting briefing about Mali. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan), was there as well. When we heard what was being done by our service personnel in Mali to ensure peace and to do good in the world, it really did sound very good indeed and was very encouraging.

4.15 pm

I absolutely get the need for us in this place to be clever in our defence of the country. I understand why we must do what we must do on cyber. I understand the importance of getting into space, an aspect that we are going to have to watch. I understand the importance of hypersonic speed and the use of drones in both defence and attack, if we have to use them. Technology and gadgets are absolutely part of what we will have to do in future, yet when I think about the recruitment problem and those soldiers who have been out in Mali—they are about to be relieved by another battalion—I conclude that no matter how clever the gadgets or the science, at the end of the day, if we are going to do jobs such as peacekeeping in Mali or interventions wherever we must in the world, we need boots on the ground. That is why, as I have said before in this place, I am concerned about what appears to be a 10,000 personnel cut in the British Army. I do not believe that that is sustainable, and I say that on the record.

It may be hard for right hon. and hon. Members to believe, but before I ever came near this place I had a career in oil, with a drilling or production company. Not so long ago, I had a briefing with some of the oil firms that are working in the North sea, and they worried me a lot by telling me about the problems they were having with recruiting suitable young people into the industry. Why? It is because, quite unfairly, oil is seen to be a sunset industry, so some of the brightest and best say, “I don’t fancy a job with BP. I don’t think so. I’m going to do something else. I would like to work in the City of London and make squillions.”

My final point is that if we take the British Army below a certain critical mass of numbers, young people who might otherwise make a huge contribution to the defence of this country in our armed services could look at that career option and say, “I don’t see a great future there. It’s shrinking all the time. I think I’ll do something else.” That is a dangerous place to be if we value the defence of this country. It is about boots on the ground—it was hundreds of years ago and it still is today—if we want to defend our realm, which we love so well.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con) [V]: It is a privilege to speak in this debate, particularly on Reserves Day and ahead of celebrating Armed Forces Day on Saturday. It is a pleasure to follow so many excellent speeches, particularly that by my Welsh colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones).

The passage of the Bill through Parliament this year is particularly important because it will put the armed forces covenant into legislation. Of course, the covenant is not new, but has been in operation in its current form for nearly 10 years. During that time, significant progress has been made to improve the lives of armed forces personnel, veterans and their families. More than 6,000 organisations and every local authority in the UK have pledged to support it.

However, the covenant is still just a pledge and individual members of the armed forces community still suffer disadvantage when accessing public services. This is often because of a lack of awareness of not just the covenant but the unique contributions that our service personnel make. The Bill will impose a legal duty on relevant bodies to have due regard to the three principles

of the covenant. This is our promise to those who are serving or have served: they and their families will be treated fairly.

I come from a service family—my grandparents met in the RAF. I have RAF Valley in my constituency, and I am proud to be on the RAF section of the armed forces parliamentary scheme. I understand that going into the armed forces is a unique career choice. People hand themselves and their family over to the service of their country, with all that that entails.

I am fortunate to work closely with RAF Valley. Group Captain Andy Turk’s whole force team at the base is a very close-knit and supportive community, and I hold regular meetings with the service personnel and the private sector organisations based there, including Babcock, BAE Systems and Affinity. I represent both civilian and service constituents and their concerns are my concerns. RAF Valley is one of the largest employers here on Ynys Môn and I am consistently pushing very strongly, both informally and formally, how important these skilled jobs are in my constituency. Indeed, I had a meeting today with the Minister for Defence Procurement, which included an invitation to visit RAF Valley over the summer.

What strikes me most about the whole force team at RAF Valley is not what they do for the country, but what they do quietly in the background for the local community. Yes, training our future fighter and helicopter pilots is what we shout about, but it is their commitment to Anglesey that makes them truly part of our island. The station is as much part of Anglesey life as Anglesey life is part of the station, so my message today is this: when people think of the armed forces covenant, they should not think only of the contribution that our forces make to our national security; they should remember also the huge contribution that they make to our everyday life.

With RAF Valley here on Anglesey, the community enjoys so many benefits. The team helped us to secure hosting of the 40th anniversary of the Island games. They have provided critical skilled volunteers for our Royal National Lifeboat Institution, mountain rescue and local first responder groups. They host award-winning youth outreach programmes such as the Jon Egging Trust, support the learning and mentoring Profi project and partner with Careers Wales and STEM Cymru projects. They provide local junior football and tennis camps, on-site science, technology, engineering and maths activities and events for local schools. Padre Michael Hall of the station charities committee raises vital funds for a range of north Wales charities and organises a Santa drop for the children staying in Ysbyty Gwynedd hospital over Christmas. They run beach cleans, they are custodians of a stretch of our beautiful coastal path, and they do so much more.

The armed forces covenant is our country’s thank you. It is a thank you for all that our armed forces do, and I take this opportunity to say personally diolch yn fawr—thank you—to RAF Valley for all that it does. I am proud that this Government are enshrining the armed forces covenant in legislation, so that our services personnel and their families receive the recognition that they deserve for their courage and years of commitment to us.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP) [V]: First, let me put on record that my thoughts are with the crew of HMS Defender as they go about their

job with the usual dedication and skill today. Let me also say that despite what certain news agencies may have said today, Crimea is in Ukraine, and all on the Scottish National party Benches hope that the Russian Federation ends that illegal occupation as quickly as possible.

Today's reminder that those members of our armed forces do a job like no other is pertinent and the opportunity that we in this House have through this legislation is a solemn duty, which I do not doubt all who are speaking today approach with the requisite seriousness. That does not mean, however, that we all share the same optimism about the Bill. While the idea of bringing the armed forces covenant into law is a welcome step forward, I still feel that there is going to be little in the Bill that will be genuinely transformative for the lived experience of armed forces personnel and veterans.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) and constituency neighbour has already spoken about her amendment on armed forces housing and I will not add much to that, other than to say that it is the type of small change that could make a real difference to the home lives of personnel wherever they are on these islands. More substantively, it is an amendment that makes an important point about how we should not see the armed forces personnel as a special class or caste of a group of our societies that seeks to defend those societies' values. They cannot do this in substandard housing. The very least we should offer them is that which is available to the rest of society and, in this case, make sure that they are housed safely and warmly. I am determined to say every time these sorts of debates come up that those of us here would do well to think of our serving personnel less as heroes, and more as human beings, with the same needs as the rest of us: fair pay and conditions, the right to private and family life and ready access to secure accommodation. That is taken for granted for every other type of public sector employee, so why is it not for armed forces personnel? In fact, come to think of it, despite being to the best of my knowledge the only group of public sector employees to have a dedicated legislative session every five years, armed forces personnel have demonstrably poorer outcomes on almost every scale. How can that be?

There may be a metaphor in here. We are told that the Armed Forces Bill meets by convention as a Committee of the whole House before Report and Third Reading. Given that the Bill Select Committee was rushed through in a few short weeks, I cannot understand why we are now inserting another stage or, indeed, why the amendments that the Government are bringing today could not have been brought to the Select Committee.

I note with particular puzzlement yesterday's statement from the Minister for Defence People and Veterans, the hon. Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty). He is a fellow Docherty, with roots in Donegal and Glasgow, with whom I enjoyed working on the Defence Committee. He stated that further scrutiny would

"delay the Bill's passage, placing undue pressure on the deadline to renew the Armed Forces Act 2006."—[*Official Report*, 22 June 2021; Vol. 697, c. 27WS.]

I would certainly like to think that the next time an armed forces Bill whizzes through the House, we get a wee bit more time to discuss the really important issues at hand.

As the arcane workings of this place continue to baffle both Members and personnel alike, we avoid being able to discuss the type of wide-ranging changes that could make a real difference to the lives of personnel, although that is probably the way that the Government and the Ministry of Defence like it. Maybe I am just being cynical.

My final points are in regard to the Opposition amendments relating to the service justice system, which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West will be supporting. From my work on the Defence Committee, it is clear that the service justice system needs a radical and profound overhaul, and not just the modest changes proposed in the amendment. With the next armed forces Bill, it is time for us to think about bringing together all the service police forces, streamlining the processes and ensuring a more robust service justice system that works for all.

I conclude by thanking all my colleagues on the Bill Select Committee for their work over the past few months—especially the Chair, the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland), because I know it is the first time that a Bill has been considered in a hybrid way—and the Clerks and those in the Public Bill Office who have helped us navigate this legislation. We owe it to service personnel, in whose name the Bill will be enacted, to make it more straightforward in the future.

Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con): It is always a pleasure to speak in any debate on the armed forces, but particularly this week, as we recognise the huge contribution they make, today on Reserves Day and Saturday on Armed Forces Day. I also take this opportunity to thank the Armed Forces Parliamentary Trust. Through the scheme that it runs, I have been able to see almost every week the incredible work that our armed forces do day in, day out.

They say an organisation is only as good as its people, and nowhere is that more true than in the armed forces. Through the Bill, not only do we maintain our armed forces on paper, but it means that the hundreds of thousands of men and women who serve in the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force, the British Army and the Royal Marines can continue to serve Queen and country. They are the best, the brightest and the most courageous among us.

As we debate clause 1, we must consider why we need the armed forces and why they are still relevant in today's world. In my view, the argument is stronger than ever before. Turning first to our domestic need, in the fight against covid-19, defence has supported literally hundreds of requests from citizens, the NHS, local authorities and Government Departments. In Lancashire, we have seen that through testing, vaccine deployment, planning, logistics and so much more. They have made a huge contribution, often behind the scenes and always without fanfare. However, this domestic demand has never come at the expense of their core activities. Only last month, we saw HMS Queen Elizabeth set sail as part of the carrier strike group—a huge tasking of personnel from all the services, not just those on board the carrier itself but those on the frigates, destroyers and submarines, as well as the aircrew, that go with it.

4.30 pm

Our operations have continued around the world, in Afghanistan, in Mali, as we heard from the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone),

and in Cyprus. All these things are vital to the UK's security. As we saw in the integrated review, the threats are evolving and not reducing. The Euro-Atlantic region has seen a resurgence of Russian activity. The Indo-Pacific region is becoming more strategically important. Cyber will become a domain that is involved in all our military operations. Non-state actors are getting hold of capabilities that have historically been beyond their reach.

But this Bill is not just about our serving armed forces: it looks beyond that at our veterans and at the armed forces covenant. The Bill Select Committee, which was chaired by my excellent colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland), welcomed the move to enshrine the covenant into law, and I wholeheartedly agree. It will then be down to our public bodies—the NHS, local councils and more—to put it into practice. In doing that, what we must avoid is a race for everyone to claim just their little bit; through the guidance that will be put out by the Office for Veterans' Affairs, we need to work together. If covid has shown us anything, it is that when public bodies work together—the police, councils, the NHS and housing providers—so much more can be achieved. I urge the Government, as they draft that guidance, to look at best practice, because everyone wants to do their best; no one wants to just do their little bit. The Government are in a unique position to see the picture nationally and to use that to drive equality of treatment.

I turn to new clauses 1 and 7 on immigration fees, which are of particular concern to some of my constituents. Many of us in all parts of the House agree that we want to see this change. We want our non-UK personnel to be able to reside in the UK after their service has ended. The Home Office and the MOD are actively working on this and there is a consultation that closes two weeks today. Asking that we ignore that consultation and do something today would do nothing to speed up the process but potentially delay it.

This Bill is very welcome. It is vital for our security and it will make an enormous difference to our veteran community.

Christian Wakeford (Bury South) (Con): I pay tribute to the men and women who serve our nation in uniform and our veterans who have selflessly sacrificed so much to protect this great nation. They deserve our utmost respect, gratitude and thanks. I also give thanks to the armed forces and veterans breakfast club in Bury where people work to help veterans, their families and service personnel, bringing the entire community together and reducing social isolation. They meet throughout the week. This should be commended and I put my thanks on record today.

I warmly welcome this Bill. I have the utmost confidence that it will ensure that veterans are treated fairly when accessing key public services, as well as improving the service justice system. As chairman of the all-party group on alcohol harm, I make particular reference to new clause 6 with regard to alcohol disorders. Although I appreciate the reasons why the Government are not bringing forward a measure at the moment, it needs to be explored further so that we do our utmost to ensure that anyone who has a disorder, a dependency or a need—whether they are a recent recruit, still serving or a recent veteran—can be given the help they need throughout their life.

In particular, the Bill will enshrine the armed forces covenant into law, increasing awareness among public bodies of the unique nature of military service and improving the level of service for members of the armed forces community in regard to their healthcare, housing and education. I imagine that every Member of this House is aware of veterans out there who have been unable to access help and services that they desperately need, so I warmly welcome the covenant being enshrined in law.

However, our veterans deserve more than the appreciation of a grateful nation. They have protected and built our country, and they deserve our tireless commitment to advancing their opportunities. We must build a brighter future worthy of their sacrifice and that of their families. That is why I welcome the funding announced in the Budget by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in support of veterans welfare. An additional £10 million will be invested in the armed forces covenant fund in 2021-22, which will deliver charitable projects and initiatives to support veterans' mental health. This latest funding is in addition to the annual Government contribution of £10 million to the covenant fund.

I welcome the funding announcement, but the veterans community in Bury needs more support. There is currently very little provided for them. Since my election to this House, I have been working with other leaders in the borough, with the council and with my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Daly), to try to bring our own veterans hub to the town of Bury. We are proud of our military heritage; we are a regimental town, looking after the Lancashire Fusiliers. The veterans hub would seek to deliver housing and employment skills, further education, family support and health and wellbeing.

I have visited numerous veterans hub operations across the surrounding areas, and I pay tribute to the services in Wigan and also in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Antony Higginbotham). The positive impact that a local veterans hub can have is clear to everyone. Can the Minister tell me what we can do to ensure that veterans receive the support that they need, no matter where they live, and what funding would be available from the MOD to help set up a veterans hub locally in Bury? We must reaffirm our fundamental promise that, just as the military leaves no one behind on the battlefield, we will leave no veteran behind when they come home.

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford) and an honour to speak in this debate in Armed Forces Week and on Reserves Day, especially because I am proud to have the Royal Marine Reserve headquarters in my constituency. Ahead of Reserves Day, I visited them last week and was able to thank them personally for their service. They put in a hard day's work all over the country, then travel to their reservist centre to train for the Royal Marines, no less. They offer amazing service to our country, and I am very proud of them and grateful to them.

There is much to welcome in the Bill, which will support our armed forces personnel and their families. I echo the words of colleagues on both sides of the House in recognising and celebrating the work of our armed forces and their ongoing efforts to make our

country and the world safer. We cannot put a price on safety. Only when our own safety is compromised, or when we do not have it, do we realise how important it is to us every day. I worked with aid workers in Bosnia during the war, and I have seen the difference it can make to a whole community not to have that safety, so I value it very much.

Our armed forces have had to adapt all their work and all their training at speed during the pandemic, and I commend them for that. I am also thankful for the work they have done to support frontline efforts to tackle the pandemic. They really have stepped up when we have asked them to. It is for this reason that, while I support the aims of the Bill, I think it is a huge missed opportunity and could have gone further. It needs to go further if it is to deliver real improvements to the day-to-day lives of our service personnel and veterans and their families.

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): As a fellow member of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill could have gone further in addressing mental health provision for veterans, given the fact that they have to wait 37 days to receive a face-to-face appointment for mental health services, compared with the Government's own target of just 14 days?

Fleur Anderson: I agree with my hon. Friend: this Bill could have gone further both in putting all aspects of the covenant fully into law, and in its scope.

The Bill does not fully enshrine the armed forces covenant in law. It seems to absolve central Government from responsibility for delivering the covenant, as has been outlined by my colleagues. It does not make sense to place new responsibilities on a wide range of public bodies, from school governors to local authorities, to deliver the covenant, but not to include central Government. Does the Minister agree that the Government are effectively outsourcing the delivery of these important commitments and also evading their own responsibility on issues such as pensions, social care and mental health services? For that reason, I support amendments 1 to 4. They would place the same legal responsibility to have due regard to the armed forces covenant on central Government and the devolved Administrations and remove that glaring discrepancy.

My second point is that the Bill is just too narrow. Service charities are rightly concerned that this Bill contains nothing specific on issues such as service accommodation, employment, pensions, compensation, social care, criminal justice and immigration. The scope of the legislation must be wide enough to ensure that all areas of potential disadvantage are addressed. Our armed forces personnel and their families should not suffer disadvantage in any area. By setting a legal standard that is below existing voluntary commitments in some areas, the Government risk creating a two-tier covenant and a race to the bottom on services for forces' communities where we should be providing the gold standard.

The Bill, as it stands, does not cover all the commitments made in the covenant, or all the public bodies responsible for delivering them. It contains powers for the Secretary of State to expand these, so why not include them? Will the Minister clarify how and when these powers might be used? These issues are why I am supporting amendment 6 this afternoon.

This Bill does nothing to address the shameful scandal of visa fees for Commonwealth veterans. I know that there is support in all parts of the House for addressing this, so I urge Members to vote for the new clause. The Government's long-awaited proposals, currently being consulted on, will help just one in 10 Commonwealth veterans. We know what the Commonwealth veterans want, need and deserve for their service, so why not just put it in the Bill? The proposed changes do not apply to family members of those who have served or who have been medically discharged, meaning that it will help only a minority of those affected.

Commonwealth service personnel have contributed an enormous amount to our national defence. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude. Exortionate visa fees have left non-UK veterans facing financial ruin and feeling abandoned by the country for which they have potentially laid down their lives. They have served with courage and distinction, and we thank them and then do not give them the rights that they deserve. The Government's long-overdue proposals are insulting to those personnel and will continue to prevent non-UK veterans from living in the country for which they have fought. Moreover, the proposals will reduce retention and recruitment rates, as has been outlined.

Under new clause 7, Commonwealth and Gurkha veterans who have served four years would pay cost price—they would pay just over £200 instead of £2,389 for an indefinite leave to remain application. Those with families will have to pay nearly £10,000 to apply for a right to remain. We did not ask them for that when they potentially laid down their life for us and for our country. We ask far too much of them, and put up far too high a barrier for the indefinite leave to remain application. This is a move that the Royal British Legion and organisations such as Citizenship for Soldiers have long campaigned for, and I pay my respect to them both for their campaigns and for speaking up for so many people. I urge all hon. Members to support the new clause.

The Government like to talk up their support for our service communities, and rightly so, but they are not delivering. It is time for Ministers to deliver the promises of the covenant in full for every member of our armed forces, veterans and their families. I often think that our armed forces personnel lose out because they are not allowed to wear their military uniform out and about, and I absolutely understand the reasons for that. None the less, in countries such as America, armed forces personnel are thanked everywhere they go. They are given special treatment and respect for their service to their country, and rightly so. But our armed forces personnel often do not feel that respect; they cannot because they cannot wear their uniform. The covenant goes a long way towards saying how much we respect our armed forces personnel and their families, but it could go a bit further to achieve that. The Opposition's reasonable and constructive amendments are designed to get the very best for our forces from this legislation, so I urge hon. Members from all sides of the House to support the amendments.

4.45 pm

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I have now to announce the result of today's deferred Division. On the motion on

[The First Deputy Chairman]

the conference, November and Christmas Adjournments, the Ayes were 567 and the Noes were three, so the Ayes have it.

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

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con): I thank the Minister for the assurances he provided from the Dispatch Box in his opening remarks. I also give special thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) for the diligence with which he conducted the Bill Select Committee. I must also pay special tribute to my friend and colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson). Whenever he recollects and provides details of his experiences, he never fails to move me and, I know, many other Members in this Chamber. Thanks are also clearly due to the Armed Forces Parliamentary Trust, particularly given the efforts it has put in, and, of course, all the military establishments that have continued with the armed forces parliamentary service during this difficult time of restrictions due to covid. It has been invaluable to me to be a member of the scheme, even with all the constraints that covid imposed.

One of the key messages that I take away from the last 18 months is that our military all do their job with a conviction that I find difficult to equal elsewhere. In fact, calling it a job is probably wrong: it is in fact a way of life. It is not a life of luxury. Indeed, it is not a life with many of the things that most of us take for granted. It is a life that they know might one day put them at risk. I thank all of them and their families and pay tribute to the veterans from my constituency of Dudley North and beyond.

Before I entered Parliament, I chaired an armed forces covenant committee in the Black Country, where I saw at first hand the difficulties faced by our brave personnel and their families—if they had any family—simply because of the nature of their jobs. At that point, the covenant was a voluntary commitment, with inconsistencies across the country. I am therefore delighted that this is being enshrined in law so that the support somebody receives in Dudley will be the same as that given in Portsmouth and, indeed, perhaps in Dover.

While I was chairing the covenant committee, I was never able to find the answer to one simple question: how many people had we helped and were we actually helping? I am a very outcome-focused person, and while I could not doubt the well-meaning and positive intentions of all the partners supporting the covenant—the local council, the local NHS trusts and so many more—I had a hard time quantifying the benefit, even though the covenant is clearly a great step forward. My plea to Ministers is therefore to seek ways to evidence what impact the covenant is having on veterans and their families. That will help partners to improve their offer together and demonstrate the great value in the armed forces covenant.

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Rosie. I wish to speak in opposition to new clauses 1, 2 and 3.

I thank my colleagues who served on the Select Committee for the Bill, which was so ably led by my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland).

The Bill as it stands will protect our armed forces not only while they are serving, but once they have completed their service, delivering on the manifesto commitments on which we were elected.

It is fitting that we are debating the Bill during Armed Forces Week. Only this morning, on Reserves Day, I was privileged to attend a flag-raising ceremony here in Darlington, attended by veterans, reservists and youth trainees, in recognition of their service and to express the thanks of the people I represent. In my Second Reading speech, I reiterated the words of those armed forces veterans in Darlington, who support the Bill. The Bill will impose a legal duty on UK public bodies and local authorities to have due regard to the principles of the covenant, ensuring that armed forces personnel, veterans and their families are not disadvantaged because of or by their service when accessing key public services. I am satisfied that, with the Government new clauses, this Bill will right the wrongs of the past to provide the protection our armed forces personnel and veterans need and deserve. That being said, I welcome the Government's acknowledgement that more can always be done.

With regard to new clauses 1 and 7, the Government have already stressed that they are aware that the current system places financial liability on non-UK service personnel and are currently consulting on a policy to waive fees for personnel at the conclusion of their military service. I look forward to the consultation's end next month. Similarly, in regard to new clause 2, the Government have already set out their desire to provide gold standard provision for veterans and I am glad that Ministers have stressed the importance of that duty of care. In regard to new clause 3, the Government have outlined at length how the armed forces are adapting to new challenges that we face across the globe.

This Bill enshrines the armed forces covenant in law and impacts veterans in all our constituencies. I am proud to be supporting the Government this evening in delivering an important promise to those who are serving and those who have served us so well.

Navendu Mishra (Stockport) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to pay tribute to all serving armed forces personnel and veterans, thousands of whom are based in my Stockport constituency and across Greater Manchester. We all owe a debt of gratitude to them.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan) and for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) and the hon. Members for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) and for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) for tabling new clause 7, which deals with

“Indefinite leave to remain payments by Commonwealth and Gurkha members of armed forces”.

It is vital that we recognise the sacrifice that these brave men and women make for our country, and they should be recognised and rewarded accordingly. The very least the UK Government can do is forgo the cost of remaining in our country. I also pay tribute to all Gurkhas, as well as to the work of the Nepal all-party group and the efforts of my good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma), who has tirelessly campaigned for justice for the Gurkha community.

I am especially grateful to Mr Peter Millns from the Stockport veterans breakfast club for all his work in supporting the veteran community in my town. He has

a long and distinguished career in the military, including a tour of Bosnia while serving in the 1st Battalion the Cheshire Regiment during the conflict in 1993. The work he and many like him do is crucial to providing the support and camaraderie that many serving personnel and veterans need.

There are 2.5 million veterans living in the UK, and it is vital that they are not simply forgotten about once they have served our country and put their lives on the line for it. Veterans such as Mr Millns in my constituency require funding for community services such as a veterans hub in Stockport town centre, a place where serving and former personnel can receive support for housing, employment and public services such as healthcare. That is vital in helping many integrate back into society after tours of duty and once they retire. In order to do this, they need Government support in the form of a fair funding package to all local authorities so these hubs in support of our veteran community can be rolled out across the nation. Voluntary organisations do incredible work, but it should not be left to them to make up the shortfall in Government support. Too often, the armed forces covenant is not upheld and the promises made do not match the reality experienced by our service communities, from substandard housing to poor veterans' mental health and social care.

Earlier this year, a highly critical report by the National Audit Office revealed that tens of thousands of troops live in substandard accommodation, while the Ministry of Defence refuses to pay for £1.5 billion-worth of repairs, meaning that half the rooms in MOD barracks would fail to meet the current building regulations. That is no way to treat those who have put their lives on the line to keep our country safe. The Government also need to reduce the waiting time for access to affordable and social housing and improve the existing armed forces housing stock, much of which is dilapidated and has often fallen into disrepair. The Bill places a legal responsibility on councils to deliver on the covenant in the areas of housing, healthcare and education, but, crucially, without providing any extra funding to do so. The Government must therefore implement the armed forces covenant fully in law and increase its funding.

As I have alluded to already, Commonwealth military veterans who have served with the UK military and put themselves in harm's way for our nation should be afforded the exact same privileges as British nationals. However, the Royal British Legion has warned that they are facing a "desperate situation" due to visa fees of thousands of pounds for those who want to stay in the UK following discharge from the military. This situation must be urgently rectified, and the visa application fees for military personnel from Commonwealth countries must be abolished urgently. Failure to do so would leave many facing deportation.

The UK aims to recruit 1,350 people from Commonwealth countries each year, up from its previous target of 200. We now have more than 6,000 Commonwealth personnel who currently serve in the armed forces.

Mr Kevan Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that those individuals have a huge contribution to make post their military career to British society, whether it be the NHS or other public services, and that by not doing what he says, we are missing an opportunity for the experience that they gained in their service to this country to be given back to the country?

Navendu Mishra: I fully share my right hon. Friend's views. These people could be invaluable in our society, contributing to all sections of the community, and the Government should urgently resolve this matter. Many of these people are exempt from immigration controls during service, but that is removed immediately on discharge. That is no way to thank them after years of loyal service for our country. We should be rewarding them rather than penalising them.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Dame Rosie, for the chance to contribute to this debate on an issue very close to my heart. Let me put on the record how pleased I am to see the Minister in his place. He has been a good friend of mine over the years—a good friend of us all—and we look forward very much to hearing what he has to say.

I declare an interest as a former part-time soldier, having served in the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Territorial Army Royal Artillery for 14 and a half years. That may have given me my interest in this issue, but the armed forces parliamentary scheme, which other Members have referred to, has given me a greater overview of what happens. It has given me an opportunity to see what the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy do, and to have a more strategic overview of what it all means, so it really has been good to do that.

New clause 3 refers to a report on personnel numbers in the armed forces. I have to put on the record, as others have—the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) referred to it—my disappointment that the personnel figure for the forces has dropped. In 2004, under Labour—that was long before I came here; I was in the Assembly at the time—there were some 207,000 personnel. That has dropped dramatically.

I worry that, as others have said, we have come to the stage where viability becomes a key issue and there is a question about whether we are able to respond to all the places in the world where there is conflict. We have heard reference—it may have been from the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) on the SNP Front Bench—to Mali. We know that British soldiers have a key role to play there and elsewhere in Africa. The level of terrorism in central Africa—Gabon, Nigeria, Mali and other areas in that part of Africa—is rising, and we have a role to play. We have a role to play in the far east as well. I do have great concern about that.

In Northern Ireland over the years, we have been very fortunate to have had a good level of recruitment. We never needed conscription in Northern Ireland, because people volunteered in great numbers in the first and second world wars and in every conflict since. Perhaps a Minister—maybe not this Minister, but another Minister or the Secretary of State—would confirm that the number of TA personnel has been increased in Northern Ireland. The recruitment of TA personnel in my constituency of Strangford and in Newtownards, the town where the two regiments are located, shows great improvement.

Moving on to the amendments that have been selected, I support my colleagues who brought forward new clause 1 regarding waived fees for indefinite leave to remain for serving or discharged members of the UK armed forces and, similarly, new clause 7. We have much to be thankful for historically because those Commonwealth members who joined our ranks served with courage and

[*Jim Shannon*]

dedication. Many paid the ultimate price in the service of democracy and freedom while wearing the uniform in service to our royal family and to Queen and country.

5 pm

That debt is not simply historical as our numbers remain swelled at this very moment owing to Commonwealth service personnel, and it is right and proper that our debt to them is cleared and discharged. Under the immigration rules, those who have served for four years or more are entitled to apply for indefinite leave to remain or to remain in the UK on discharge and to sponsor applications for their partner and children. However, the fees—I must express great concern about the process, as others have—have not risen in line with inflation or with the rate of pay of service personnel. Instead, they have risen steeply.

I believe that issue must be addressed. The Government have suggested that that will happen, and the hon. Member for Burnley (Antony Higginbotham) referred to it, and others have done likewise.

Carol Monaghan: Although I said that fees were the biggest issue, we have heard from a number of Commonwealth veterans that they were not made aware of the requirement to apply at the appropriate point and that they have found themselves in a difficult situation over their immigration status. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is an awful lot of work to be done here, particularly when veterans are discharged from the armed forces?

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention and wholeheartedly agree that there are things to do. I hope the Minister will respond to her, and also to me, because I endorse what she has said. It is obvious to me that whenever issues are brought to the attention of Ministers and the Ministry of Defence, things do happen—for instance, the status of the Afghan translators has been changed owing to perseverance and lobbying inside and outside the House—and I suggest that if there is an anomaly to be addressed, we should do that. The way to do it is for our Minister to respond, and I hope he will do so.

Let me return to the fee, which stands at £2,389 per person, despite the unit cost to the Home Office of processing an application being just £243. I always try to be respectful in the Chamber, but when I see figures of £243 and £2,389, I wonder to myself, “Where’s the money going?” For a family of four, the fee would be £9,556. People do not move on their own; they move as part of a family, so I believe consideration should be given to all the family.

I agree that the Government have found some way to acknowledge the debt in that they have proposed dropping fees for personnel who have served more than 12 years, but that does not include any provision for the families, I understand. If the Minister is able to reassure me on the matter, I will be more than happy to respect that.

This must change, and I fully support new clauses 1 and 7 with respect to those who fight to protect these shores. We cannot refuse entry by way of fees, which could take years to save, and perhaps more years to pay off. This small step could change lives and bring working families to enjoy what they have served to uphold.

When someone serves, it is not simply their life that is changed; it is the life of the entire family. That is the issue. During the urgent question on vaccinations earlier today, I made a point about families to the Minister for the Armed Forces, the hon. Member for Wells (James Heappey). It is not just one person who is involved, but a family, and often a family of four or more. The immediate family must be part of the equation at all levels.

I welcome some of the work that has been done in relation to veterans. I have a deep interest in veterans owing to the service rendered by my Strangford constituents. Many people have joined over the years and some have lived with the problems of post-traumatic stress disorder. I see the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) in his place. I thank him for his recent report, which has gone some way to addressing those issues.

I want to make a point about a charity called Beyond the Battlefield. It started 10 years ago in my constituency. There are many charities, but I want to speak about this one. Last year, it looked after 850 veterans. Whether it is benefits issues, social housing, health issues, family issues or legal advice, the help that it gives is incredible. Many people that the organisation helps are those who have fallen under the radar; other charities do not pick them up and they face real problems. In particular, I commend Annemarie Hastings and Rob McCartney for the work they have done through Beyond the Battlefield.

The charity organises a walk at the end of May called “A Big Dander”. If someone goes for a walk or a long run, somewhere at the bottom of that is what we call a dander—just take it at your leisure. Connor Ferguson and Ian Reid covered 430 miles in two days, crossing seven peaks and raising some £15,500. I commend them for that. Beyond the Battlefield survives on contributions and volunteer charity events like that one, and it does tremendous work.

I turn to the armed forces covenant. The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones) referred to her wish—it is my wish as well—to have the armed forces covenant in situ, not just here on the mainland, but for the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and in particular Northern Ireland.

In the background information, I see that the Committee “welcomed the Bill’s proposals” and referred to

“the areas of housing, healthcare and education in the last 12 months...the effectiveness of the legislation and comment on future scope...a memorandum to the Defence Committee two years after the legislation is enacted to enable the Defence Committee to conduct post-legislative scrutiny into how the Act has worked in practice.”

I want that covenant for my constituents in Strangford and all those across the whole of Northern Ireland who have served Queen and country in uniform, so that they have the same rights as they would here.

In the same spirit, I lend my support to amendments 39 and 40 on the standard of housing in the armed forces. Family units sacrifice to serve and it is vital that we do right by them. How can we expect a man or woman to serve with focus if they are worried about the housing in which their family reside back home? How can they serve with focus if they are concerned that their child’s asthma—this is one issue that has come to my attention—is worsening because of damp in their housing? The answer is that they cannot. It is their duty to sacrifice for us and they do so willingly. We in this House must do the same for them and address the issue

of decent housing for families. It is sad that we need to legislate in this way, but the fact is that some Army housing is not fit for purpose and funding must urgently be allocated for those family homes. I am coming to the end of my contribution, Madam Deputy Speaker.

In my constituency, I have an Army couple—one person from Northern Ireland and one from England—who refuse to put their five-year-old into Army housing, so they privately rent. It is not because they want to be better than anybody else. It is because the rented accommodation that they were offered just was not suitable for their child or for them; indeed, I would suggest that it is not suitable for anybody. Given that they have had to private rent, their decent wage is taken up almost in its entirety by rent and childcare.

When we ask people to serve, we take them away from the support of siblings and parents who might be able to mind their children, yet—with great respect—we do not provide enough for them to live comfortably when doing so. It is little wonder that many families choose to split their time by keeping a base in one town to which they travel on weekends and when on leave, and another only for work. One step towards a good working family is providing housing that is fit for purpose that families can live in together, saving what money they can while working on base, and doing away with the use of very costly private rentals.

I am immensely proud of our armed forces, as we all are in this House. We stand in awe of those who serve in uniform, whether in the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force or the Army. We are so proud of what they have done for us, and I believe that we in this House have to do our best for them, with gratitude for their service and for their families, who are part of that service. We need to give them the best; unfortunately, we are not there just yet.

Leo Docherty: I thank all Members who have spoken today for their thoughtful and sincere contributions, and I wish to put on record again my gratitude for the effective chairmanship of the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill by my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland). I also wish to thank the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Stephen Morgan) for the constructive tone of his remarks today. He rightly spoke at some length on the historic hurt suffered by those dismissed from military service purely for their sexual orientation—this related to new clause 4. We also heard welcome remarks on that from the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden), who made a moving speech, and the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone). So I want to put clearly on the record the fact that the historical ban on homosexuality in the armed forces was absolutely wrong and there was horrific injustice as a consequence of it. We will go all out to address that injustice. We are resisting new clause 4 today because we believe that if we accepted that, it would complicate our efforts to address at pace this injustice. But getting after this historical hurt and delivering justice for these people is at the heart of our veterans' strategy, which I will be announcing later this year. I have met Fighting with Pride already to that end. So we will address this injustice with compassion and deep urgency.

Many Members mentioned settlement fees in relation to new clauses 1 and 7. New clause 1 stood in the name of the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, but other Members spoke to it, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell, the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake), my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Antony Higginbotham), the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson), my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson), and the hon. Members for Stockport (Navendu Mishra) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who also mentioned the cases of Afghan interpreters. I am pleased that they are now coming to our country for the sake of refuge. Let me be clear again that the provisions for settlement fees are out for public consultation, which will conclude on 7 July. I cannot pre-empt what it will find, but I am optimistic and expectant that we will deliver a good and honourable result for those who serve and deserve to be able to settle without exorbitant and unjust fees.

The right hon. Member for North Durham returned to the familiar theme of investigations, and I am pleased to confirm to him this afternoon that Justice Henriques will report by the end of the summer, at which point we will consider with sincerity and rigour the recommendations within that report. I have no doubt that we will communicate further on this subject.

Mr Kevan Jones: I have been a Minister in the Ministry of Defence, so will the Minister just clarify what he means by “the summer”, because there is a big difference between what we all know as the summer and what the MOD knows as the summer? Is he referring to what we recognise or will it be later in the year?

Leo Docherty: I am pleased to confirm that that means summer this year, not summer next year.

I was pleased to hear from a trio of Welsh MPs: my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones), the hon. Member for Ceredigion and my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Virginia Crosbie). The hon. Member for Ceredigion questioned whether or not we should have had a legislative consent mechanism in relation to this Bill. I am happy to confirm to him that that is not required—we have taken legal advice on that. My hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire referred to my recent visit to Wales, when I was very pleased to meet veterans and members of the armed forces and to hear about the very important work of armed forces liaison officers in relation to the local delivery of the armed forces covenant. We had discussions about whether or not there is a need for a veterans commissioner for Wales, and I would hope that all three Welsh Members who spoke today would support that notion, because it would, in addition to the armed forces liaison officers, deliver some value for our defence people and our veterans. I urge the Welsh Government, as I will do in future meetings, to look at that very seriously.

We were pleased also to hear from the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes), who brought his usual good cheer and sincere interest in defence affairs to the Chamber virtually. My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley referred, quite rightly, to the valued work of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, through the trust. He spoke about the centrality of people to everything we do in defence, and I thought that was very apposite.

[Leo Docherty]

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford) spoke about the breakfast club in Bury, and about the challenges faced by veterans and service people when it comes to alcohol. I have noticed a discernible shift in the drinking culture in the armed forces: it is becoming much less of a thing. During my visit to Wales, I met serving members of 1 Para, who said that the gym is the new bar. That is quite interesting, compared with my experiences as a young soldier 20 years ago. Of course I spent a lot of time in the gym, but I was also committed to time in the bar. I think that culture may be shifting. I will be happy to support my hon. Friend's efforts in Bury South—if he was in his place, I could give him that personal commitment—and the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Daly) to support veterans at the local level.

The hon. Member for Putney made a fitting tribute to the magnificent Royal Marine reserve unit in her constituency. I can confirm that if she comes to Aldershot, she will see a lot of armed forces personnel cutting around in public, in the garrison and in Tesco. She would be very welcome to do that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Marco Longhi) also mentioned the Armed Forces Parliamentary Trust. My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington and the hon. Member for Stockport mentioned the valuable work that veterans do to support their local communities.

I think we were all moved by the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson). His moving testimony of his personal experience of the armed forces covenant, both as someone in despair following service and then as an armed forces champion, caught the House's attention and was very welcome.

Ten years ago, the covenant was relaunched to set out our nation's promise to honour the immense contribution and commitment of our armed forces people. Ten years on, we are going further still. Anyone who has served their country knows that they should never face disadvantage because of their service. Today, we honour our service people and our veterans. This Bill delivers, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 to 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8

RESERVE FORCES: FLEXIBILITY OF COMMITMENTS

Amendment proposed: 1, in clause 8, page 9, line 19, at end insert—

“(aa) a relevant government department;”—(*Stephen Morgan.*)

This amendment, with amendments 2, 3 and 4, would place the same legal responsibility to have ‘due regard’ to the Armed Forces Covenant on central government and the devolved administrations as the Bill currently requires of local authorities and other public bodies.

The Committee divided: Ayes 271, Noes 355.

Division No. 33]

[5.18 pm

AYES

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
Campbell, Mr Gregory
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
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria

Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Fletcher, Colleen
Flynn, Stephen
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Girvan, Paul
Glindon, Mary
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Kate
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Harvey, 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

Lockhart, Carla
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Paisley, Ian
 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
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, 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

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Sarah Owen and
 Lilian Greenwood

NOES

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
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 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
 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
 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
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl

McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, 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
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 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
 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, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg

Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, 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
 Wakeford, Christian
 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

Tellers for the Noes:

**Scott Mann and
 James Morris**

Question accordingly negated.

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

Amendments made: 8, in clause 8, page 11, line 23, at end insert—

“other than a cross-border Special Health Authority”.

This amendment and Amendment 9 exclude cross-border Special Health Authorities from the scope of section 343AB of the Armed Forces Act 2006.

Amendment 9, in clause 8, page 12, line 10, at end insert—

“‘cross-border Special Health Authority’ means a Special Health Authority which is established under the National Health Service Act 2006 and the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006 by virtue of—

- (a) paragraph 1(2) of Schedule 2 to the National Health Service (Consequential Provisions) Act 2006, or
- (b) the power under section 28 of the National Health Service Act 2006 and the power under section 22 of the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006 being exercised together;”—
(Leo Docherty.)

This amendment and amendment 8 exclude cross-border Special Health Authorities from the scope of section 343AB of the Armed Forces Act 2006.

Amendment proposed: 41, in clause 8, page 13, line 9, at end insert—

“and

(e) in relation to accommodation provided to service people in Scotland, a requirement for that accommodation to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.”—*(Carol Monaghan.)*

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 39.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 273, Noes 354.

Division No. 34]**[5.29 pm****AYES**

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
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 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
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Girvan, Paul
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 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
 Lockhart, Carla
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Paisley, Ian
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby

Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar-Javed, Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 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

Tellers for the Ayes:
Marion Fellows and
Richard Thomson

NOES

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
 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
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 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
 Dinanage, Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, Michelle
 Dorries, Ms Nadine
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 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
 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
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan

Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, 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
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 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, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean

Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, 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
 Wakeford, Christian
 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

Tellers for the Noes:
Scott Mann and
James Morris

Question accordingly negated.

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

Amendments made: 10, in clause 8, page 13, line 21, leave out “and 5 (child's plan)”.

This amendment provides that functions under Part 5 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 are not to be “relevant education functions” for the purposes of section 343AC of the Armed Forces Act 2006.

Amendment 11, in clause 8, page 14, line 25, at end insert “, except Article 15”.

This amendment provides that functions under Article 15 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 (assistance for voluntary organisations) are not to be “relevant housing functions” for the purposes of section 343AD of the Armed Forces Act 2006.

Amendment 12, in clause 8, page 14, line 26, leave out paragraph (c) and insert—

“(c) Chapter 2 of Part 3 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 (S.I. 2003/412 (N.I. 2)), so far as that Chapter relates to disabled facilities grants.”

This amendment makes it clearer that all functions under Chapter 2 of Part 3 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, so far as they relate to disabled facilities grants, are to be “relevant housing functions” for the purposes of section 343AD of the Armed Forces Act 2006. Amendment 14 defines “disabled facilities grant”.

Amendment 13, in clause 8, page 14, line 43, leave out “provision of” and insert

“of the following, so far as the function relates to health care”.

This amendment ensures that a function specified in section 343AD(6) of the Armed Forces Act 2006 is a “relevant healthcare function” only so far as it relates to health care. Amendment 15 defines “health care”.

Amendment 14, in clause 8, page 15, line 5, after “section” insert—

““disabled facilities grant” has the meaning given by Article 35(4) of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003;”.

This amendment is consequential on amendment 12.

Amendment 15, in clause 8, page 15, line 7, at end insert—

““health care” means all forms of health care provided for individuals, whether relating to physical or mental health.”—(*Leo Docherty*.)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 13.

Clause 8, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 10

SERVICE COMPLAINTS APPEALS

Amendments made: 16, in clause 10, page 20, line 8, after “(2)” insert “—

(i)”

This amendment is ancillary to amendment 17.

Amendment 17, in clause 10, page 20, line 11, at end insert—

“(ii) after paragraph (c) insert—

‘(ca) requiring the Defence Council to decide any question relating to whether an appeal has been brought on valid grounds;’.

This amendment (to which amendment 16 is ancillary) enables service complaints regulations to provide that it is to be for the Defence Council to decide whether an appeal against a decision on a service complaint has been brought on valid grounds.

Amendment 18, in clause 10, page 20, line 12, at end insert—

“(4A) In subsection (6)—

(a) after paragraph (a) insert—

‘(aa) for the Service Complaints Ombudsman, on an application by the complainant, to review a decision by the Defence Council that an appeal cannot be proceeded with because it was not brought on a valid ground;’.

(b) in paragraph (b) for ‘such a review,’ substitute ‘a review such as is mentioned in paragraph (a) or (aa).’.

This amendment provides for a complainant to be able to apply for a review by the Service Complaints Ombudsman of a decision that their appeal was not made on a valid ground.

Amendment 19, in clause 10, page 20, line 13, leave out “In”.

This amendment is ancillary to amendments 20, 22 and 23.

Amendment 20, in clause 10, page 20, line 13, after “investigations)” insert

“is amended as follows.

(5A) After subsection (5) insert—

‘(5A) A decision on a service complaint is not to be taken to fall within subsection (5)(b) if the complainant does not have grounds (of which the complainant is aware) on which the complainant is entitled to bring an appeal against the decision.’

(5B) ”.

This amendment (to which amendment 19 is ancillary) clarifies the meaning of “finally determined” in section 340H of the Armed Forces Act 2006 in relation to cases where a person does not have grounds (of which they are aware) for bringing an appeal against the decision on their service complaint.

Amendment 21, in clause 10, page 20, line 13, after “(9)” insert “—

(a)”.

This amendment is ancillary to amendment 22.

Amendment 22, in clause 10, page 20, line 14, at end insert—

“(b) for the words from ‘date’ to the end substitute ‘relevant date (see subsection (9A))’.”

This amendment (to which amendment 19 is ancillary) and amendment 23 make special provision about the time limit for applications to the Service Complaints Ombudsman about a service complaint where the complainant is notified that their appeal against the decision on the complaint was not made on a valid ground.

Amendment 23, in clause 10, page 20, line 14, at end insert—

“(5C) After subsection (9) insert—

“(9A) For the purposes of subsection (9) ‘the relevant date’ in relation to a service complaint that has been finally determined is—

- (a) where the service complaint falls within subsection (5)(b), the date on which the complainant is notified of the determination of the appeal;
- (b) where the decision on the service complaint does not fall within subsection (5)(b)—
 - (i) if the conditions in subsection (9B) are met, the date of the final invalidity decision;
 - (ii) otherwise, the date of the decision on the service complaint.

(9B) The conditions mentioned in subsection (9A)(b)(i) are that—

- (a) the complainant brings an appeal against the decision on the service complaint;
- (b) the Defence Council decides that the appeal cannot be proceeded with because (and only because) it was not brought on a valid ground;
- (c) on any review of that decision of the Defence Council in accordance with regulations made by virtue of section 340D(6)(aa), the decision is upheld.

(9C) In subsection (9A)(b) “the date of the final invalidity decision” means—

- (a) if the complainant does not apply for a review by the Service Complaints Ombudsman of the decision mentioned in subsection (9B)(b), the date on which the Defence Council notifies the complainant of that decision;
- (b) if the complainant does apply for such a review, the date on which the Service Complaints Ombudsman notifies the complainant that the appeal cannot be proceeded with because it was not brought on a valid ground.’.”—(*Leo Docherty*.)

This amendment (to which amendment 19 is ancillary) and amendment 14 make special provision about the time limit for applications to the Service Complaints Ombudsman about a service complaint in cases where the complainant is notified that their appeal relating to the service complaint was not made on a valid ground.

Clause 10, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 11 to 13 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 14

DRIVING DISQUALIFICATION

Amendments made: 24, in clause 14, page 29, line 5, at end insert—

“1A a sentence of detention under section 224B (special sentence of detention for terrorist offenders of particular concern)

two-thirds of the term imposed pursuant to section 252A(5) of the Sentencing Code by virtue of section 224B(4) of this Act (the appropriate custodial term)”

This amends the table in proposed new section 177J of the Armed Forces Act 2006 to refer to a new sentence introduced by the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act 2021.

Amendment 25, in clause 14, page 29, line 12, leave out “half” and insert “two-thirds of”.

This amends the table in proposed new section 177J of the Armed Forces Act 2006 to reflect changes to release points made by the Terrorist Offenders (Restriction of Early Release) Act 2020 and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

Amendment 26, in clause 14, page 29, line 26, at end insert—

“4A a serious terrorism sentence of detention in a young offender institution under section 268A of the Sentencing Code by virtue of section 219ZA of this Act (serious terrorism sentences)

the term imposed pursuant to section 268C(2) of the Sentencing Code (the appropriate custodial term)”

This amends the table in proposed new section 177J of the Armed Forces Act 2006 to refer to a new sentence introduced by the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act 2021.

Amendment 27, in clause 14, page 29, line 27, leave out “half” and insert “two-thirds of”.

This amends the table in proposed new section 177J of the Armed Forces Act 2006 to reflect changes to release points made by the Terrorist Offenders (Restriction of Early Release) Act 2020 and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

Amendment 28, in clause 14, page 29, line 40, at end insert—

“6A a serious terrorism sentence of imprisonment under section 282A of the Sentencing Code by virtue of section 219ZA of this Act (serious terrorism sentences)

the term imposed pursuant to section 282C(2) of the Sentencing Code (the appropriate custodial term)

6B a custodial sentence in respect of which section 244ZA of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 applies to the offender

two-thirds of the sentence

6C a custodial sentence not within any of the preceding entries in respect of which section 247A of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 applies to the offender

two-thirds of the sentence”

This amends the table in proposed new section 177J of the Armed Forces Act 2006 to refer to a new sentence introduced by the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act 2021 and to reflect changes to release points made by the Terrorist Offenders (Restriction of Early Release) Act 2020 and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

Amendment 29, in clause 14, page 30, line 8, at end insert—

“(5A) In the case of a sentence specified in entry 2, 4 or 6 of column 2 in the table which is within section 247A(2A) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, the corresponding entry in column 3 of the table is to be read with the omission of ‘two-thirds of’.”

This modifies the table in proposed new section 177J of the Armed Forces Act 2006 to reflect changes to release points made by the Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act 2021.

Amendment 30, in clause 14, page 30, line 22, leave out “paragraph” and insert “entry”.—(*Leo Docherty.*)

This makes a minor verbal adjustment for purposes of consistency.

Clause 14, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 15 to 26 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause 7

INDEFINITE LEAVE TO REMAIN PAYMENTS BY COMMONWEALTH AND GURKHA MEMBERS OF ARMED FORCES

(1) The Immigration Act 2014 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 68 (10), after “regulations” insert “must make exceptions in respect of any person with citizenship of a Commonwealth country (other than the United Kingdom) who has served at least four years in the UK armed forces, or in respect of any person who has served at least four years in the Brigade of Gurkhas, such exceptions to include capping the fee for any such person applying for indefinite leave to remain at no more than the actual administrative cost of processing that application, and”—(*Stephen Morgan.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 272, Noes 355.

Division No. 35]

[5.39 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane	Chamberlain, Wendy
Abrahams, Debbie	Champion, Sarah
Ali, Rushanara	Chapman, Douglas
Ali, Tahir	Charalambous, Bambos
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Cherry, Joanna
Amesbury, Mike	Clark, Feryal
Anderson, Fleur	Cooper, Daisy
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Cooper, Rosie
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Cooper, rh Yvette
Bardell, Hannah	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Barker, Paula	Cowan, Ronnie
Beckett, rh Margaret	Coyle, Neil
Begum, Apsana	Crawley, Angela
Benn, rh Hilary	Creasy, Stella
Betts, Mr Clive	Cruddas, Jon
Black, Mhairi	Cryer, John
Blackford, rh Ian	Cummins, Judith
Blackman, Kirsty	Cunningham, Alex
Blake, Olivia	Daby, Janet
Blomfield, Paul	Davey, rh Ed
Bonnar, Steven	David, Wayne
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Davies, Geraint
Brennan, Kevin	Davies-Jones, Alex
Brock, Deidre	Day, Martyn
Brown, Alan	De Cordova, Marsha
Brown, Ms Lyn	Debbonaire, Thangam
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Bryant, Chris	Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Buck, Ms Karen	Dodds, Anneliese
Burton, Richard	Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Butler, Dawn	Doogan, Dave
Byrne, Ian	Dorans, Allan
Byrne, rh Liam	Doughty, Stephen
Cadbury, Ruth	Dowd, Peter
Callaghan, Amy	Dromey, Jack
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Duffield, Rosie
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Eagle, Dame Angela
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Eagle, Maria
Carden, Dan	Edwards, Jonathan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Efford, Clive

Elliott, Julie	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Elmore, Chris	Lucas, Caroline
Eshalomi, Florence	Lynch, Holly
Esterson, Bill	MacAskill, Kenny
Evans, Chris	MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Farron, Tim	Madders, Justin
Farry, Stephen	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Fellows, Marion	Mahmood, Shabana
Ferrier, Margaret	Malhotra, Seema
Fletcher, Colleen	Maskell, Rachael
Flynn, Stephen	Matheson, Christian
Fovargue, Yvonne	Mc Nally, John
Foxcroft, Vicky	McCabe, Steve
Foy, Mary Kelly	McCarthy, Kerry
Furniss, Gill	McDonagh, Siobhain
Gardiner, Barry	McDonald, Andy
Gibson, Patricia	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Gill, Preet Kaur	McDonald, Stuart C.
Girvan, Paul	McDonnell, rh John
Glendon, Mary	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Grady, Patrick	McGinn, Conor
Grant, Peter	McGovern, Alison
Green, Kate	McKinnell, Catherine
Green, Sarah	McLaughlin, Anne
Greenwood, Margaret	McMahon, Jim
Griffith, Nia	McMorris, Anna
Gwynne, Andrew	Mearns, Ian
Haigh, Louise	Miliband, rh Edward
Hamilton, Fabian	Mishra, Navendu
Hanvey, Neale	Monaghan, Carol
Hardy, Emma	Moran, Layla
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Morden, Jessica
Harris, Carolyn	Morgan, Stephen
Hayes, Helen	Morris, Grahame
Healey, rh John	Murray, Ian
Hendrick, Sir Mark	Murray, James
Hendry, Drew	Nandy, Lisa
Hillier, Meg	Newlands, Gavin
Hobhouse, Wera	Nichols, Charlotte
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	Nicolson, John
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Norris, Alex
Hollern, Kate	O'Hara, Brendan
Hollobone, Mr Philip	Olney, Sarah
Hopkins, Rachel	Onwurah, Chi
Hosie, rh Stewart	Oppong-Asare, Abena
Howarth, rh Sir George	Osamor, Kate
Huq, Dr Rupa	Osborne, Kate
Hussain, Imran	Oswald, Kirsten
Jardine, Christine	Owatemi, Taiwo
Jarvis, Dan	Paisley, Ian
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	Peacock, Stephanie
Johnson, Kim	Pennycook, Matthew
Jones, Darren	Perkins, Mr Toby
Jones, Gerald	Phillips, Jess
Jones, rh Mr Kevan	Phillipson, Bridget
Jones, Ruth	Pollard, Luke
Jones, Sarah	Powell, Lucy
Kane, Mike	Qaisar-Javed, Anum
Keeley, Barbara	Qureshi, Yasmin
Kendall, Liz	Rayner, rh Angela
Khan, Afzal	Reed, Steve
Kinnock, Stephen	Rees, Christina
Kyle, Peter	Reeves, Ellie
Lake, Ben	Reeves, Rachel
Lammy, rh Mr David	Reynolds, Jonathan
Lavery, Ian	Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Law, Chris	Rimmer, Ms Marie
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Robinson, Gavin
Lewis, Clive	Rodda, Matt
Linden, David	Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Lloyd, Tony	Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Lockhart, Carla	Shah, Naz

Shannon, Jim
 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
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen

Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 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

Tellers for the Ayes:
Lilian Greenwood and
Sarah Owen

NOES

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
 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
 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
 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
 Heappey, James

Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther

Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, 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
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 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, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Alok

Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, 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
 Wakeford, Christian
 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

Tellers for the Noes:
James Morris and
Scott Mann

Question accordingly negated.

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

Schedules 1 and 2 agreed to.

Schedule 3

SERVICE COMPLAINTS APPEALS

Amendments made: 31, page 40, line 27, at end insert—

“(c) in paragraph (b)(i) for “340D(6)” substitute “340D(6)(a)”.”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 18.

Amendment 32, page 40, line 35, at end insert—

“(c) in paragraph (b)(i) for “340D(6)” substitute “340D(6)(a)”.”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 18.

Amendment 33, page 41, line 8, at end insert—

“(c) in paragraph (b)(i) for “340D(6)” substitute “340D(6)(a)”.”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 18.

Amendment 34, page 41, line 8, at end insert—

“Working Time Regulations 1998

3A In regulation 38 of the Working Time Regulations 1998 (S.I. 1998/1833) (armed forces)—

(a) in paragraph (2), for sub-paragraph (a) substitute—

“(a) that person (“the complainant”) has made a service complaint in respect of the same matter, and”;

(b) for paragraph (3) substitute—

“(3) Where the service complaint is dealt with by a person or panel appointed by the Defence Council by virtue of section 340C(1)(a) of the Armed Forces Act 2006, it is to be treated for the purposes of paragraph (2)(b) as withdrawn if—

(a) the period allowed in accordance with service complaints regulations for bringing an appeal against the person's or panel's decision expires,

(b) there are grounds (of which the complainant is aware) on which the complainant is entitled to bring such an appeal, and

(c) either—

(i) the complainant does not apply to the Service Complaints Ombudsman for a review by virtue of section 340D(6)(a) of the Armed Forces Act 2006 (review of decision that appeal brought out of time cannot proceed), or

(ii) the complainant does apply for such a review and the Ombudsman decides that an appeal against the person's or panel's decision cannot be proceeded with.”;

(c) in paragraph (4), for “service redress procedures” substitute “procedures set out in service complaints regulations”;

(d) for paragraph (5) substitute—

“(5) In this regulation—

“service complaint” means a complaint under section 340A of the Armed Forces Act 2006;

“service complaints regulations” means regulations made under section 340B(1) of that Act.””

This amendment makes amendments of subordinate legislation that are consequential on clause 10.

Amendment 35, page 41, line 8, at end insert—

“Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000

3B In regulation 13 of the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 (S.I. 2000/1551) (armed forces)—

(a) in paragraph (3), for sub-paragraph (a) substitute—

“(a) that person (“the complainant”) has made a service complaint in respect of the same matter, and”;

(b) for paragraph (4) substitute—

“(4) Where the service complaint is dealt with by a person or panel appointed by the Defence Council by virtue of section 340C(1)(a) of the Armed Forces Act 2006, it is to be treated for the purposes of paragraph (3)(b) as withdrawn if—

- (a) the period allowed in accordance with service complaints regulations for bringing an appeal against the person's or panel's decision expires,
 - (b) there are grounds (of which the complainant is aware) on which the complainant is entitled to bring such an appeal, and
 - (c) either—
 - (i) the complainant does not apply to the Service Complaints Ombudsman for a review by virtue of section 340D(6)(a) of the Armed Forces Act 2006 (review of decision that appeal brought out of time cannot proceed), or
 - (ii) the complainant does apply for such a review and the Ombudsman decides that an appeal against the person's or panel's decision cannot be proceeded with.”;
 - (c) in paragraph (5), for “service redress procedures” substitute “procedures set out in service complaints regulations”;
 - (d) for paragraph (6) substitute—
- “(6) In this regulation—
- “service complaint” means a complaint under section 340A of the Armed Forces Act 2006;
- “service complaints regulations” means regulations made under section 340B(1) of that Act.”

This amendment makes amendments of subordinate legislation that are consequential on clause 10.

Amendment 36, page 41, line 8, at end insert—

“Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000

3C In regulation 13 of the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 (S.R. (N.I.) 2000 No. 219) (armed forces)—

- (a) in paragraph (3), for sub-paragraph (a) substitute—
- “(a) that person (“the complainant”) has made a service complaint in respect of the same matter, and”;
- (b) for paragraph (4) substitute—

“(4) Where the service complaint is dealt with by a person or panel appointed by the Defence Council by virtue of section 340C(1)(a) of the Armed Forces Act 2006, it is to be treated for the purposes of paragraph (3)(b) as withdrawn if—

- (a) the period allowed in accordance with service complaints regulations for bringing an appeal against the person's or panel's decision expires,
- (b) there are grounds (of which the complainant is aware) on which the complainant is entitled to bring such an appeal, and
- (c) either—

- (i) the complainant does not apply to the Service Complaints Ombudsman for a review by virtue of section 340D(6)(a) of the Armed Forces Act 2006 (review of decision that appeal brought out of time cannot proceed), or
- (ii) the complainant does apply for such a review and the Ombudsman decides that an appeal against the person's or panel's decision cannot be proceeded with.”;

- (c) in paragraph (5), for “service redress procedures” substitute “procedures set out in service complaints regulations”;
- (d) for paragraph (6) substitute—

- “(6) In this regulation—
- “service complaint” means a complaint under section 340A of the Armed Forces Act 2006;
- “service complaints regulations” means regulations made under section 340B(1) of that Act.”

This amendment makes amendments of subordinate legislation that are consequential on clause 10.

Amendment 37, page 42, line 13, at end insert—

“(c) in paragraph (b)(i) for “340D(6)” substitute “340D(6)(a)”.”

This amendment is consequential on amendment 18.

Amendment 38, page 42, line 13, at end insert—

“Working Time Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016

4 In regulation 49 of the Working Time Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (S.R. (N.I.) 2016 No. 49) (armed forces)—

- (a) in paragraph (2), for sub-paragraph (a) substitute—

“(a) that person (“the complainant”) has made a service complaint in respect of the same matter, and”;

- (b) for paragraph (3) substitute—

“(3) Where the service complaint is dealt with by a person or panel appointed by the Defence Council by virtue of section 340C(1)(a) of the Armed Forces Act 2006, it is to be treated for the purposes of paragraph (2)(b) as withdrawn if—

- (a) the period allowed in accordance with service complaints regulations for bringing an appeal against the person's or panel's decision expires,
- (b) there are grounds (of which the complainant is aware) on which the complainant is entitled to bring such an appeal, and
- (c) either—

- (i) the complainant does not apply to the Service Complaints Ombudsman for a review by virtue of section 340D(6)(a) of the Armed Forces Act 2006 (review of decision that appeal brought out of time cannot proceed), or
- (ii) the complainant does apply for such a review and the Ombudsman decides that an appeal against the person's or panel's decision cannot be proceeded with.”;

- (c) in paragraph (4), for “service redress procedures” substitute “procedures set out in service complaints regulations”;
- (d) for paragraph (5) substitute—

“(5) In this regulation—

“service complaint” means a complaint under section 340A of the Armed Forces Act 2006;

“service complaints regulations” means regulations made under section 340B(1) of that Act.”—(*Leo Docherty.*)

This amendment makes amendments of subordinate legislation that are consequential on clause 10.

Schedule 3, as amended, agreed to.

Schedules 4 and 5 agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.

Bill, as amended, reported.

Bill to be considered tomorrow.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ELECTRICITY

That the draft Contracts for Difference (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2021, which were laid before this House on 12 May, be approved.—(*Tom Pursglove.*)

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (24 JUNE)

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 24 June—

(1) notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business), the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership shall

have precedence over the business determined by the Backbench Business Committee, and proceedings on that Motion may continue for 90 minutes and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of;

(2) notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (2)(c), as applied by paragraph (4), of Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business), the business determined by the Backbench Business Committee may be proceeded with until 5.00 pm or for three hours, whichever is the later, and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of;

(3) proceedings on each Motion may be entered upon and continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption, and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Tom Pursglove.*)

DELEGATED LEGISLATION (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO INDUSTRY)

Ordered,

That the Motion in the name of Paul Scully relating to Financial Assistance to Industry shall be treated as if it related to an instrument subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Delegated Legislation Committees) in respect of which notice has been given that the instrument be approved.—(*Tom Pursglove.*)

English Wine Week

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

5.48 pm

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): It is a great pleasure to talk about the success story that is English wine in English Wine Week, but I am happy to expand the designation to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. My constituency, Arundel and South Downs, has one of the largest collections of vineyards in the United Kingdom, with a combined 309 hectares. Vineyards making up that hectareage are among some of the best in the country, including Nutbourne, Redfold Vineyards, Coldharbour, Tullens, Stopham, the Wiston Estate and Woodmancote vineyard. In that respect, I draw the House's attention to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests or, more accurately, the lack of any entry. With the summer months now upon us, I am always happy to volunteer myself as a professional consumer of their products.

I am also the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for wine of Great Britain, of which I see a number of members here this evening. I am pleased to announce that it has 53 members from across the House. Through my role as chair, I have had the pleasure of working closely with Simon Robinson of Hattingley Valley, who sadly informed us that he will be stepping down as chair of WineGB in August. I pay tribute to him for his work, but I also welcome his successor, Sam Linter of Bolney Wine Estate. I am sure that we will have a great time promoting English wine together.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): May I first thank my hon. Friend for his leadership of the English wines group and for his expansive way of making it for all this country?

One of the issues raised by English wine producers, and in particular by producers of sparkling wine, where we are doing really well, is that we ought to be able to bring in half-litre bottles. [*Interruption.*] Forgive me; I am being asked to go to the pub. We can sell still wine in half-litres and some English wine growers suggest that, now that we are free of EU rules, it would be a good idea to do the same for sparkling wine.

Andrew Griffith: I thank my hon. Friend for that eminent suggestion. As we know, the only thing better than half a litre of English sparkling wine is a full litre, but why would we seek to deprive the consumer of choice? Perhaps the Minister and her colleagues will pick that up when she responds.

Wine, as we know, has a long history on this island, having been introduced by the Romans. By the time of the Normans, who indeed chose Sussex to land, more than 40 vineyards were listed in the Domesday Book—one of the earliest censuses on record—proving that their produce has always attracted the attention of the taxman. There was healthy growth in the wine industry in the late medieval and early-modern period, with 139 vineyards recorded at the time of Henry VIII's coronation. Indeed, to this day, just over the road, there is a legacy of Henry's prodigious taste for wine in the form of his personal cellar, now buried—or so they claim—under the Ministry of Defence. English wine has done exceptionally well in

[Andrew Griffith]

recent years and is now repeatedly recognised as a contender among some of the world leaders in the industry, with England winning more gold medals in the Sommelier Wine Awards than France.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this issue forward. Does he not agree that British goods of a high quality, such as English wine, should be available for sale in each corner of this wonderful United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and that Greenfields wine, which I think he omitted to refer to, should be promoted in my constituency of Strangford just as Echlinville gin, made in Kircubbin in my constituency, should be promoted in Arundel?

Andrew Griffith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for reminding us of the importance of the single internal market. I would be delighted to promote his Echlinville gin to my constituents in Arundel and South Downs.

I was talking about awards and the quality of our English products. In recent months, Nyetimber—another vineyard in my constituency—won four awards at the 2020 Champagne and Sparkling Wine World Championships. Closer to home, we should not forget the excellent work done by Trevor Clough and Jason Humphries at Digby Fine English—also in my constituency—who have been awarded the contract for the House of Commons gift shop's first ever official sparkling wine, meaning that every visitor to this House can leave with a genuinely sparkling souvenir. It is happening not only in my constituency but across England, and it has been a pleasure to hear from hon. Friends about a wealth of other first-class wine estates.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Right across England, and indeed even in North Yorkshire—which might sound very northerly for a wine—there are the wonderful, award-winning Ryedale vineyards that produce the fantastically named Yorkshire's Lass and Yorkshire's Lad white wine. It really is top-drawer and worthy of that award. Does my hon. Friend think we might push the Treasury to introduce some incentives for our smaller wine growers—cellar door relief, for example, or perhaps small vineyards relief—which would encourage more tourism to our lovely constituencies as well as more wine sales?

Andrew Griffith: My hon. Friend makes a fantastic point. I look forward to consuming Yorkshire's Lass or Yorkshire's Lad. We should certainly support our small producers in what is, as I will go on to say, a growing industry in the United Kingdom.

A number of other colleagues have joined me to talk about the wine estates in their constituencies. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Greg Smith) has mentioned the Chafor vineyard in his constituency, and I see on the Front Bench the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Mims Davies), who plays host to Bolney, and Kingscote in East Grinstead.

English sparkling wine has had a very busy year despite the pandemic. With the current trend to stay local and to buy local due to the pandemic, the industry

has adapted well to current restrictions. WineGB data suggests that the industry saw an increase of 30% in 2020 on the previous year, with 7 million bottles sold, and we have a great deal more to look forward to. Dermot Sugrue, winemaker at Whiston Estate, wrote recently that the 2020 harvest is

"in a word: Superb. Best...since 2003 & 2011."

Peter Gladwin, the proprietor of the Nutbourne Vineyards, told me that he believes in some ways covid restrictions have helped the UK wine industry. Buying local, staycations and the multitude of good publicity have all boosted direct-to-consumer sales.

Wine tourism has also seen an increase in the lockdown, with more visitors than ever heading to our UK vineyards and wineries for their holidays, enhancing—and this is a very serious point—the rural economy and much-needed employment. A recent report commissioned by the South Downs National Park Authority, which itself does an excellent job at promoting English wine, estimated that we have seen 33,000 visitors coming to our 51 vineyards and 11 wineries.

If the authors of a recent report on climate change—another very serious topic—are to be believed, the South Downs wine harvest will only grow. Today, just 0.4% of agricultural land is currently used for viticulture, whereas the report estimates that up to 34% of land could be suitable in the future. This potential is already apparent in the wider country, as 2021 has seen 1.4 million vines planted, and over 5,000 acres have been planted over the past five years.

With restrictions easing, we cannot stop here. We must continue to try to help this great industry grow, and one way to help is through taxation. Wine Drinkers UK explained to me that currently excise duty on a bottle of still wine is £2.23 plus VAT, while excise duty on a bottle of sparkling wine is £2.86 plus VAT. There is literally a bubble tax. Maybe it is the forerunner of a broader tax on carbon emissions, but I have to say it does seem like a really odd place to start.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a very good point there. It is absurd of course if it is a tax to prevent people from drinking more alcohol, because the alcohol content of sparkling wine is rather lower than that of still wine, so it is actually even more healthy for people to drink sparkling wine than still wine.

Andrew Griffith: I thank my hon. Friend for his endorsement of the health benefits of sparkling wine, and I am sure he himself is a sparkling example of that as well. In the long term, I am confident that such a change in taxation would be a good deal for the Chancellor.

Another current issue that the wine industry in Britain is facing is the lack of seasonal workers able to come over and help with the harvest. There is currently only one UK college I am aware of that promotes the very highest level of viticulture course, and that is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield)—Plumpton College. Its principal, Jeremy Kerswell, is very engaged in expanding this space and stepping into that opportunity. I believe that, together, we can find a happy balance between gaining seasonal workers and encouraging more British people to take up the wonderful career opportunities offered in viticulture.

On the subject of Government hospitality and patronage of home-grown wine, I have tabled a number of written questions in this House, from which I learned that in March of last year English wines made up only 10% of the Government wine cellar. However, I am delighted to report that the Government are busy rectifying this oversight. In 2018-19, 49% of wines purchased for Government hospitality were English or Welsh, and that has improved this year to 73%—a commendable direction of travel and one we should really celebrate in English Wine Week.

Since I became chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for wine of Great Britain, the members and I have been pushing the Government to promote English wine as much as possible. It is something I will continue to champion, and I was grateful for the commitment given in this Chamber last week by my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams), as a Foreign Office Minister, that he will encourage all British high commissions and embassies to stock their cellars with home-grown produce. This would help, support and encourage the growth of the English wine industry on a global scale. Boosting exports is a major cause for optimism. Today we drink far more Australian wine than the Australians drink English wine, so there is an opportunity to redress that imbalance thanks to the new outline trade deal agreed by the International Trade Secretary. Such opportunities will be firmly on the agenda, or the menu, at the SussExport event to be hosted by Wilton Park this July for all export businesses in Sussex.

English Wine Week is also an outstanding opportunity to celebrate the community institutions that serve our local English wine—the great British pubs. Pubs provide a warm welcome and a safe place to enjoy company, perhaps a glass of English sparkling wine, and often delicious food. Many are cherished and characterful buildings used for hospitality over the centuries.

To help our hard-pressed hostellers, I have launched a South Downs pub guide to encourage my constituents and visitors to the South Downs back to the booths, benches, beer gardens and bar stools of these local favourites. From the Foresters Arms in Kirdford, to the Thatched Inn in Hassocks, to the Holly Tree in Walberton to the White Horse in Graffham, all points of the compass in Arundel and South Downs are well served by an array of local pubs. I am thankful to Squires garden centre and Harwoods Land Rover for making this guide a possibility. It is not yet quite, as they say, available in all good bookshops, but copies will be available in time for unlocking on 19 July. In the meantime, it is at southdownspubs.com.

I believe that it is important to celebrate and support this growing British industry in any way that we can, from promoting it on the international stage to ordering a bottle or two occasionally for ourselves. It is successful, sustainable and with plenty of room to grow.

6.1 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this debate given that we have a little more time due to the previous business finishing early. I really congratulate my hon. Friend, and neighbour, the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Andrew Griffith) on securing it. I am very covetous of his constituency because it includes

the best vineyards in the country in the county that has the best vineyards in the country. It is with great pleasure that I endorse everything that he has said about English wine.

I speak with some long-term experience. Back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as a vacation job, I used to work at the English Wine Centre in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) in the village of Alfriston, where I grew up. In those days, English wine was an altogether different beast. It had been reinvented by Guy Salisbury-Jones down at Hambledon in Hampshire, the home of cricket, and was largely an occupation taken up by retired colonels and the like as a sideline and hobby.

The quality of English wine in those days was somewhat questionable, so we had to think up imaginative ways of trying to promote it. One of those we came up with was having an English wine festival; it was rather more down to quantity than quality, which appealed to those who came. Then, in 1984, we founded the great English wine run, which mimicked the Beaujolais race bringing the new Beaujolais across to the UK. Instead, we took English wine across to a bunch of unsuspecting Parisians, ending up at the George V hotel in Paris. About 100 teams took part. Some were dressed up as famous English generals who had conquered the French in battle; of course, there were many that fitted that bill. We had double-decker London buses, surfboards, helicopters and vintage Rolls-Royces. We appeared, each of us, with our two bottles of English wine that we delivered to the finishing point at the George V hotel to the unsuspecting French who did not really want to drink it.

But today English wine is an altogether different beast. Forty years on from when we had those English wine runs, which we did for four or five years, we can now, with huge pride, hold up a bottle of English wine and it will hold its own with the best the French champagne industry can throw at it. As my hon. Friend said, we now have countless vineyards that are winning in blind tastings internationally across the globe against the French, who thought they were the masters of producing sparkling wine. English sparkling wine is better. We have benefited from climate change, we benefit from the same latitude as the champagne district and we benefit from a similar terroir, particularly on the south downs, where the 51 vineyards in the South Downs national park have that chalky terrain that makes the best grapes to turn into English sparkling wine. So it has been a great success story, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I am sure that the odd drop has passed your lips occasionally in the past.

We need to celebrate the industry, and the Government need to get behind the industry a little more. We are now producing 7.1 million bottles on 10,000 acres across the country, mostly in England but some in Wales and apparently on a vineyard in Scotland—with a certain whisky tinge about it, I should think. We have 800 vineyards—and growing—employing many thousands of people and, really importantly, encouraging wine tourism as well. In Sussex, we have something called Sussex Modern, which was invented by the proprietor of Rathfinny, which is probably going to become the largest English vineyard and is a great success story. Sussex Modern combines vineyards with cultural and artistic sites for people coming to have a holiday in Sussex, just as they might go down to the south of France, to Bordeaux or wherever. They can take in some vineyards and some

[Tim Loughton]

culture, history and heritage as well, and they can do it all in the United Kingdom, regardless of pandemics and everything else.

This is a really important, quality industry, and we want help from the Government. It is more expensive to set up a vineyard in this country, owing to the cost of land, when you are starting from scratch, so some more generous capital reliefs as part of agricultural aid might be something the Government would like to consider rather more generously. It is absurd, now that we are no longer constrained by taxation rules from the EU, that we are paying such a high tariff of tax on English wine. The equivalent tax in France is simply pennies—or euro cents—whereas here it is a much bigger chunk of the cost of the wine. It is also absurd, as I mentioned earlier, that we are paying a higher rate of tax on sparkling wine when it has a lower alcohol content—usually 11% compared with still wine at around 13 or 14%.

I know that, when the Minister replies, she will celebrate this industry—I have seen her taste much of the stuff in her years in this House—but will she have a word with her ministerial colleagues in the Treasury as well? This is a huge success story. It is part of Britain is GREAT, it will help to sell the UK around the world, and it would be nice to get that recognition from the Government with some financial advantage. In the post-common agricultural policy world in which we now live, the world is the English wine industry's oyster and much of the south downs still can be developed under vineyards in the years to come. Thank you very much for this opportunity, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I look forward to hearing great things from the Minister. We can all then retire to the bar and have a sparkling wine from England.

6.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Andrew Griffith) for organising this refreshing debate. It has been a really enjoyable end to today's proceedings, but it has also raised some important matters, which I will endeavour to go through.

English Wine Week gives us a really good opportunity to come together to celebrate all that is good about English wine, and it is true that the growth in the sector has been phenomenal, with growth of 150% in just 10 years. Other sectors can only dream of such growth.

We have more than 3,500 hectares under vines at the moment, located on 770 vineyards spread across the country. It is great to have representatives of some of them in the Chamber this evening, and not just of Digby and Nyetimber, with whose products many of us are now familiar, but also my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), who talked about Yorkshire's Lad and Yorkshire's Lass, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), who represents so many great growers, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Mims Davies), who represents Bolney and Kingscote, and my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), who was here earlier.

It was great to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who is also a very experienced wine drinker. It was good to

hear his experiences of the great English wine run. I think it is fair to say that, in his lifetime and mine, the reputation of English wine has rightly changed enormously, and he made that point extremely powerfully.

The growth is impressive, but this is very much just the beginning. WineGB predicts that, by 2040, we will be producing 40 million bottles a year and as much as 70,000 hectares could be under vine. Large champagne houses, including Pommery and Taittinger, are working with vineyards and wine producers here, for the climatic reasons that have been rehearsed by my colleagues.

The industry anticipates that, by 2040, the wine sector will account for up to 30,000 new jobs. A significant part of this new economy is tourism, with 150 British vineyards now open to the public. There was a very useful article about that in the *Telegraph* yesterday, suggesting where people might visit on their summer holidays.

Our excellence in education is also significant. The quality of wine education at Plumpton, which was mentioned, is rightly recognised around the world. I was pleased to talk earlier to the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex. She told me about a very exciting scheme: the DWP is working with Plumpton on a sector-based work academy in viticulture to produce and train up the workers we need for the future of this sector.

I met WineGB recently to discuss what more the Government can do to support the sector. We continue to work on the application for a new geographical indication for Sussex wine; of course, that is where the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs is. That application is being processed within our new domestic GI scheme, and it is progressing well.

My hon. Friend mentioned the excellent report from the South Downs national park. The writers of that report are prepared to countenance a truly massive expansion of viticulture in the region. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs officials are taking the report very seriously and will be meeting the report writers next month to discuss how we can take the practical issues forward together.

It is also important to discuss marketing. We are truly a wine-loving nation. The trade is very important to us. By volume, we trade more wine in this country than anywhere else in the world. A fifth of our food imports by value are wine. English consumers clearly love wine, but—I should bring us down to reality—99% of the wine we drink currently is not produced here. We need to come together to boost sales among local consumers, which very much fits with our mantra this year of “Buy British, buy local, buy sustainable”.

I will look at the regulations post Brexit to ensure that they work in the best possible way for this industry. The points about taxation will, I am sure, have been heard by Her Majesty's Treasury, and it is right that we are looking at how future farming schemes can fit this sector in a way that the common agricultural policy just did not.

We also need to ensure that English and Welsh wine benefits from our work on exports. At the moment, 10% of what we produce is exported, and the food and drink element of the GREAT campaign has made real progress in China, the US and Japan. We will continue

to showcase excellent English wine. My hon. Friend and his APPG are right to challenge us on Government hospitality, and I will continue to work with him on that.

I am pleased to say that, in December last year, the UK joined the Organisation of Vine and Wine, which should help us shape the rules around winemaking on an international platform. We are very grateful to both WineGB and the Wine and Spirit Trade Association for working so closely with us on both that and other issues.

I encourage Members across the House to raise a glass this evening to this flourishing sector. I look forward to the day when, as a treat, we no longer have a glass of champagne but we can together have a glass of Sussex.

Question put and agreed to.

6.14 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)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Tahir Ali (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jonathan Ashworth (Leicester South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Suella Braverman (Fareham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
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)	Chris Elmore
Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Felicity Buchan (Kensington) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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
Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Jon Cruddas (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
James Daly (Bury North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mims Davies (Mid Sussex) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Marsha De Cordova (Battersea)	Zarah Sultana
Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP)	Hywel Williams
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)	Chris Elmore
Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind)	Stuart Andrew
Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP)	Jim Shannon
John Glen (Salisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
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)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Green (Chesham and Amersham) (LD)	Wendy Chamberlain
Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Hywel Williams
Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
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)	Chris Elmore
James Heappey (Wells) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gordon Henderson (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
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)	Chris Elmore
Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
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)	Chris Elmore
Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Johnston (Wantage) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Fay Jones (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC)	Hywel Williams
Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Brandon Lewis (Great Yarmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
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

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)	Zarah Sultana
Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (Alba)	Neale Hanvey
Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Shabana Mahmood (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alan Mak (Havant) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Julie Marson (Hertford and Stortford) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
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)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Joy Morrissey (Beaconsfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jill Mortimer (Hartlepool) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
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)	Chris Elmore
James Murray (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op)	Zarah Sultana
Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab)	Zarah Sultana
Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
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)	Chris Elmore
Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP)	Jim Shannon

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC)	Hywel Williams
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)	Chris Elmore
Grant Shapps (Welwyn Hatfield) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alok Sharma (Reading West) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Julian Smith (Skipton and Ripon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Spellar (Warley) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Derek Thomas (St Ives)(Con)	Stuart Andrew
Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op)	Chris Elmore
Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
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
Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
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)	Chris Elmore
Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Mrs Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP)	Owen Thompson
Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
John Whittingdale (Malden) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab)	Chris Elmore
Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con)	Stuart Andrew

Member eligible for proxy vote	Nominated proxy
Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
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)	Chris Elmore
Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford- on-Avon) (Con)	Stuart Andrew
Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab)	Chris Elmore

Deferred Division

ADJOURNMENT (CONFERENCE, NOVEMBER AND CHRISTMAS)

That this House at its rising on Thursday 23 September 2021, do adjourn until Monday 18 October 2021; at its rising on Tuesday 9 November 2021, do adjourn until Monday 15 November 2021; and at its rising on Thursday 16 December 2021, do adjourn until Tuesday 4 January 2022.

The House divided: Ayes 567, Noes 3.

Division No. 32]

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
Ansell, Caroline
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Argar, Edward
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Barker, Paula
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Bell, Aaron
Benn, rh Hilary
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Betts, Mr Clive
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brennan, Kevin
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Brokenshire, rh James
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
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carden, Dan
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
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, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Coyle, Neil
Crabb, rh Stephen
Creasy, Stella
Crosbie, Virginia

Crouch, Tracey
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Daly, James
David, Wayne
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davies-Jones, Alex
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
De Cordova, Marsha
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dinenage, Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, Anneliese
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Dromey, Jack
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duffield, Rosie
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
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
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Ferrier, Margaret
Fletcher, Colleen
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fovargue, Yvonne
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Furniss, Gill
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Gill, Preet Kaur
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Glindon, Mary
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
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
Hanvey, Neale
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Carolyn
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hates, Helen
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Healey, rh John
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hillier, Meg
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollern, Kate
Hollinrake, Kevin
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul

Hopkins, Rachel	Lopresti, Jack	Nici, Lia	Sharma, rh Alok
Howarth, rh Sir George	Lord, Mr Jonathan	Nokes, rh Caroline	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Howell, John	Loughton, Tim	Norman, rh Jesse	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Howell, Paul	Lucas, Caroline	Norris, Alex	Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Huddleston, Nigel	Lynch, Holly	O'Brien, Neil	Siddiq, Tulip
Hudson, Dr Neil	MacAskill, Kenny	Offord, Dr Matthew	Simmonds, David
Hughes, Eddie	Mackinlay, Craig	Onwurah, Chi	Skidmore, rh Chris
Hunt, Jane	Mackrory, Cherilyn	Opperman, Guy	Slaughter, Andy
Hunt, rh Jeremy	Maclean, Rachel	Oppong-Asare, Abena	Smith, Cat
Hunt, Tom	Madders, Justin	Osamor, Kate	Smith, Chloe
Huq, Dr Rupa	Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Osborne, Kate	Smith, Greg
Hussain, Imran	Mahmood, Shabana	Owatemi, Taiwo	Smith, Henry
Jack, rh Mr Alister	Mak, Alan	Owen, Sarah	Smith, Jeff
Jarvis, Dan	Malhotra, Seema	Paisley, Ian	Smith, rh Julian
Javid, rh Sajid	Malthouse, Kit	Parish, Neil	Smith, Nick
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil	Mangnall, Anthony	Patel, rh Priti	Smith, Royston
Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Mann, Scott	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Smyth, Karin
Jenkinson, Mark	Marson, Julie	Pawsey, Mark	Sobel, Alex
Jenkyns, Andrea	Maskell, Rachael	Peacock, Stephanie	Solloway, Amanda
Jenrick, rh Robert	Matheson, Christian	Penning, rh Sir Mike	Spellar, rh John
Johnson, rh Boris	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Pennycook, Matthew	Spencer, Dr Ben
Johnson, Dr Caroline	Mayhew, Jerome	Penrose, John	Spencer, rh Mark
Johnson, rh Dame Diana	Maynard, Paul	Percy, Andrew	Stafford, Alexander
Johnson, Gareth	McCabe, Steve	Perkins, Mr Toby	Starmer, rh Keir
Johnson, Kim	McCarthy, Kerry	Phillips, Jess	Stephenson, Andrew
Johnston, David	McCartney, Jason	Phillipson, Bridget	Stevens, Jo
Jones, Andrew	McCartney, Karl	Philp, Chris	Stevenson, Jane
Jones, Darren	McDonagh, Siobhain	Pincher, rh Christopher	Stevenson, John
Jones, rh Mr David	McDonald, Andy	Pollard, Luke	Stewart, rh Bob
Jones, Fay	McDonnell, rh John	Poulter, Dr Dan	Stewart, Iain
Jones, Gerald	McFadden, rh Mr Pat	Pow, Rebecca	Streeter, Sir Gary
Jones, rh Mr Kevan	McGinn, Conor	Powell, Lucy	Streeting, Wes
Jones, Mr Marcus	McGovern, Alison	Prentis, Victoria	Stride, rh Mel
Jones, Ruth	McKinnell, Catherine	Pritchard, rh Mark	Stringer, Graham
Jones, Sarah	McMahon, Jim	Pursglove, Tom	Stuart, Graham
Jupp, Simon	McMorrin, Anna	Quin, Jeremy	Sturdy, Julian
Kane, Mike	McPartland, Stephen	Quince, Will	Sunak, rh Rishi
Kawczynski, Daniel	McVey, rh Esther	Qureshi, Yasmin	Sunderland, James
Kearns, Alicia	Mearns, Ian	Raab, rh Dominic	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Keegan, Gillian	Menzies, Mark	Randall, Tom	Syms, Sir Robert
Keeley, Barbara	Merriman, Huw	Rayner, rh Angela	Tami, rh Mark
Kendall, Liz	Metcalfe, Stephen	Redwood, rh John	Tarry, Sam
Khan, Afzal	Miliband, rh Edward	Reed, Steve	Thomas, Derek
Kinnock, Stephen	Millar, Robin	Rees, Christina	Thomas, Gareth
Knight, rh Sir Greg	Miller, rh Mrs Maria	Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob	Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Knight, Julian	Milling, rh Amanda	Reeves, Ellie	Thornberry, rh Emily
Kruger, Danny	Mills, Nigel	Reeves, Rachel	Throup, Maggie
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi	Mishra, Navendu	Reynolds, Jonathan	Timms, rh Stephen
Kyle, Peter	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Ribeiro-Addy, Bell	Timpson, Edward
Lake, Ben	Mohindra, Mr Gagan	Richards, Nicola	Tolhurst, Kelly
Lammy, rh Mr David	Moore, Damien	Richardson, Angela	Tomlinson, Justin
Lamont, John	Moore, Robbie	Rimmer, Ms Marie	Tomlinson, Michael
Largan, Robert	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Robertson, Mr Laurence	Tracey, Craig
Lavery, Ian	Morden, Jessica	Robinson, Gavin	Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea	Morgan, Stephen	Robinson, Mary	Trickett, Jon
Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Morris, Anne Marie	Rodda, Matt	Trott, Laura
Levy, Ian	Morris, David	Rosindell, Andrew	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Morris, Grahame	Ross, Douglas	Tugendhat, Tom
Lewer, Andrew	Morris, James	Rowley, Lee	Turner, Karl
Lewis, rh Brandon	Morrissey, Joy	Russell, Dean	Twigg, Derek
Lewis, Clive	Mortimer, Jill	Russell-Moyle, Lloyd	Twist, Liz
Lewis, rh Dr Julian	Morton, Wendy	Rutley, David	Vara, Shailesh
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Mullan, Dr Kieran	Saville Roberts, rh Liz	Vaz, rh Valerie
Lloyd, Tony	Mumby-Croft, Holly	Saxby, Selaine	Vickers, Martin
Lockhart, Carla	Mundell, rh David	Scully, Paul	Vickers, Matt
Loder, Chris	Murray, Ian	Seely, Bob	Villiers, rh Theresa
Logan, Mark	Murray, James	Selous, Andrew	Wakeford, Christian
Long Bailey, Rebecca	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Shah, Naz	Walker, Mr Robin
Longhi, Marco	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew	Shannon, Jim	Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Lopez, Julia	Nandy, Lisa	Shapps, rh Grant	Wallis, Dr Jamie
	Neill, Sir Robert		Warburton, David
	Nichols, Charlotte		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
Williams, Hywel
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Winter, Beth
Wood, Mike

Wright, rh Jeremy
Yasin, Mohammad
Young, Jacob

Zahawi, Nadhim
Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Bone, Mr Peter
Hollobone, Mr Philip

Latham, Mrs Pauline

Question accordingly agreed to.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 23 June 2021

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

Beauty and Wellbeing Sector Workforce

Virtual participation in proceedings commenced (Order, 25 February).

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

9.25 am

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Let me remind hon. Members that there have been changes to the 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—that is all but one this morning—and virtually that they must arrive for the start of a debate and remain for the entire debate. Members participating virtually must leave their camera on for the duration of a debate, so that they will be visible at all times, both to one another and to us in the Boothroyd Room. If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, please email the Westminster Hall Clerks; the email address is westminsterhallclerks@parliament.uk.

Members attending physically—[*Interruption.*] Good morning, Mr Shannon. We will allow you the minute's grace. Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and before they leave the room. I remind Members that Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall. There are no Members attending and waiting to speak, so the next bit does not really apply. Members who are not on the call list but wish to intervene can do so only from the horseshoe, and those on the call list have priority for spaces on the horseshoe. Members wishing to intervene should not prevent a Member on the call list from speaking.

9.27 am

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the beauty and wellbeing sector workforce.

May I say what an honour it is to serve under your chairmanship in this important debate, Sir Roger? As co-chair, alongside my good and hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins), of the all-party parliamentary group on beauty, aesthetics and wellbeing, I am well aware of the struggles that the people working in the industry have faced during the past 15 months. Uncertainty around closures and the absence of financial support, coupled with lack of respect for the industry and those working in it, have hit the sector hard. We have seen businesses failing and those that have survived facing an uphill struggle as the country slowly begins to open back up.

This industry has always contributed greatly to the UK economy and supported a substantial workforce. A British Beauty Council report, "The Value of Beauty", published in 2019—before the pandemic—determined

that the industry was worth up to £30 billion a year and supported 50,000 businesses. Figures from the UK Government's "COVID-19 Response", published in February 2021, show that in 2019 the industry provided more than 560,000 jobs, 85% of which were done by women, many of whom were working flexibly.

The pandemic has decimated this multimillion-pound industry and has had a devastating impact on the workforce and businesses. On average, businesses in the sector were closed for 250 days during lockdown—far longer than in any of the other, often male-dominated sectors, and too long for them to survive with no income and inadequate support. The knock-on effect of the extended closures has been severe. A recent report from the National Hair and Beauty Federation on the fate of the industry estimated that by the end of this year, businesses will on average have lost £40,000 of revenue. That has led to job losses, with employment in the industry down by 21% from pre-pandemic levels. In addition, 62% of businesses say that they have had to cut staff hours, and 14% say that they are being forced to make redundancies.

Even now that businesses are able to reopen, continued restrictions mean that many are still struggling. Large events, weddings and holidays being scaled back or cancelled has caused a huge deficit in demand, and salons are still operating at only 70% capacity to observe social distancing requirements. While demand for hair appointments and beauty treatments has declined, demand for wellbeing services such as massages and holistic therapy has grown significantly, which is hardly surprising given the increased stress levels that we have all experienced over the past year. Figures from wellbeing platform Urban show that demand for services are now 30% higher than pre-covid. Sadly, however, there are not enough therapists to meet the demand. Some 35% of mobile therapists have not returned to work since the first national lockdown lifted—those skilled therapists have taken on work in other industries due to a lack of income during extended closures. So we have a situation where customers are ready and able to book, but no appointments are available because the industry and those who work in it were unable to survive the long closures without financial support.

As someone who has used massage over the years as a therapy to maintain my mental health, I completely understand why people are seeking those services. I find it sad that because of the pandemic and, in all honesty, the failure of the Government to take the industry seriously and support its workforce, the services are just not there. The gap seems set to continue, as the closure of training schools during the pandemic and limited opportunities to gain workforce experience means that the number of newly qualified professionals entering the sector is significantly lower than normal. Recent data from the National Hair and Beauty Federation paints an equally bleak picture going forward, with only 11% of salons planning to recruit new apprentices in the next three to six months. This once thriving industry is suffering and needs support urgently. In a survey undertaken by the National Hair and Beauty Federation on the state of the industry, half of businesses say that they cannot rule out redundancy when furlough comes to an end, and more than a third are unsure whether they will survive the next few months while social distancing remains in place.

[Carolyn Harris]

The all-party parliamentary group on beauty, aesthetics and wellbeing has already launched an inquiry into post-covid recovery for the sector, looking at how businesses recoup can their losses and how the highly skilled workforce can be retained. There are so many risk factors for the industry that Government support is key to combating them. Financial support for the sector during the pandemic was woefully lacking compared with that given to other customer-facing industries. The Government must now ensure that support is available to businesses for as long as social distancing measures are in place, given their effect on how many staff and customers can be in salons, and therefore on profits.

Promotion of the industry is also needed to encourage young people to follow this career path so that there is a full and flourishing skill base. Beauty and wellbeing practitioners play a vital role in supporting our physical and mental health, and many people use the treatments instead of visiting a doctor or to complement their medication. Figures from the Federation of Holistic Therapists 2021 members survey show that 75% of practitioners have clients who are using their treatments to support long-term health conditions, and 63% of clients use them to prevent poor health. I will give a plug here to the menopause and say that that is a condition where holistic therapy is invaluable.

If the industry is given the support that it so deserves, businesses will begin to thrive again and we will have a growing workforce who will be able to offer treatments to ease the burden on our already overwhelmed NHS. We entered the pandemic last year with a beauty and wellbeing industry that was thriving, that boosted the UK economy and that supported families up and down the country by enabling the huge, mostly female, workforce to work flexibly, yet throughout the pandemic, that loyal workforce has been undervalued and under-appreciated, overlooked for financial support and even ridiculed in the House of Commons Chamber. As we begin to emerge from restrictions, the future of the industry hangs in the balance, and key to its survival is the workforce. The industry needs help now more than ever to ensure that it can support jobs, provide a much-needed wellbeing boost to its customers and once again be a key contributor to the UK economy.

9.35 am

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): May I say what a pleasure it is to see you back in the Chair, Sir Roger? You have been much missed.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for her phenomenal work, both as chair of the APPG and in repeatedly highlighting the hair and beauty sector in the main Chamber, emphasising, as she has done again this morning, the particular challenges that it has faced during the pandemic. She has also given us a really healthy reminder of what a strong sector it has been, which is important to reflect on.

We went into the pandemic with somewhere in the region of 300,000 employees in the sector, the vast majority of whom were women. Hon. Members would expect me, as Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, to emphasise that we are talking about a sector that employs women, but it does not simply

employ them; it trains them and gives them opportunity. Many of them will do years of training in college or an apprenticeship, then move into working in a salon or studio. They might then consider taking the plunge and going self-employed; that is always a risk, but many of those brilliant and brave women do exactly that. After a few years of being self-employed, perhaps on a mobile basis, they rent their own salon—an enormous financial commitment, involving business rates and rent. For all of them, it is about risk and a cost-benefit analysis. They are brave and ballsy—as I have previously said and established, that is not unparliamentary language—women, who go out, take the risk and benefit from it, and in turn they become employers of other women. That is a model that we should absolutely be encouraging, celebrating and promoting.

I will tell a little anecdotal story. As Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, I get all sorts of interesting panels with fascinating people, including one gentleman who is one of the leading educationalists to whom the Government turn when they are looking for advice and interesting reports on everything to do with education. He talked to me about the veterinary profession and said that the veterinary profession was full of clever white girls. Then, he said, “But when educationalists find not-so-clever bright girls, they shove them off just into the beauty industry,” at which moment I had one of my moments of rage. Through the medium of Zoom, he undoubtedly got the famous death stare, because the reality is that the beauty and wellbeing industry is not “just” anything. It is a fantastic, thriving industry that provides training, employment and the opportunity to go off and become an entrepreneur.

Over the course of the last 12 months, I have been blown away by the stories I have heard from young and not-so-young women who have told me how their boyfriends, fathers or brothers have regarded them as “just” beauty therapists. I have always gone back to them and said, “You are not ‘just’ anything. You are an entrepreneur, and you know what? This country thrives on the entrepreneurial spirit of people like you, who have the guts to go off and become self-employed, to set up your own business, to rent your own studio, and to contribute to the economy in myriad ways.” I have got that off my chest, and I feel lot better about it.

The hon. Member for Swansea East mentioned that the industry sometimes gets ridiculed and people laugh at it, which makes me really angry, because they are laughing at the hard work of women who have skill, ability and the determination to give back to others the confidence that some of them may have lost. I know there is nothing more boring than somebody who stands up in this place and says, “When I was a Minister,” but I am will say it. When I was a Minister, I spent a very happy year at the Department for Work and Pensions. We talked about the challenges of getting women back into employment, perhaps after a long career break, and the thing that was missing from so many women was confidence. I would speak to women in jobcentres up and down the country, and I learned that they did not have the confidence to go back into the workplace; they felt their skills were lacking and they were old and past their sell-by date. These were women of 40. For the record, let me say that no woman in her 40s—I declare an interest—is past her sell-by date. It is crucial that we look at this sector, which can give the female workforce confidence.

The hon. Lady mentioned some of the services that can be provided, but I always highlight services such as ayurvedic facials that help with migraines, or the ability of specialist—indeed, brilliant—cosmetic tattooists, who put eyebrows back on people with alopecia or tattoo nipples back on women who have had breast reconstruction surgery. All these things give people the confidence to go back into the workplace, go back to work and take up a productive and useful role in society, in the community, and of course—I would say this to a Minister at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy—in the economy. That is crucial, because ultimately these are people who will pay tax and help the rest of us to recover from the hideous fiscal crisis caused by the pandemic. I recognise and want to reinforce the comments made by the hon. Lady about the promotion of the sector. This is not just “hair and beauty”; it is a really important sector, worth £28 billion, which can give women back their confidence.

I have a specific plea, which I hope the Minister will listen to and act on. The thing that struck me after talking to the National Hair and Beauty Federation and the British Beauty Council, among other organisations, and perhaps specifically after talking to individual providers of beauty services both large and indeed very small, including one-woman-band enterprises, is that they talk about the VAT break that was given to hospitality. Treasury Ministers always say that it was very easy and straightforward to do that because hospitality was on a separate VAT code and could be easily and distinctly hived off from other sectors, but the same does not apply to the beauty sector. Well, it should, and it would not be difficult to give it a separate VAT code. Will my hon. Friend the Minister undertake to have a conversation about that with the Treasury? We do not know whether covid will be back, or what the next pandemic is coming over the hill will be, or indeed what future financial challenges will arise. I think that it would be of benefit to the sector to have a separate VAT code, so that we will not be in the same situation in the future.

This is a very competitive, enterprising and determined sector, and one that is phenomenally good at self-promotion. What is lacking is regulation. We need a way of making sure that people are accredited, that training is understood and recognised, and that we can understand who is providing what to whom. I remember having a fantastic conversation with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on this subject. He rang me on a Sunday to talk about it and I explained to him there and then that he and I could set ourselves up as a pair of beauticians with absolutely no training, no accreditation and no regulation—although we would not survive in business very long, because we would be very bad at it. The reality is that there is not the sort of oversight that one might expect for an industry that uses, in some instances, interesting and even challenging chemicals and machinery, and all sorts of products that need to be used by expert hands, particularly in services such as cosmetic tattooing. I say that because we can all open the *Daily Mail's* Sidebar of Shame and see some of the horrors that have been carried out on people's faces.

Fundamentally, it is vital that the Government recognise that, as we come out of the pandemic, there is a challenge in female employment. My Select Committee, the TUC and the Women's Budget Group—a range of experts, up and down the country—have reflected upon the fact it is predominantly women who have been

employed in the sectors that have been locked down longest and hardest. The hon. Member for Swansea East mentioned the fact that the beauty and wellbeing sector has rightly had to put in all sorts of provisions to prevent covid spread, but increased gaps between chairs reduce capacity, and businesses must have 15-minute breaks between customers so that facilities can be wiped down and disinfected, taking hours out of a day that could instead have been productive, income-generating hours.

We have seen the same in retail. We know that 58% of non-essential retail workers are women, and my horrific prediction is that when furlough comes to an end, we may well see a massive increase in the number of women being made redundant. That will have a consequential impact on the work of the Department for Work and Pensions to make sure that interesting, challenging and sustainable opportunities are found for those women in the future. It is crucial that we look at our recovery and how we build back better in a feminine way.

I will leave the Minister with that thought. When we look at how we build back, we have to make sure that we do not forget the female workforce, who are so vital in the hair and beauty sector, and indeed in other sectors.

9.44 am

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for securing the debate.

In many places, including my constituency, beauty and wellbeing businesses are the lifeblood of the high street. Of course, it is an industry predominantly run by women, for women and employing women, and prior to the pandemic it contributed up to £30 billion to our economy. However, it was harder hit than most sectors by coronavirus restrictions, and it was hit particularly hard in places such as Bradford South, which faced even tougher measures for much longer than anywhere else. Business owners and the workforce can be said to have been well and truly rocked in the past 15 months. Businesses have closed, skilled therapists have been forced to find work elsewhere, and fewer newly qualified professionals are joining the industry.

Despite those challenges, there can be a bright future for the sector, as the services that it delivers are increasingly valued by people after they have got through such a tough time. I thank all the practitioners up and down the country for their work, because much of the industry delivers excellent services in a safe and highly professional way. One business owner in my constituency told me how she donated her stocks of personal protective equipment to frontline workers when her business was forced to close in lockdown. That is typical of an industry that contributes so much. Then there is the work of Beauty Banks, a charity that supports those living in poverty by providing essential hygiene products.

However, the lack of regulation around the ever-growing list of treatments available means that consumers cannot have confidence that their treatment has been administered by someone who is appropriately trained. A certificate hanging on the wall is just not good enough. Getting standards across the board to match best practice requires regulation that ensures that a consistent level of training is delivered to medical and non-medical practitioners.

[*Judith Cummins*]

The APPG on beauty, aesthetics and wellbeing, which I co-chair with my good and hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East, held an inquiry into non-surgical cosmetic procedures, which found a growing prevalence of short qualifications—often as short as a day—for non-surgical procedures such as injectables. That is alarming for consumers, as that type of advanced aesthetic procedure cannot be taught well in a single day. To ensure that standards are lifted for the entire industry, the Government need to strengthen regulation and training for non-surgical cosmetic treatments for medics and non-medics alike. It is what the public expect, and it is what the Government need to deliver.

9.47 am

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Well done to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for securing this important debate, and for all her dogged campaigning with my equally hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) on behalf of the beauty sector over a year of enormous challenges.

I put on record my support and admiration for all the hair, beauty and therapeutic businesses in Newport East, which, like many businesses out there, have been hard hit at this extraordinary time and have had to adapt and innovate very creatively in lots of instances in the pandemic. I pay tribute to business owners such as Lynne Palmer of Friends salon in Maindee. She has run her business for decades in the heart of the community—I will come back to that point—and has helped me to understand just how challenging it has been to adapt. She has marvellously adapted to adhere to the rules and to keep giving her customers the wonderful service she provides, but she has also helped me to understand how challenging that has been. I very much agree with the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East about entrepreneurial women in small businesses and about the guts it takes to set up and run a business and employ others.

As has been said, the hair, beauty and products industry is a serious economic powerhouse, contributing more than £30 billion to the economy and employing more than 500,000 people in thousands of salons, nail bars and beauty salons up and down our high streets, forming a real linchpin in local economies. In 2018, the industry generated £7 billion in taxes, and accounted for around 1.3% of GDP. As has been said, the National Hair and Beauty Federation report released last month makes for stark reading on how the industry has suffered through the pandemic. In 2020, salons were shut for 140 days. Turnover fell by 45% compared with 2019, and the average cash loss to a business was £17,000, with those over the VAT threshold taking a bigger hit.

In Wales, there has been welcome help from the Welsh Government, including the freezing of business rates, the small business rate relief package and the £650 million the Welsh Government offered to help businesses with operation costs up to the end of March. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) highlighted at Prime Minister's questions last week, unlike in England, where business rate relief is being withdrawn at the end

of the month, the Welsh Labour Government are extending that rate relief for a year and providing new support for those affected.

Furlough has been welcome, but salons in my constituency and across the UK have called on the Chancellor to take action on the reduced 5% VAT rate to put businesses in the beauty sector on a level playing field with other sectors, such as hospitality. Many businesses in my constituency have signed that petition, and I am interested to hear the Minister's response. Without comprehensive support, many businesses may close.

National Hair and Beauty Federation research shows that there are more hair and beauty businesses in the less advantaged parts of the UK. Throughout the pandemic, communities in less well-off areas, as well as women and young people, have been disproportionately impacted. That is highlighted in Wales by Chwarae Teg in its report "Covid-19: Women, Work and Wales", which was published last October. The effect of the sector's shutdowns, business closures and unemployment is falling disproportionately on women, who are more likely than men to have lost their jobs due to covid-19. There are clearly challenges around female employment.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East said, a recent survey of 5,000 salons found that 62% were not sure if their business would survive beyond the end of the financial year, with 18% sure they would close. Six out of 10 salons started the year with no cash reserves, and many businesses are now described as acutely vulnerable to failure. Those are businesses that generate much for the Treasury. They pay tax and they are vital employers in our community. As my hon. Friend said, it is also important to remember the impact of the cancellation of events, weddings in particular, on the hair and beauty industry.

Finally, the value of the beauty sector cannot be measured in economic terms alone. I hope parliamentary legal counsel, Daniel Greenberg, who is a regular contributor to "Thought for the Day" on Radio 4, will forgive me, but I would like to quote from one of his thoughts last year. He talked about how the restrictions imposed during national lockdowns taught us to distinguish between two types of essential:

"There are things that I need to remain physically healthy: food, medicines and healthcare services. But there are also things that I need to remain mentally healthy, and those go far beyond what might be regarded as the formal mental healthcare sector...Lockdown may have taught us to reclassify as luxuries some things we thought of as essential, but perhaps it has also shown that some things that are luxuries in one sense may be essential to people's wellbeing...Nail salons and other beauty sector services aim to help people to feel better about themselves, and to make customers generally more cheerful and well-disposed...Perhaps we can see more clearly post-lockdown that these services are in what might be called the frontline of the well-being sector, and that they deserve society's recognition, gratitude and appreciation."

I and a great number of my constituents would totally endorse that sentiment. Thanks again to all those beauty and hair businesses in Newport East. On a few occasions over the past year, flippant comments from those on the Government Benches have been unfortunate. The beauty sector needs to be put on a level playing field and supported as a key player in the UK Government's economic and health-centred recovery from the pandemic. Hon. Friends are here to speak up for the industry, and I hope the debate has underlined the importance of doing so.

9.54 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Sir Roger, I am pleased to see you back in person in Westminster Hall and the House. It is good to have personal contact with you again face to face. I wish you well. It is also nice to be here to support the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) and her contribution.

In my contribution, I will support her and all the other speakers, but it is fairly obvious from the top of my head that I very rarely have to visit the barber or indeed anywhere else. In the morning, I do not need a comb; I just need a shammy. That takes care of my hair texture and so on. I am here because I want to speak up on behalf of my sector back home, and I want to give some examples. The right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) gave some examples of businesses in her constituency and how covid has affected them, and I want to do the same.

I am delighted to serve in the most beautiful constituency in the Province—I say that unapologetically, although others may disagree. It is made up of large urban towns and small villages. Something that every village across my constituency has in common is its own beauty salon. We have quite a few spas as well, so a lot of time is spent in those places. Those who start the businesses have a lot of entrepreneurial spirit, and there is certainly demand and need for them. In this busy world, people need an hour to themselves—an hour to not think of anything else, other than to completely relax, have some space and time to themselves and soak their weary muscles. It is something to cheer and rejuvenate them.

I can only really speak for my wife and the girls who work in my office, but whenever they go to the hairdresser or the beauty salon, it lifts their spirits and wellbeing. That is why the title of this debate refers to the beauty and wellbeing sector. I cannot encapsulate the wellbeing that people get from going to the hairdresser, but I can say that for my wife, and indeed for the ladies in my office, the appointment with the hairdresser or at the beauty salon lifts their whole day. Many get wee treats at a place just across the road from us in Newtownards. They can have all the treatment they need from head to toe. I know how much my staff and other friends look forward to that.

However, this industry has been hit hard by the restrictions. It has been unable to work, and even with the doors open it has had fewer clients in due to the restrictions. It is one of the industries that needs continued support, and I echo the calls of the hon. Member for Swansea East and others who said that. We are very fortunate to have a Minister who believes that to be the case, understands the arguments and points of view that we are putting forward, and is keen to help and assist in response.

I had a young girl in my office who had just started her own business. I echo the comments of the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North: the people who start these businesses are highly intelligent, and they have massive skills and the brains and economic and business acumen to take their businesses forward. This was that young lady's first business. She needed a wee bit of extra cash to get it going, so the bank of mum and dad probably helped out. That is where she was.

I had come in at a time when covid was just starting to take grip—about March, April and May last year. She was in tears in the office. I remember this very well.

She said, “You know, Jim, I can really make this work. I just need this chance. I need this opportunity to get it over the line and continue it for the months ahead.” She definitely had the ability and the talent, and we were very keen to help her. She had not been open long, which of course meant that, when it came to the grant process, furlough and everything else that was necessary, she was under some pressure. She had contracts signed with the rental agencies and the suppliers, and she had many other overheads. We were fortunate in the scheme that the Government were able to offer, not just here in the UK mainland but replicated in the regions, and I thank the Ministers for all their help for those businesses. I have absolutely no doubt that this Government's support enabled those businesses to survive.

We were able to source funding to see my constituent through, but only after a prolonged look at the criteria and how they could apply. I thought of so many other businesses that have not felt comfortable, or even considered, going to their elected representatives, and whether those businesses have survived. I hope and pray that whenever we come to the end of furlough, those businesses will be in a position to continue. Covid-19 restrictions have reduced customers, with new regulations requiring 15-minute intervals, but these businesses can work. I have seen them working in my constituency, with the beauty salons just in the street close to my office, never mind across the whole of the constituency.

The hair and beauty sector contributes £9.2 billion annually to Britain's economy. Some 288,160 people work as hair and beauty practitioners in salons or in a self-employed capacity in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. There are some 44,800 salons in the UK registered for VAT and pay-as-you-earn, generating £5.4 billion annually and employing some 190,000 staff. Of this, £3.35 billion in turnover is generated by 12,300 VAT-registered salons, which in turn employ some 95,000 staff. The reason I give stats is that they remind us all of the importance of this sector: the jobs it creates, the money it generates, and the way it benefits the economy, as well as the tax system and the PAYE system. It generates approximately one third of the tax take for HMRC as a proportion of sales.

These valued practitioners and business owners have none the less received very little, or no, specific financial support from the UK Government, despite being closed for longer periods and having to make more significant adjustments to service delivery than many other retailers, small businesses and the hospitality sector. The costs of additional safety, hygiene and PPE products have been piling up, on top of all the other overheads that these businesses have. I recently read that, in a survey of salon owners, up to 56% were considering closing. That comes back to what others have said about the future, when furlough ends. In summing up, maybe the Minister can give some indication of what would be available whenever furlough comes to an end. It is really important that, when it does, the Government are on stand-by to ensure that we do not lose a lot of businesses, whether in the beauty sector or in other sectors.

The Save Our Salons campaign group found that nearly four out of five salons will recruit no apprentices this year. It has been highlighted that any closures would harm the finances of women the most, as this profession enables flexible working patterns that support family life. This flexible working is very important, as is

[Jim Shannon]

increasing economic opportunities and entrepreneurship for women: 88.6% of the sector's workforce are female. A while ago, the Government had a project through which businesses that took on apprentices received financial assistance, so could the Minister tell us what we can do for the salon and beauty sector? If we can keep apprenticeships going, we will prepare for the next generation. Our duty today is to make sure these businesses are retained, but we also have a duty for tomorrow—to ensure that there is a flow of new recruits to that sector to take us forward.

For those reasons, I support the call of many in the hair and beauty industries for a VAT reduction, because of the hard times they are having. These services do not have huge profit margins, and a VAT reduction could encourage those considering throwing in the towel to instead pick it up and continue their jobs, playing a part in the lives of other people and helping them to feel more confident. How important it is to feel confident—to feel strong in the morning and strong for the rest of the day! That can only be a good thing, so I very much look forward to the Minister's response—as I often do—and I am sure that he will be able to answer some of the questions I have asked, and give that sector the security it needs.

10.3 am

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I thank the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for having secured today's debate, and for the work that she and the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) have done and are doing in the beauty and wellbeing sector. I declare a 50-year interest in that sector.

During the pandemic, all of us MPs recognised the hardship that the beauty sector and wellbeing industry workforce have had to deal with. In particular, the timings of financial support information from the UK Government in initial covid-19 lockdowns, the details of furlough, and the support to business owners—including on how to support their staff mentally—were woefully inadequate. I have to say that financial stress owing to the delayed announcements about self-employment grants in many cases caused salons to close or cease trading—basically, to shut up shop.

Employers felt pressured to immediately try to foster a pastoral care role for their staff outside the salon, and to many employees, that contact with their employer was of paramount importance for their wellbeing. The support required for that role well exceeded normal employer duties and experiences. For example, in normal times, there might be one employee at a time with an issue to deal with, but this was absolutely different—it was all the staff at one time. Thankfully, for many, support was found on Facebook, social media forums and industry-led webinars where thousands of beauty salon owners sought information and one-to-one support. I attended many, hearing at first hand the stress, confusion and anxiety that all parts of the sector were going through.

Along with other MPs we have heard from, I supported calls for a temporary VAT cut for personal care businesses, in recognition of the unique challenges that these salons

faced with covid. Although not all salons are VAT-registered, this temporary cut would have made a huge difference to all those salons that are, and would have been a crutch for a recovery period after opening. It is simply easier to keep people in employment and to support the businesses that already employ, thereby ensuring continuity, rather than starting new pilots, projects and incentives for already damaged, struggling businesses that probably cannot afford to take on any incentive schemes.

For certain, controlling the virus is key to keeping the economy open, and proper advice is needed for all workforces when moving forward into the recovery from the impact of the virus. The UK Government's last-minute turnarounds on furlough did not and do not help; certainty was and is required wherever possible. Imagine the stress levels for employers and employees as deadlines approached for furlough payments to stop—they went through the roof. Yet again, there was little reassurance and no information on what would happen next. The constantly changing furlough regulations were difficult enough for accountants doing payroll to deal with, never mind for salon owners completing their own applications. This was yet another cost and burden for salons to bear in ensuring that furlough was completed correctly.

Close-contact businesses such as those in the beauty and wellbeing industry are known to carry increased risk of transmission due to proximity to the client, particularly to their face. As the Minister will know, the talent pool for massage therapists has been absolutely decimated, meaning fewer qualified professionals will enter the profession at a time when demand will surely exceed supply. The beauty industry has now returned in Scotland, but new, more transmissible variants mean continued adherence to effective mitigations remains highly important to protect clients and the practitioners themselves. It is pleasing to note that the vast majority in this sector know and take seriously and professionally their responsibilities.

We recognise just how difficult the restrictions have been for the beauty and wellbeing workforce; the Scottish Government have worked to provide all the support they can, but in recognition of the greater risk of exposure to covid, restrictions were necessary to protect clients and the workforce. Research shows that more than 10% of Scottish businesses in the industry had ceased to trade by December last year, and that number has obviously grown. As has been said, in April, across the UK, 46% of respondents to that consultation were unsure whether their business would survive until the end of social distancing. Salons were simply not earning enough to cover outgoings such as rent, stock, overheads and staff costs. The research also found that only 38% were just about breaking even. On the whole, two in five businesses across the entire hair and beauty sector were making any kind of profit. I will read from an email from a salon owner in Falkirk:

"No VAT reduction. Delayed and last-minute changes to financial support. No PPE cost support. No UK Government awareness of the huge impact on business i.e. you losing 200 clients from your business may set you back two years in growth and achievement. To sustain your current business cost, you must find a way to replace these lost clients within six months or you will be running at a loss. I am not sure the support is there for these scenarios and not in six months' time when businesses will not have the buffer of the re-start grants and potentially most salons will close or staff

will be let go. There is an urgency to support the reopening and sustaining of businesses trying to keep going. Appreciation of the business owners' efforts in these times of extreme business difficulties is absolutely paramount."

In Scotland, we recognise this serious problem. Therefore, in addition to furlough, retail beauty businesses with premises were supported by the strategic framework fund. The mobile and home-based close contact services fund supported those not eligible for the UK Government's self-employment income support scheme, and alleviated business rates. Additional restart grants were available for those that got the strategic framework fund. Fellow MPs and I have worked with the Save our Salons campaign, calling for a VAT reduction in the March Budget. As others have said, that the UK Government did not take that easy step or listen to the sector's suggestions was a body blow to their self-worth and value.

Controlling the virus is key. Scottish Government officials are working with local authorities and other regulators to renew focus on ensuring that workplaces are operating and reopening in a safe and compliant way. We recognise that each workplace is different and individual organisations work with trade unions or workforce representatives to determine how best to apply safe workplace guidance to meet all relevant requirements. Guidance is reviewed on a regular basis with the priority of containing the spread of the virus, saving lives and safeguarding the NHS. This partnership working is key to establishing a shared confidence in the safety of returning to workplaces, protecting public health and supporting Scotland's recovery.

For all workforces, proper advice is needed. The UK Government's last-minute turnarounds on furlough have added to the uncertainty. The furlough scheme is due to end on 30 September, but from 1 July the Government are due to pay 70% of the wages, with employers obliged to make up the remaining 10%. From August, the Government are due to pay 60%. Around 3.4 million people are still on furlough—a tenth of the workforce—and 553,000 fewer people are in payrolled employment. Now is not the time for the Conservative Government to withdraw support. Business trade federations and trade unions alike have urged the Chancellor to extend furlough. All last summer we urged the Chancellor to extend furlough and give firms the chance to plan. Unfortunately, the UK Government did not heed us, which led to another last-minute reversal. There is no reason to suggest that they will act faster this time.

The Chancellor should now invest in recovery and employment by providing the £350 billion to firms, and allow those who have already borrowed to convert the debt into grants or equity to avoid the debt time bomb and investment recession. The self-employment income support scheme still excludes 3 million people from any support at all.

This industry is undervalued, under-consulted and often overlooked by the UK Government. Financial uncertainty for this unique sector's future cannot continue. The UK Government should value the sector, as Scotland does, and bring some peace of mind to all parts of the beauty and wellbeing workforce.

10.13 am

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Roger. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East

(Carolyn Harris), who co-chairs the all-party parliamentary group on beauty, aesthetic and wellbeing, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins). I congratulate her on securing this debate and on her excellent opening speech on the lack of sufficient support for the beauty and wellbeing industry through the pandemic. She talked of the challenges it faced, many of which were echoed by other hon. Members who have spoken. I thank those who have made contributions, including my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford South and for Newport East (Jessica Morden), the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), and others who contributed in discussions with us who were unable to speak today.

Many important points have been made. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport East spoke about the support provided by the Welsh Labour Government. The right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North highlighted that this is a women-led sector—as well as, in many ways, a BAME-led sector—that employs women and serves men and women, young and old, across the country. It is one industry that serves almost everybody in the country at some point. She outlined the arguments, as others have done, for a reduction in VAT. That point was also made by former hairdresser Maria Evangelou in an article on PoliticsHome before the Budget this year.

The hon. Member for Strangford made a powerful point about the sector being highly skilled, but it is often not seen as such. That is the same stereotype we seem to apply in our minds to women-led sectors—to see them as low skilled—which is often connected to them being low paid. We have to check and challenge ourselves.

There is nothing greater than the contribution of lockdown to understanding that point. We saw the rise of lockdown haircuts—I, too, had to learn how to use a barber set—and we really appreciated how much skill goes into making us all look and feel as good as we can and should. The point was made that it is very important to appreciate the industry for its wider contribution to health and wellbeing. I hope that the House will take that on board and we will see that in future debates.

The contribution of the beauty and wellbeing sector must not be overlooked, as I think we have all come to feel that it has been during the last year by the Government. The sector contributes so much to our wellbeing, but it also contributes economically to our high streets, to our communities and to our economy. I think my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South used the phrase the lifeblood of the high street, which is powerful and no understatement.

A report by Oxford Economics found that the beauty industry, which employs around 600,000 and has done so for some time, contributes about £28 billion to UK GDP annually and supports £7 billion in UK tax revenues. That is equivalent to the combined salaries of 250,000 nurses and midwives. The numbers speak for themselves. This is a vital industry for our country,

As we have heard, the sector—hairdressers, salons, barbers—makes a huge contribution to our personal wellbeing and mental health, as well as to our community spirit. If someone wants to know what is going on, or wants to share their stories, we should look at how

[Seema Malhotra]

much people do that at the hairdresser. We all have that experience of a moment away from frenetic, everyday life and I think we underestimate that social contribution.

During the pandemic, the industry has certainly been one of the most acutely hit by the restrictions, because it is a close-contact industry. The product is often a one-to-one service. One stylist does not serve 10 clients an hour, which might happen in a restaurant. That has been very much affected by social distancing. There are also the extra costs involved in maintaining safety for staff and customers.

There has been a sharp increase in permanent closures of hair and beauty businesses—around 20% have had to shut their doors so far. The numbers employed as hairdressers or in related services have also fallen by 20%. Of those, more than 60% were self-employed. We have heard in the debate about how people who are employed go on to be self-employed and then become owners of businesses and employers of others. They take the risks themselves, every step of the way. Many have experienced issues accessing the self-employment income support scheme. Being self-employed is often a journey to becoming an employer. We need to understand the issues that are faced in that context, too.

Looking ahead, the future remains far from certain for the industry, which is one reason why it is an important time to have this debate. I believe it was my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East who said that six out of 10 salons started this year with no cash reserves, and many businesses are now described as acutely vulnerable to failure. Sixty-two per cent. of salon owners surveyed by the National Hair & Beauty Federation were not confident that they will remain solvent by the end of this year. There are also projections of further redundancies of over 15%.

Luke Hersheson, a globally renowned hairstylist backing the Save Our Salons campaign, said earlier this year:

“In March this year my salons will have been closed for 260 days out of 365...running a business for more than two thirds of a year with no income at all is incredibly challenging. When the tap is turned off salon businesses are still paying landlords, they're still paying utility bills, insurance costs and subsidising furlough pay. It's a huge strain on the entire industry.”

Although barbers, hairdressers and beauty salons have been allowed to open since 12 April, huge concerns remain about the gap between the revenues they can generate and their overheads. Our principle since the start of the pandemic has been that public health measures must be matched by fair economic measures. The Chancellor of the Exchequer once promised that he would do “whatever it takes”, and Labour's position continues to be that these businesses must be supported so that they can recover and thrive after the pandemic.

The furlough scheme has helped so many, but we know that employers still have to pay national insurance contributions, and beauty companies have been paying full rent during lockdown, despite making little or no income. They still have fixed insurance costs and utility bills to pay while revenues are depressed.

I therefore ask the Minister why the Government will not delay the increased employer contribution to furlough, given that most of the 1.8 million people remaining on furlough are employed in sectors affected by the ongoing restrictions. On business rates relief, why will the

Government not learn lessons from the Labour-led Welsh Government, who have given the vast majority of businesses 100% business rates relief for this financial year? Can the Minister tell us what assessment has been made of business rates costs for those in the hair and beauty industry? Finally, on debt repayment, where is the Government's flexible plan to help businesses pay back their loans in a sensible way when they are generating profit and back on their feet?

There currently appears to be no credible strategy to ease the burden of debt that affects many businesses across the country, including in the beauty and wellbeing sector, which have racked up debts due to the long periods of closure. Forcing businesses to start making debt repayments—whether they are profitable or not—will squeeze the amount that they have to invest, to grow, or to take on new staff. For some, it could mean complete closure.

Campaigners say that their salons typically operate on a wafer-thin 2% to 5% profit margin in normal trading conditions. With social distancing requirements still in place, the average salon can often operate at only around 50% of their previous capacity. That is why Labour would give businesses flexibility to repay debt they have taken on during the crisis and link it to what they are making. Such measures would be invaluable to helping beauty businesses to survive.

There have been clear warning signs that the sector is in difficulties. Further closures would have a far greater impact on women's income, as almost 90% of those employed in the industry are female. We also know that women have experienced a worse economic hit throughout the last year across all sectors. It is important to know from the Minister what further steps are being taken to ensure that those in the beauty sector do not continue to be disproportionately affected by the economic impact of this pandemic.

I pay tribute to the hair and beauty salons across our country. They play an enormous role, as has been mentioned, at the heart of our communities; I have seen this in my constituency of Feltham and Heston. I have also seen a large proportion of black and ethnic minority communities in my constituency affected—for example, BAME-led hairdressers such as His & Hers Beauty Salon run by Israr Rao and family that is at the heart of Hounslow West. When we go along the parade and talk to the shop owners, they come out and say how much they are still struggling. As we think about the economic recovery we face, that voice is still not heard sufficiently. I thank them for what they continue to do and for continuing to share their stories with us all.

It is right that there are new grants available as part of the restart grant scheme, but we have no idea how well these are supporting the beauty sector. In answer to a parliamentary question, the Department released a breakdown of the restart grant funding allocations and payments, but it does not hold sector-level data. As the Government point to the restart grants as a key support measure for the beauty industry, will the Minister now publish how much of the spending is reaching beauty and wellbeing businesses?

On skills, we know that there have been almost 30% fewer apprenticeship starts in hair and beauty in the first six months of this academic year, compared with the last. The Save Our Salons campaign group estimates that nearly four in five salons will not recruit any apprentices

this year. If the salons struggle to take on new trainees and to hold on to staff who are leaving for other sectors, how will the Government ensure that they retain the skill sets needed to thrive in the future?

These businesses make a vital contribution to our economy. We know the Government's approach to the crisis has failed to appreciate the importance of the sector and provide support to the extent needed. Businesses have done right by our country during the crisis and the Government must now do right by them. The health, wellbeing and beauty sector is a skilled and creative sector at the heart of our communities that absolutely deserves our support.

10.26 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Paul Scully): It is a pleasure to see you back in the chair, Sir Roger, and to serve under your chairmanship. I congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on securing today's important debate, and I congratulate her and others, including the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) and other members of the APPG, on the work that they are doing in support of this important sector.

Today's debate is important because the beauty and wellbeing sector is so important. It is important because of its contribution to the economy, its pivotal role in high streets and communities in every corner of the UK, its showcasing of female entrepreneurship, as we have heard, and its role in improving our health and wellbeing. We have heard a little about high streets. We have to remember that high streets are an ecosystem. It is not just about retail, hospitality or the beauty and wellbeing sector; they all work together to make our high streets vibrant. It is important that we protect all of that as we reimagine the future of the high street.

I was keen, as we looked to the end of this lockdown and at the Prime Minister's road map, that we should secure the reopening of the beauty and wellbeing sector at an earlier stage than last time. The sector was last to open after previous lockdowns, but among the first to open this time. That is testament to the appreciation that we were able to get across to the Government and the understanding that people's wellbeing is so important, as well as the economic situation and the recovery. Today's debate has highlighted the key role that the sector plays in our economic society and I hope it will go some way to strengthen the perception of the sector as highly skilled, entrepreneurial and accessible.

As we have heard, the personal care sector consists of over 280,000 businesses employing about 561,000 people and adding £21 billion to the economy. Over 95% of the businesses are small or medium sized. As for levelling up, 30% of all hair and beauty enterprises are based in local authorities that fall into the ninth and tenth deciles of multiple deprivation. Although its economic contribution is significant, what is arguably even more valuable is its impact on society and its role in communities. It plays a key role in supporting jobs, as was eloquently shared by my right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), especially jobs for women and young people. Some 82% of hair and beauty businesses are female owned, 60% of workers are self-employed and around 20% of hair and beauty workers are under the age of 25.

The pandemic has had a major impact on our mental health and we need to recognise how the sector can help the nation's recovery by improving people's physical and mental wellbeing. Whether it is feeling fresh after a new haircut, catching up with the local beauty therapist or getting a massage to relax, as the hon. Member for Swansea East said, the beauty and wellbeing sector provides the services needed to make people feel better.

The sector tells us that 68% of British adults who get their hair done professionally agree that having their hair done supports their mental health and wellbeing, and it is interesting to hear the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) tell us about how she had to bring out her hairdressing skills. There was no way that I was going to try that. I know that some people thought that I was taking my loyalty to our Prime Minister to the nth degree with the hair that I sometimes brandished in the Chamber, and I am glad that I have been able to get it cut since.

As we have heard, the sector also plays a key role for some people with serious medical needs, such as those with cancer. We therefore allowed treatments to continue during lockdown for those with health issues when they could not be deferred—for example, some people undergoing cancer treatment were able to visit spas and salons to receive specific treatment tailored to their comfort. Throughout the pandemic, I have worked really closely with the sector to understand the issues, so that I can best represent its interests within Government. Although it has always been represented in Government, we had a dedicated personal care sector support team back in January, and we look forward to working with organisations within the sector, the APPG and other interested parties in the coming months and years.

However, this has been a really tough year for personal care businesses, which have been closed at various points of the year and faced restrictions for the remainder. That is why, in recognition of the impact that the pandemic and the restrictions have had on the sector, we put in place an unprecedented package of support worth £382 million. That is the largest peacetime support package in history, and it included the job retention measures that we have talked about, support for the self-employed, access to the highest grants, the restart grants of up to £18,000 and loans. Indeed, the restart grants are a testament to the sector. Although it was able to restart at an early stage of this part of the road map, the restart grants are a testament to the extra costs that the sector had to bear by getting the PPE and other mitigation measures in place. As we have heard, we have also provided business rates relief and a moratorium on commercial rent evictions.

The business support programmes have helped many businesses and protected many jobs, but they cannot substitute for operating in an open market. The road map that I have talked about has always been cautious and gradual, but it has to be irreversible. To help the sector reopen, we developed guidance that could get it to reopen safely. Through compliance with that, it has been able to operate since 12 April. The road map laid out the timing for easing restrictions, and it is an approach that is being led by data, not dates. We have obviously had the announcement by the Prime Minister that we are taking a four-week pause at step 3, meaning that restrictions, including social distancing measures, are still in place. That will still have an impact on the

[Paul Scully]

beauty and wellbeing industry, because operating at reduced capacity is extremely challenging—not only for revenue, as we have heard, but by making certain roles in the workforce redundant—but by pausing step 3, we will further improve protection in the population and reduce the need for stringent restrictions to control the virus.

Seema Malhotra: The Minister has just mentioned the extension of the restrictions in line with the required public health measures, based on the data. Can he explain—the Government have not explained this—why furlough support has not been extended in line with public health measures? There seems to be a mismatch, and there is no explanation that does not leave the most vulnerable businesses continuing to pay and having a greater gap between their revenues and costs.

Paul Scully: I will cover support in a bit more detail in a few minutes. In his Budget, the Chancellor essentially went long by extending furlough to September, which allowed a cushion within the road map. It was about data, not dates, so it was never on the June date specifically—it was not before the June date. That is the essential thing, but I will cover support in a second, including the VAT request that has been made by number of hon. Members.

Over the next few weeks, we obviously want to ensure that the pause allows us to get more people vaccinated, but I hope that our unprecedented package of financial support will continue to go some way towards reducing the impact of the pause. As I say, we erred on the side of generosity, as well as going long, in the Budget in March, specifically to accommodate short delays to the road map. Most of the schemes do not end until September or after in order to provide continuity and certainty to businesses. It is fantastic that the sector is looking at ways to boost consumer confidence to maintain the high demand—for example, the Oh Hello Beauty campaign, which I have supported.

Until then, it is critical that we all continue to follow advice on safe behaviours, including social distancing, wearing a face covering when required, washing hands, and letting fresh air into indoor spaces. It is so important that hands, face, space and fresh air are really there, because we will not get to that July date to find that suddenly the baddie has been killed and it is the end of the film—roll credits. We will still be living with covid for some time, but we want to ensure that the social distancing measures can melt away, in order to allow capacity to increase in the personal care sector and others.

Seema Malhotra: May I probe the Minister a bit further? He will know that quarterly rents, for example, are due today and that other support measures, such as furlough, are being reduced from next week. From 1 July the level of grant will be reduced and businesses will have to pay a contribution to those wages. Those decisions were made assuming that lockdown measures would be lifted on 21 June. That has not happened, yet there has not been a corresponding change to the economic measures. Nothing that he has said so far has answered that question, which is a matter of real concern to employers across my constituency. I am sure that employers across the country have raised the same concern with their MP.

Paul Scully: I talked about the fact that the Chancellor went long and was overly generous—well, not overly generous. He erred on the side of generosity in the Budget to cope with the possibility of an extension. On the grant scheme, I have written, along with the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston), to local authorities to ensure that the additional restrictions grant can be widened. We have offered £425 million more to top up the additional restrictions grant, but that will be given to councils only if they have spent their original allocation. There are two ways that they can do that: they can either give businesses to which they are already paying grants more money or widen the number of businesses to include some of those that have fallen between the cracks, of which we know there are many.

Interestingly, different sectors are saying different things about furlough. It is a drag on bringing people back into work for some sectors, such as in some parts of the hospitality sector, but others, such as the personal care sector, are saying that they want to extend it. That is why it is really important that the Chancellor looks at it in a holistic way, right across the economy. Although these debates are so important to highlight the pleas and plight of a particular sector, the Chancellor has to take a macro view, while understanding that there is a human cost within all of this. When I say a macro view, it is not all about spreadsheets; it is about personal loss in terms of people's jobs and businesses. That is why we have had to wrap our arms around the economy so much.

A number of contributors to the debate talked about VAT. It is interesting to note that the majority of businesses within the personal care sector are not registered for VAT in the first place, so it was considered by the Chancellor as probably not the best way of getting support directly out to a number of the small businesses affected. VAT is one of the larger and more costly measures for the Treasury, so the Chancellor again has to take a holistic view. From memory, the cost of the VAT cut to the hospitality sector was something like £27 billion, contrasted with about £12 billion for the business rates sector. That was a figure from around January, so it may be slightly out of date, but not by much.

Turning to jobs and skills, it is really good that the sector is accessible and flexible, and that it benefits young people and women, including those who have to balance work with looking after their children. In 2018, 65,000 qualifications were achieved in hair and beauty, and the hair profession specifically saw approximately 10,000 new apprenticeships—the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) raised this issue—being taken up in England, but I recognise how the deeply challenging restrictions caused by the pandemic have affected employers' ability to hire new staff, especially apprentices, due to capacity restrictions and financial hardship.

Jim Shannon: Is it the Government's intention to help hair and beauty salons to employ apprentices in order to have in place, as I said earlier, the next generation of those who can do the job?

Paul Scully: The hon. Gentleman, as ever, predicts the next few paragraphs of my speech. Yes, we want to encourage and work with the sector, and incentivise it

to take on more apprentices. I am aware of how highly skilled and valued practitioners are, but they are tempted to start careers in different industries because they have lost confidence in the sector's future viability. That is why it is important that we talk about it, support the sector and demonstrate how viable and flexible it is, and how it very much has a key role in the high street ecosystem that I talked about earlier.

Caroline Nokes: My hon. Friend was quick to respond that he wishes to support apprenticeships and demonstrate how important they are in the sector. Can he outline what specific work he is doing with the Department for Education to make sure that it, too, promotes them?

Paul Scully: I can indeed, and I will come to that in a second. We also have to examine why apprenticeships were in decline before the pandemic began. We can look at it holistically across Government with the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions and BEIS.

We have provided a range of support for the beauty and wellbeing sector. For example, the sector is eligible for the kickstart scheme, which provides a fully funded six-month job for 16 to 24-year-olds on universal credit and at risk of long-term unemployment. I am pleased to say that 600 high quality industry-designed apprenticeship standards are now available. I want to work with the sector to increase the number of small and medium-sized beauty businesses offering apprenticeships.

The Government have recently increased the cash incentive to £3,000 for every apprentice that a business hires, and that helps to maintain and attract the sector's future workforce. It is good to see sector initiatives aimed at upskilling the workforce. For example, I commend L'Oréal on its education platform, Access, which I am told 54,000 hair professionals have used. We will continue to work with the sector to advance the reputation of beauty and wellbeing as an invaluable, skilled and highly rewarding career path.

I have talked about some of the issues that the hon. Member for Swansea East raised in her speech. I was pleased that she was forthright in mentioning the benefit of holistic treatment to the menopause. It is important that we do not shy from talking in this place about a treatment that can be of so much benefit to so many women across the country. It is great to see that issue highlighted.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North talked about the entrepreneurial spirit, as did the hon. Member for Strangford. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that we should not talk about just beauty therapists and just the beauty sector. As we have heard, the hospitality sector, for example, has a low bar to entry, but that does not make it a low-skilled sector. The hair and beauty sector does not have a particularly high bar to entry, but someone cannot just pick up a pair of scissors and expect to walk into a hairdresser's and say, "Can I start work, please?" It is really important to demonstrate the skills required in the sector.

The hon. Member for Bradford South talked about regulation, and we are working with the Department of Health and Social Care to look at regulation and what needs to be done for particular treatments. We will continue to make sure that we can work with the Department, the APPG and the sector to ensure the

safety of customers. They need to see not just a certificate on the wall, as she said, but that there are skills behind it. We have to be really careful in those areas.

The hon. Member for Strangford talked about people—specifically, women—setting up businesses. We have talked about the fact that this is largely a female-led-business sector. He is absolutely right when he talks about female entrepreneurs. This fits into a wider piece of work that we are doing in my Department. What are the barriers to female entrepreneurs? They include access to finance, peer-to-peer networking and mentoring. The issue there is not just having the big beasts—the Deborah Meadens, the Richard Bransons and all those people. It is how you get mentors for people who have perhaps just opened their first salon, having been a mobile worker for a number of years; perhaps they have just taken on their first employee—it is about all those kinds of things. That is the kind of example that women want to see—someone in their mould, speaking to them about their issues. It is a question of getting consistency across the country, but also, as I have said, access to finance.

Alison Rose, the chief executive of NatWest, led the Rose review a few years ago. I chair the Rose Review Board with her—we have a meeting next week—and we talk about access to finance. We have 100 signatories to the "Investing in Women Code", which involves a number of venture capitalists as well as lenders. We are trying to get them to change their teams so that they can get diversity of thought in their investment decisions. That will lead to having diversity in their investments and ensure that they are investing in more women, and that has to be brilliant for the UK economy.

We also have the start-up loans, available for anybody to set up a new business, of up to £25,000, alongside free mentoring. That is run by the British Business Bank and has been since 2012, and 40% of those loans are going to women. That is clearly far lower than the percentage of women in the population, but compared with some other lenders, it is going in the right direction. We still need to do more, so I am pleased to be able to encourage that. The Budget in March from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was focused on helping those most affected by the pandemic, including small businesses and vulnerable groups such as young people, women and those from disadvantaged groups in our communities. It is really important that we continue to do that.

In conclusion, we will continue to listen to the sector to understand its views and concerns. As we move to step 4 on the road map, we will work together to address the key problems facing the beauty and wellbeing workforce, discussed in the debate today. We will keep on reviewing the data; we will keep on making an assessment against the four tests at least a week in advance and will announce whether we proceed to step 4 on the new date of no later than 12 July. I want the sector to fully open as soon as that is safe, so that it can bounce back and recover from the restrictions and the financial pressures caused by the pandemic. That will help to address the issues relating to jobs and the skills gap. There is clearly more to do, after we reopen, to address the longer term challenges for the sector, but we need to keep making the point that the beauty and wellbeing sector is a fantastic industry to work in because of the people and the skills that they bring.

10.48 am

Carolyn Harris: It is a pleasure to see colleagues from across the House acknowledge and champion an industry that is a serious contributor to both the economy and the societal life of our country. If we as parliamentarians have achieved anything, it has been to throw a spotlight on the need for greater respect for this industry, but we need to do more than be champions. We need to support the industry and provide solutions to repair the damage. I was disappointed to hear the Minister comment that the Chancellor had been “overly generous” in his provision. I am sure that that is not something that many people across the country would recognise, but I am going to acknowledge that it was, hopefully, a Freudian slip. I am sure that he would not want people to believe that he honestly thought that. I hope that he will take away from today’s debate everybody’s contribution and will think seriously about what more can be done to ensure the security, viability and progression of this very important industry.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the beauty and wellbeing sector workforce.

10.49 am

Sitting suspended.

Tyne Bridge: Celebrating 100 Years

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

11 am

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there have been some changes to normal practice to support the new hybrid arrangements. Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and also before they leave the room after the debate, and I also remind Members that the Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered celebrating 100 years of the Tyne Bridge.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, and to share with you and the Minister the details of the celebration of our fantastic Tyne bridge.

We often say of people that they need no introduction, and that is certainly true of the Tyne bridge. It is a great icon of the north-east, of our pride, our people, our culture and our engineering. It is one of the greatest bridges of the world and, in my humble opinion, the most beautiful bridge ever built—or it is when it is looking its best, which is not now. The Tyne bridge is a nonagenarian. It will be 100 years old in 2028. We want to celebrate it and the purpose of this debate is to find out from the Minister what he plans to bring to the party.

First, I will give a little bit of history. The roots of our Tyne bridge go back millennia. The first recorded bridge across the Tyne, near to the location of the current bridge, was the Roman pons aelius, which was built in about 122 AD. The Romans believed that all rivers had a god who blessed the community living by the water, and representations of the Tyne’s river god can be found across Tyneside to this day. In 1270, a medieval stone bridge was built, which stood for 500 years until it was badly damaged by the great flood of 1771 and replaced by a new stone bridge in 1781. That replacement was itself removed in 1866 to allow the taller ships that existed by then to pass up the Tyne, with the swing bridge being built in 1876 by the “Magician of the North”, William Armstrong.

In August 1925, construction of the current Tyne bridge began. High enough for ships to pass underneath, it was built for the new age of the motorised vehicle and to cope with the increased volume of traffic across the Tyne. Made of steel and granite, the bridge was a major feat of engineering. It was constructed using shipbuilding techniques by local shipyard workers—hence the steel rivets, which can still be seen today. When it was opened in August 1928, it was the world’s longest span bridge. I recommend that everyone sees the fantastic photographs of its construction, which can be found online.

The Tyne bridge is sometimes cited as a prototype for the Sydney Harbour bridge. In fact, although the Sydney Harbour bridge was not completed until four years after the Tyne bridge opened, work began on Sydney’s bridge first. Although the two bridges had the same design team, the differences between them are really quite striking, as was explained to me by Vin Riley, a local engineer and historian. The Sydney Harbour bridge is 1,149 metres in length and 48 metres wide, which

makes it almost exactly three times the size of the Tyne bridge, which is 389 metres long and 17 metres wide. But what the Tyne bridge may lack in size, it more than makes up for in beauty, being more perfectly proportioned than Sydney Harbour bridge.

The Sydney Harbour bridge is simply flatter, as its nickname of “the Coathanger” implies. That makes for a gentler, less hair-raising experience for those who have walked the bridge arch—I have not done so, but I understand that it is very popular—but it also makes the bridge less inspiring. The arch of the Sydney Harbour bridge is thicker at its base than at its height. The Tyne bridge, on the other hand, is thinner at its earth-bound side and much broader at the height of the arch, which gives the impression that it is bounding up, soaring away, almost as if it were trying to shake itself free of its earthly constraints. What more apt symbol could there be of the people of the north-east, who have so often shown through generosity and social activism, through passion and protest, through hope and hard work, a desire to put an end to earthly pain and a determination to build a better, brighter and more just world?

That is not the only way in which the Tyne bridge represents our whole region. It connects the north and south of the Tyne and spans the region in its construction. It was built by Dorman Long, which went on to become British Steel and was based in Middlesbrough on the Tees. Building the Tyne bridge was a mammoth task, and workmen risked their lives working up to 200 feet above the river without the benefit of safety harnesses, helmets and ropes. One worker died—Nathaniel Collins, a 33-year-old scaffolder from South Shields.

The bridge was officially opened on 10 October 1928 by King George V. The King and Queen were the first to cross it in their State Landau horse-drawn carriage, as thousands of people lined the streets for the opening ceremony and 20,000 local schoolchildren were given the day off to mark the occasion.

It is particularly fitting that we are celebrating the bridge today, as it is International Women in Engineering Day. The Dorman Long design team included the first woman to gain entry to the Institution of Civil Engineers, Dorothy Buchanan. As a chartered engineer myself—though an electrical engineer, not a civil engineer—I want to pay particular tribute to her on this day. She said:

“I felt that I represented all the women in the world. It was my hope that I would be followed by many others.”

It is our hope, too. In 2018, more than 90 female engineers from across the country gathered in Newcastle to celebrate the bridge’s 90th birthday and Dorothy Buchanan.

Today, the Tyne bridge is an important part of our north-east transport infrastructure and is used by more than 70,000 vehicles every day. It was upgraded to grade II* listed status in August 2018 as part of the Great Exhibition of the North, meaning that it is a particularly important structure of more than special interest. It is also home to the furthest inland breeding kittiwake colony in the world. Any work on the bridge must be planned around their breeding season on the towers.

The beautiful granite towers, which stand at each edge of the bridge, used to be open to the public, but in recent years have been used only for the odd illegal rave.

It is a huge pity that there is no longer a legal way for north-east communities to use that space. It has magnificent views across the Tyne, from the north and the south, and would be a superb exhibition space, restaurant or other community space.

But the bridge as a whole is not looking its best—far from it. I am regularly contacted by constituents and visitors to our city upset at the state into which it has been allowed to fall. A bridge of that stature and importance requires regular safety checks, repairs, preservation and upkeep. The Tyne bridge was last fully painted in 2000, and the paint system is designed to last approximately 18 to 20 years, so a new paint job is overdue. Repairs are needed to the road deck, the towers, the stonework and the steelwork, and a new drainage system needs to be installed. A major refurbishment takes time—some years—in addition to the tendering process, which may also take over a year. If the bridge is to be ready for its birthday, we need to start planning it now.

We want to celebrate the Tyne bridge in 2028, and celebrate our region. Just last week, Members of Parliament from across the north-east—many Members wished to contribute to this debate but were unable to be here—together with local authority leaders, the North of Tyne Mayor Jamie Driscoll and the police and crime commissioner Kim McGuinness, wrote to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Transport Secretary to request the £18.5 million needed to repaint the bridge from the levelling-up fund. We want to ensure that it looks at its best, as a symbol of our region’s proud engineering past and, we hope, prosperous future. We want to make it fit for a queen—the Queen, in fact. We very much hope that the Queen will consider commemorating the bridge her grandfather opened.

We cannot allow the bridge to continue in its current state of disrepair. It represents our region nationally and globally. It is the familiar backdrop to the annual great north run, as 54,000 runners pass over the bridge, accompanied by a display from the Red Arrows. The bridge is also used for other large events, including hosting the rings for the 2012 Olympics, the 2015 rugby world cup, and, more recently, the 2019 European rugby champions cup final. It was the location for the amazing closing ceremony of Freedom City 2017, when we celebrated 50 years since Martin Luther King’s visit to our city, and also the closing ceremony of the Great Exhibition of the North.

However, the sad fact is that the bridge’s last proper birthday celebrations were for its 75th birthday, hosted by local mayors from Gateshead and Newcastle. The Sydney Harbour bridge, on the other hand, is celebrated annually as the backdrop for the first fireworks display of each new year and had a large, organised 80th birthday celebration, with a special performance by musicians on the top of its 134 metre-high arch. The Tyne bridge, I am afraid to say, had nothing.

The Government make much of their levelling-up agenda, yet the north seems to be forgotten when it comes to celebrating our communities. I have raised with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for International Trade that they only seem to use London images—red buses and Big Ben—to promote the United Kingdom abroad. Why not the Tyne bridge and the Angel of the North?

[Chi Onwurah]

Global Britain must mean global Britain including the north-east. If this refurbishment does not happen and the bridge is allowed to continue in its current state of disrepair and neglect, I am afraid to say that it will become a different kind of symbol of the north-east. It will become a symbol of the neglect of the north-east, which has been forgotten by this Government—its great heritage and great future have been forgotten.

What support does the Minister propose to offer my region for this momentous celebration? I do not suppose that the Minister can tell us the Communities Secretary's response to our levelling-up fund application—although I would be very much pleased if he gave a certain yes—but does he agree that celebrations of such a national icon cannot be left simply to the local authority funds? Does he recognise that 10 years of austerity have slashed local government spending? For example, Newcastle City Council has lost more than a third of its spending power since 2010, with city spending entirely taken up by statutory duties such as social care. Does the Minister agree that local authorities cannot be expected to fund such a major project? Would he expect Westminster City Council to pay for the refurbishment of the Big Ben, for example?

How will the Minister ensure that all the north-east's communities benefit from the celebrations? How will he work with other Departments to ensure that great engineering stories, such as those of Dorman Long and—this is particularly relevant on International Women in Engineering Day—of Dorothy Buchanan, are celebrated as part of the festivities? We want to inspire another generation of engineers, particularly women engineers, with our celebrations. Will the Minister talk to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to ensure support for protecting our kittiwakes?

In the north-east, we know how to give a party. The north-east will bring our bridge, our passion and our people to the party. What will the Minister bring?

11.14 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Eddie Hughes): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I thank the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) for securing this important debate and for highlighting the importance of the Tyne bridge to her constituents. The Tyne bridge is rightly a source of immense pride for communities in the north-east. Alongside the Angel of the North, Durham cathedral and Hadrian's wall, it is recognised the world over as a potent symbol of the region, its character and heritage.

The affection for this iconic landmark and much-loved feature of the Newcastle and Gateshead skyline is clear from the comments we have heard today. The majestic arch of the Tyne bridge is a symbol of Tyneside's international reputation for industrial excellence. As the hon. Lady noted, the bridge was officially opened on 10 October 1928 by King George V, grandfather of Queen Elizabeth. Constructed from Tyneside steel, the Tyne bridge is a magnificent feat of British engineering.

As a civil engineer, I note with genuine enthusiasm the proposals to celebrate the anniversary in seven years' time. The bridge plays a vital role in the everyday

lives of people in Tyneside, allowing easy access across the river for work and education. It is an exciting symbol of the rich cultural life of Newcastle, Gateshead and the north-east. From hosting the country's largest Olympic rings in 2012, to celebrating 50 years since Martin Luther King visited Newcastle in 1967, the Tyne bridge has been closely connected to major sporting and cultural moments over the years.

I welcome the hon. Lady's commitment to the restoration of such an important local and national landmark. I am aware that Newcastle has entered a bid to repair the bridge, through the Government's £4.8 billion levelling-up fund. I understand that Newcastle is in the high-priority category 1 for the fund. I am sure the hon. Lady will understand that I am unable to comment on individual bids at this stage of the process, as applications for round 1 of the fund closed only last Friday. Levelling-up fund proposals are currently in assessment and I look forward to my Department announcing successful bids in the autumn.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is aware of proposals for the Tyne bridge, including £36.7 million of major road network funding developed by Transport for the North. Department for Transport officials are continuing to work with Newcastle City Council officials on a business case, as that is the best way to make progress on securing the funding.

I am also pleased to note that there has already been significant Government investment in Newcastle and the north-east. To support the north-east's economic recovery, the Government have allocated £47 million from the getting building fund to the North East local enterprise partnership, for local shovel-ready infrastructure projects. That includes £7 million for a landmark regeneration scheme on the banks of Newcastle and Gateshead quayside, set to open in 2023, with a new hotel, arena and conference centre; £5.1 million for public realm and digital infrastructure works in Newcastle city centre; and £780,000 towards NU Futures, a new leisure, careers and skills venue for young people.

Chi Onwurah: I thank the Minister for his comments on the importance of the Tyne bridge as a regional iconic symbol, and for referring to investment in projects on the banks of the river. Does he agree that that makes it all the more important that our bridge, which has not had such investment for decades, should be fit for its surroundings, as well as for its birthday in 2028?

Eddie Hughes: As a civil engineer who appreciates the fine beauty of bridges and has visited Sydney harbour and seen its poor comparative version, I hope that the hon. Lady is successful in securing the funding she needs. There are a number of options open. The bridge deserves to be restored to its former glory.

The Department for Transport has provided significant funding to the north-east, including £198 million to the North East combined authority and the North of Tyne combined authority for local transport improvements through the transforming cities fund. The Government have also provided £82.9 million for 2021-22 to authorities in the north-east for highway maintenance, pothole repairs and local transport measures. Some £700 million has been provided for strategic road schemes between 2020 and 2025, including the A1 and A19 junctions north of Newcastle. The north-east has also received

more than £9 million in investment from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport culture recovery fund.

I thank the hon. Lady for raising this issue.

Chi Onwurah: Before the Minister concludes, I hope that he, a civil engineer, will join me, an electrical engineer, in celebrating International Women in Engineering Day and particularly the contribution of Dorothy Buchanan to the Tyne bridge.

Eddie Hughes: I thank the hon. Lady for giving me the opportunity to restate my enthusiasm for engaging more women in engineering and construction. As a proud member of the Chartered Institute of Building, I have previously done work not just on attracting women to the industry, which is sometimes successful, but on the less successful aspect of retaining them in the industry, because sometimes working practices do not fit with the way they would like to live. The construction and engineering sector has moved considerably on being welcoming to women and I hope that that continues in the future. When I was at university, only two of the 50 people on my degree course were women. I hope there is a significant improvement and that we will continue to build on it.

I recognise the pride held by the people of Newcastle and Gateshead in the Tyne bridge and I welcome the hon. Lady's efforts to represent their strength of feeling. Although I am unable to comment on Newcastle's bid for the £4.8 billion levelling-up fund while those bids are assessed, I look forward to the autumn when we will be in a position to announce those results.

The Government have provided significant funding for Newcastle City Council both during the pandemic and to support recovery from it. We are working hard to ensure that there is a strong settlement for all of local government at the forthcoming spending review, which will provide certainty for the coming period. I wish the hon. Lady all the best in her preparations as we approach the centenary of this iconic feat of engineering and I look forward to celebrating with her in 2028.

Question put and agreed to.

11.22 am

Sitting suspended.

Deforestation in the Amazon

[STEVE McCABE *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): I have been asked to remind Members that there have been some changes to normal practice in order to support the hybrid arrangements. The timings of debates have been amended to allow technical arrangements to be made for the next debate. There will also be suspensions between each debate. Members participating physically and virtually should arrive for the start of debates in Westminster Hall and are expected to remain for the entire debate.

Members participating virtually, Mr Speaker has asked me to remind you that you must keep your camera on for the duration of the debate and should be visible to each other and to those of us in the Boothroyd Room. If Members attending virtually have technical problems, they should 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. Mr Speaker has stated that masks should be worn in Westminster Hall, along with the usual practices.

Members attending physically who are in the latter stages of the call list should use the seats in the Public Gallery and move into the horseshoe when seats become available. Members can only speak from the horseshoe where there are microphones. Members who are not on the call list but wish to intervene can do so, but only from the horseshoe. I remind Members that those on the call list have priority for spaces on the horseshoe, and those wishing to intervene should not prevent a Member on the call list from speaking.

2.31 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered deforestation in the Amazon.

I called this debate because of what I see as a mounting crisis in the battle to protect the Amazon rainforest, which is one of the world's most important biomes, if not the most important. The Amazon is thought to be home to 10% of known species on earth, including 16,000 species of tree, 3,000 species of fish and more species of primate than anywhere else on earth. It is one of the last refuges for jaguars, harpy eagles and pink river dolphins and is home to sloths, black spider monkeys and poison dart frogs. It is a really important part of our global ecosystem.

For decades, large swathes of the Amazon were cleared to make way for agriculture, but the Amazon was not the only place affected in that part of the world: areas such as the Atlantic forest in Brazil have also largely disappeared, all too often to leave space for agriculture, and all too often agriculture that uses up the fertility of the land in a few years and leaves behind sparsely used and degraded land. In recent years, the impact of deforestation has become clearer and clearer, and international efforts to halt it have grown. I could speak for much longer than I have available today on the need to increase those efforts, to protect essential habitats and biomes, and to produce a global strategy to begin restoring some of the areas that have been lost, but that is not what the debate

[Chris Grayling]

is about. It is about what is happening right now in Brazil, which in my view is tragic and cannot be accepted by the rest of the global community.

For many years, it seemed as if progress was being made in slowing the loss of the rainforest. Brazil committed to sharply reduce deforestation, introduced new legislation to strengthen environmental protections, and worked with soy traders to end the purchase of soy from illegally cleared areas. At the Paris climate change conference, it agreed to end illegal deforestation by 2030. However, the Brazilian Government have reversed that progress. I say that with great sorrow and dismay, because Brazil is a friend of this country, but we have to speak truth to friends, and the reality is that the Government in Brazil have reversed the process. Despite warm words to the international community, the situation is now going from bad to worse. The loss of rainforest in the Amazon is now acute, with 2019 and 2020 being disastrous years for the Amazon. In a 12-month period, an area the size of Israel was cleared. In 2020, the loss amounted to 4,281 square miles—and that is a Brazilian statistic. Despite the pandemic, the situation continues to look bleak. Current estimates are that deforestation has actually accelerated this year, with the loss of an area the size of the Isle of Man in just one month. Despite warm words internationally, this clearly has official sanction.

Instead of taking steps to halt deforestation, the Brazilian Government are now pushing legislation through the Congress that will have the opposite effect by regularising the rights of people who have cleared and occupied forest areas illegally. At the same time, a presidential decree has reduced the likelihood of environmental criminals being punished for past actions. I cannot think of any step more likely to encourage those who have been breaking the existing protections and clearing areas illegally than letting them off the punishments that they might have been expecting, or deciding to allow them to stay on those sites legally. What clearer message could there be that they will be allowed to get away with it if they try it again? It is no surprise that environmental groups are up in arms. They rightly see this as a clear route to further illegal forest clearances.

There are also plans to open up to commercial mining interests lands that enjoy existing protections—lands that are those of the indigenous peoples. I suspect that we will hear a bit more about that later from my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), who has been champion of indigenous peoples and the protections they need.

New environmental assessment rules for road building do not take deforestation into account, opening the way for large-scale road building through the Amazon, and the inevitable consequence of more clearances for mining and other uses, as remoter areas become more accessible. Those are not policies that come from a Government who are taking their environmental responsibilities seriously. The Brazilian Government claim that they are victims of misinformation, but I am afraid that simply is not true. The reason we know it is not true is because they told us themselves: at a recent meeting, the Brazilian Environment Minister was caught on video threatening to use the pandemic as a smokescreen to run the cattle herd through the Amazon, change all the rules and simplify standards. Heaven help the Amazon if that is the real policy of the Brazilian Environment Minister.

My message today, and the reason for calling the debate, is to say to our Government and the Minister that the international community really must act on this issue, and the UK has to take a lead, along with other nations, in making that action happen. The reality is that other countries in that part of the world are working on this—for example, Colombia is starting to get to grips with the issue—but, sadly, the Brazilians are not. The first battleground has to be over trade, but it will not be easy. China has become a huge market for Brazilian exports and Brazil's reliance on European and north American markets has been reduced, but that is not a reason for us to avoid action. It now looks unlikely that the provisional trade agreement reached between the European Union and the Mercosur trade bloc in South America will be able to go ahead in the agreed form because of what is happening in the Amazon. In the European Parliament, steps are already being taken to block the deal, and several EU Parliaments have voted to oppose it. It certainly gives the impression of being dead in the water.

As colleagues know, I do not always believe in following the example of the EU, but I definitely make an exception in this regard. The UK should not countenance even starting discussions with Brazil about a free trade agreement while the current situation continues. There must be no trade deals with Brazil while it continues to allow wholesale clearances in the Amazon, and we need a very clear message from our Ministers to their counterparts in Brasilia that this is the case. We cannot simply treat this as if it is not happening. Unless the situation changes quickly, I think we actually have to go further than that and deal with the issue in a very direct and robust way. Given the mood in Brussels and the changes in the United States, we can work internationally to tackle the issue directly.

It is very hard to work constantly to identify which products come from sustainable sources and which do not. For example, retailers in the UK tell me that it is hard to tell which soy used in their products has sustainable origins, given that the major dealers mix their supplies together in big batches. We now have to look very seriously at international action to impose tough tariffs on relevant Brazilian food exports unless and until there is clear evidence that the Government there are taking serious steps to protect the Amazon. That might seem strange coming from a strongly pro-free trade Conservative, but it is essential if we are to put the kind of pressure on Brazil that will stop this deforestation while we still have time. We cannot simply let the exports and imports flow if they are increasingly coming from more and more areas of the Amazon that have been cleared.

There is also a debate in the United States at the moment about whether President Biden and his climate change envoy, John Kerry, should even engage with the Brazilian Government, and in particular meet President Bolsonaro. I think they should, and I think our Government should be engaging as well: we should be having discussions and trying to strengthen relationships, but we have to be absolutely clear all along that future partnerships and future trade agreements are conditional on deforestation stopping. Of course, there is the issue that other countries are close trading partners with the Brazilians—the Chinese, for example. We should be clear with the Chinese Government that, as major importers of its produce, we need them to be part of putting the pressure on Brazil. Although the Chinese are making clear commitments

themselves—they are chairing the COP on habitat and biodiversity later this year—they need to be putting that into practice and putting pressure on the Brazilian Government as well.

Protecting our natural ecosystems must become a central responsibility of all countries on Earth. Of course we need development, of course we need homes and jobs for a growing global population, and of course we understand the economic challenges that the Brazilian Government face, but none of the things that need to be done to remove poverty risks and improve the lives of citizens can be allowed to happen at the expense of key biomes and the habitats of endangered plant and animal life. A smart approach to land management and smart technology can help us to reverse the damage that has been done and start to rebuild the natural environment around us, but that work has to start quickly, and the loss of key habitats must stop now.

We, the United Kingdom, will be chairing the COP summit on climate change this autumn. We will, I hope, be the drivers of a new agreement on climate change and environmental improvements. This year, Ministers have already taken a lead role in the pre-discussions happening ahead of that meeting. As a Government, we have taken some really quite significant steps to address environmental challenges, both domestically and internationally, so I think we are as well placed as anyone to say, “We are willing to take a lead, but we need the help of others to follow.” In my view, there is no greater environmental need than this, both because the Amazon rainforest is key to dealing with the challenge of climate change and because it is such an important habitat—such an important home—for so many species and for indigenous people. It is a global asset, it is globally vital and it must be protected, but we are now facing a situation where a Government of a friendly nation is allowing policies and actions to go ahead that are accelerating the destruction of that global asset.

My message to the Minister today is very simple: the UK has to act on all of this. We have to be saying to Brazilian Ministers and others in Brazil, “We are your friends. We are going to carry on being your friends, but we cannot just stand idly by while this happens. We will take action. We will take action with the international community to put pressure on you if you do not listen and if you do not act.” It is in the interests of every Brazilian citizen, as it is in the interests of every citizen around the world, to deal with these environmental issues. Brazil has perhaps a bigger responsibility and a bigger burden than most, because it is home to such an important asset, but that responsibility has to be shouldered none the less, and this problem has to be addressed. As such, I say to the Minister and, through her, to colleagues in Government that this is something on which the UK Government have a duty to act. This year, we have a duty to lead, and if that means tough action and very tough words, we have to do it, because it is a historic responsibility that we cannot and must not shirk.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): We can probably get away without imposing a formal time limit if people confine themselves to about six minutes.

2.44 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on securing this debate, and I note with great pleasure, Mr McCabe, that you are presiding in the Chair.

This debate is timely, with the debate on the Environment Bill continuing today in the Lords. In my speech, I will refer to the vital provisions in that Bill that seek to place due diligence obligations on companies to eliminate illegal deforestation from their supply chains. That is an important start, but we need to go further. First, however, I will focus on the drivers of deforestation.

One key driver is the conversion of forest for ranching to produce beef. It is no wonder that we hear lots of analysis of the importance of transitioning to plant-based diets and the role of consumer choice in mitigating emissions and restoring biodiversity. The number of vegans and vegetarians in the UK has increased by 40%, and it is estimated that by 2025 vegans and vegetarians will form a quarter of our population. That sounds great until one understands that the other key driver of Amazonian deforestation is the demand for soy. The World Wide Fund for Nature reports that the land required to meet the UK’s annual demand for soy between 2016 and 2018 averaged 17,000 sq km, which is an area of land the size of Wales. This situation is all the more alarming when we consider that 27% of soy consumed in the UK was certified as being deforestation-free. If my maths is right, that means that 73% was not. It is no wonder that the Dasgupta review highlighted the fact that our demand for the Earth’s resources is far outstripping the planet’s capacity to supply us. This is what he called the “impact inequality”. We are living as if we have 1.6 planets.

I support the right hon. Gentleman’s push for sustainability labelling on foods to drive better consumer choices. It is clear to me that information, education and choice are essential to bring about change. However, it is also clear that, on their own, they will not be sufficient. We cannot afford to wait and hope that consumers will drive this change. There must be regulation and the legislative framework in place to drive change from the top. In 2020, deforestation in the Amazon increased by 13% in just 12 months and the number of wildfires there hit a 13-year high. It is easy to become complacent when all these figures are brandished about, so to put it simply: if we do not legislate for an end to deforestation in company supply chains, the Amazon—the world’s most vital biodiversity and carbon sink—will reach a tipping point and be gone.

I welcome the proposals in the Environment Bill for a due diligence system for companies to ensure that their supply chains are free from any involvement with illegal deforestation. This follows the recommendation by the Global Resource Initiative, an independent taskforce convened by the UK Government. Yet the GRI also recommended two vital measures that the UK Government have thus far failed to adopt: extending that due diligence to all deforestation, irrespective of legality; and extending it to the finance sector. I will address finance first.

UK financial institutions have provided finance worth £500 million to the three largest beef companies in the world—JBS, Marfrig and Minerva—all of which are linked with illegal deforestation in the Amazon. That is despite earlier commitments from these companies, stretching back to 2008, to end their links with illegal deforestation. UK-based banks and investment firms are providing huge finance for beef companies that are driving deforestation through their supply chains. It is imperative, therefore, that legislation extends to the finance sector. Voluntary commitments have failed.

[Barry Gardiner]

A Global Witness investigation found that these beef-producing companies bought cattle from 379 ranches containing 20,000 football fields-worth of illegal deforestation. That was not the number in the whole of the Amazon; it was the number in one state in the Amazon alone.

That extraordinary depletion of rainforest is being financed by UK financial institutions and investment companies, and despite the evidence, they are failing to act—indeed, they are failing to follow even their own voluntary “zero deforestation” commitments. Mandatory due diligence on financial institutions is vital, because even excellent initiatives, such as the Financial Stability Board’s task force on climate-related financial disclosures, will not pick up emissions from deforestation associated with these institutions’ financing. Mandatory due diligence and a statutory target to reduce our global footprint by 2030 would send the signal to the finance sector of the seriousness of this issue.

We must also address the problem of defining “legality” by producer-country standards. The Government’s own consultation document on due diligence for forest-risk commodities acknowledges that globally only 49% of deforestation is defined as “illegal” under local country laws. When companies in the global north first began to question their supply chains a few years ago, they asked specifically about the legality of the deforested land on which their supply chain products had been grown. The result was that, in order to help Brazilian business meet the demands of its customers, the Government relaxed the rules on legality. They simply changed the law. WWF found that, with Bolsonaro’s weakening of the legislative framework on deforestation, between only 22% and 29% of soy-related deforestation would now come under illegal deforestation regulation. We simply have to go further.

Law enforcement agencies, including the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources—IBAMA—issued in 2019 the lowest number of fines due to deforestation in the past 30 years. Most concerning, Bolsonaro is taking away the rights of the indigenous communities to block deforestation and mining on their land. That is important because their land protects 34% of carbon stocks in the Amazon.

A Bill introduced in Congress last February would legalise the commercial mining and agricultural expansion on indigenous land without the free, prior and informed consent of those communities. Notwithstanding the devastating environmental impacts of that, it is also a violation of the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous people, to which Brazil is a signatory.

So, yes, let us label properly, accounting properly for the actual deforestation, but let us also insist on mandatory reporting for companies and, in particular, for those banks and funds that are financing the destruction. As President of COP26, let us ensure that indigenous land rights are a key priority in Glasgow.

2.51 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. Mr McCabe. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) for bringing the debate to Westminster Hall. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon.

Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), who is a very able member of the Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which I chair.

Talking about the deforestation of the Amazon and, in particular, about what is happening in Brazil is a good reason for us to be here this afternoon. The Environment Bill is now in Committee in the Lords and offers a welcome opportunity for the UK to show global leadership in protecting the Amazon. The due diligence obligations will see companies that play a role in producing key commodities such as soya and palm oil held accountable for the illegal deforestation in their supply chains.

Although those due diligence obligations are welcome, they do not go far enough to protect the Amazon and other crucial, natural ecosystems, or to meet the UK’s global goals on climate and nature. The deforestation amendments I tabled unsuccessfully in the House of Commons were targeted towards ensuring that big businesses are not bankrolled. Those big businesses in Brazil that carry out cattle ranching, driving the cattle towards the Amazon, and ploughing up the savannah to grow soya, removing the rights of indigenous people, are being bankrolled by major UK institutions, such as HSBC, Santander and Barclays, which have investments in those big agribusinesses.

The Global Witness “Money to Burn” report shows that UK banks invested £5 billion between 2013 and 2019 in companies that are illegally deforesting land, such as those in the Amazon. We may not be conscious of it but our own pension funds in the House of Commons may well contribute to that by having investments in those institutions.

In a capitalist system, if those businesses are starved of capital they are brought to some recognition of the huge damage that they are doing. They are causing huge environmental damage; if we did them financial damage they would listen more carefully. That is why I am so keen for this to happen, and I shall be interested to hear what our Minister has to say.

In December 2020, Global Witness, in “Beef, Banks and the Brazilian Amazon”, found that Brazil’s three largest beef companies are linked to tens of thousands of hectares of illegal deforestation, despite auditors saying otherwise. In just one state, over three years, beef giants JBS, Marfrig and Minerva brought cattle from a combined 379 ranches, containing 20,000 football fields-worth of illegal deforestation. In this year alone, an area twice the size of Devon has been deforested. While we stand here and speak, deforestation is going on at an alarming rate.

We have to remember that, although trees are valuable in every country in which they are grown, we would need to grow three trees here to hold the amount of carbon that a tree in the rainforest holds. We need to wake up to that. I understand that Brazil is a sovereign country and that it needs to make its decisions, but it cannot make decisions that are seriously damaging—literally—the health and sometimes the lives of indigenous people in Brazil and are causing so much degradation to our global climate. As we move forward as a country towards ensuring we have a much greener environment, we have to look to the rest of the world to deliver on that.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell made a point about the Chinese, who are very hungry for minerals and all sorts of commodities, including

soya for feeding their cattle and their people, but they too must be very conscious of where this is coming from. We can all work together to deliver on this. Overall, the people of Brazil would benefit from a regime that did not deforest.

Finally, to put my farming hat on, one of the problems that I have with what they do in Brazil is that they basically burn down the rainforest and plough it up, using all the fertility in the soil, and then move on to some more rainforest, abandoning the land after taking the fertility that has probably taken hundreds of thousands of years to deliver. Even from a farming perspective, it is ruinous. That is why I say bluntly that we need to listen to this debate very clearly. I look forward to the Minister taking the points that we are making very seriously. This is very much a cross-party issue, and is very much for the good of this country. In this case, we have to give clear guidance to the Brazilians about the impact of the policies of the present President of Brazil and where they are leading the country.

2.58 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr McCabe. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on securing this debate. I hope he is not too offended if I say that I find myself agreeing with him an awful lot more these days, now that he is on the Back Benches, than I did when he was in Government.

Yesterday was World Rainforest Day, and it would be wonderful if we were here to celebrate all the wonders of the rainforest—the huge range of biodiversity and the fact that it is a habitat that is home to many rare and exotic species, as the right hon. Gentleman said. Instead, this is a very depressing day because, as has been said, the rainforests are under threat and are disappearing at a very worrying rate. Deforestation continues to devastate many havens of biodiversity around the world. It is driven by a variety of economic drivers, including infrastructure construction, logging, extractive industries and land conversion for livestock and feed crops such as soy.

The Amazon is a huge global resource in terms of its environmental contribution and is home to around 10% of known species. It stores around 76 billion tonnes of carbon. Clearly, we have a responsibility to do all that we can to protect it, but there was a devastating 13% increase in Amazonian deforestation in 2020, with over 11,000 sq kms of deforestation. Unfortunately, as has been said, the UK is driving this deforestation with our domestic consumption.

As was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), in 2017 only 27% of soy consumed in the UK was certified as deforestation free, meaning that the rest was not. Supermarkets, such as Tesco, have well-documented links to meat firms tied to deforestation. I know some supermarkets have spoken about trying to stamp out those connections in their supply chains, and I welcome that move.

It is very rare that I take issue with anything my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North says, but I have to correct him about what he said earlier. The main driver by far in the expansion of soy production, which has almost doubled in recent years, is increased meat consumption. The main use of soy is livestock feed. Soybean oil is also used in cooking, cosmetics and soap and soy is used in industrial processes.

According to WWF, 80% of the world soybean crop is fed to livestock and according to *Oilseed & Grain News*, which I am sure we all read avidly every night, it is 85%, but that is where the bulk of it goes. I have had these run-ins with a former agriculture Minister in previous Parliaments. He is not in Parliament any more, but on quite a few occasions he stood up and said, “It’s all the vegans and their veggie burgers that’s causing this problem.” It really is not, although with the move to plant-based diets, the best thing people can eat is plants and not processed food anyway.

Many of us have been raising this subject for some time. A year ago I asked a question of the International Trade Secretary:

“Between 2013 and 2019, British financial institutions provided over \$2 billion in financial backing to Brazilian beef companies linked to Amazon deforestation. How can we ensure that there is greater transparency in our supply chains so that we are not unwittingly, through exports from Brazil, contributing to such environmental degradation?”—[*Official Report*, 18 June 2020; Vol. 677, c. 939.]

I got a vague answer that they were working on “supply chain” issues.

In January this year, I asked about this issue again at International Trade questions. I mentioned my recent correspondence with the Brazilian ambassador that started after I had mentioned the problems with biofuel when I was leading for Labour on a statutory instrument about the renewable transport fuels obligation, which I am sure the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell knows about. The Brazilians took issue with something I said, and we entered into a chain of correspondence, which was basically the Brazilians saying that deforestation was not a problem.

I mentioned this correspondence at International Trade questions and raised with the Trade Minister recent, very worrying reports in the press about Brazilian beef farms, where working conditions were said to be akin to modern slavery. I asked if the Government would make any future bilateral trade deal conditional on Brazil taking action to protect workers and prevent deforestation. I note that the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell said that there should be no trade deal agreed with Brazil until these issues are resolved.

In reply to my question, the Minister said that “the United Kingdom has already committed £259 million to Brazil through its international climate finance programme to tackle deforestation.”—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2021; Vol. 687, c. 471.]

He mentioned the early movers programme, which rewards pioneers in forest conservation, and a programme led by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that has prevented the clearance of around 430,000 acres in Brazil. DEFRA stopping the clearance of 430,000 acres sounds really good, but under the Bolsonaro Administration deforestation is at a 12-year high.

As *The Guardian* has reported, at least 11,000 sq kms were razed between August 2019 and July 2020. That is roughly 2,740,000 acres in the space of less than a year. For all our efforts, we are just giving with one hand while Bolsonaro is destroying all that work with the other.

The Government had an opportunity to address this issue in the Environment Bill. I lose track with the Environment Bill because it took so long to go through Parliament. At one point, I tabled some amendments but they are lost in the mists of time. I was pleased that

[Kerry McCarthy]

the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) tabled his amendments at the final stage. I was pleased that the Government went halfway by including measures in the Bill to impose a due diligence obligation on the supply chains of UK firms, forcing them to tackle illegal deforestation. As has been said, and as I have tried to raise in Parliament with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the issue should not just be about illegal deforestation, because we know that so many of the activities that contribute to deforestation are legal, and Bolsonaro has been relaxing legal protections. We also know that there is very little enforcement and that companies can act with impunity. The Environment Secretary replied by saying that many countries have laws on deforestation in place, and that there was evidence that the failure to enforce was the problem, but I do not accept that.

We have heard what is happening in Brazil. As has been said, it is not just that some states are pushing ahead with measures to weaken legal protections. There are also serious concerns that they lack the mechanisms. Even if the political will was there, which I do not think there is, they do not have the mechanisms to identify what is legally and illegally produced. Clearly, a distinction between legal and illegal deforestation is not good enough.

As has been said by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, UK financial support for firms linked to deforestation goes far deeper than many of us would expect. Analysis from Feedback shows that even the parliamentary pension fund has investments in big meat firms such as JBS, which have been repeatedly linked to deforestation. I hope that that is something we can take up after this debate, because we should set an example in this place by severing all our financial links to forest risk commodities.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell that what is happening in Brazil is tragic and cannot be accepted. I agree with his argument that it has been officially sanctioned by Bolsonaro and that our Government need to act. I thank organisations such as WWF, CAFOD and Global Witness for their tireless efforts to raise awareness of the issue and to try to ensure that the Environment Bill includes measures to address it. I very much hope that now the Bill is in the other place we can take stronger action.

I hope the Minister can shed some light on how the Government plan to rectify the glaring holes in their proposals on deforestation. I accept that she is a Foreign Office Minister, but there is a link with DEFRA and the Department for International Trade, and I hope that ahead of COP and the convention on biological diversity she talks to all her colleagues and tries to secure firm action on this.

3.7 pm

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on securing this debate, because the issue is not talked about as much as it should be. It is right that we talk frequently about developing electric vehicles and renewable energy, but we do not discuss deforestation enough, so I am glad to have this opportunity to make a brief contribution.

During the recess I had the pleasure of visiting the Eden Project, which, as Members know, is expertly run by David Harland and his team in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). The project clearly demonstrates the importance of rainforests, particularly the Amazon rainforest, in terms of biodiversity, insects, birds, animals, plants and perhaps other forms of life that have not been fully discovered. Very simple research demonstrates that although rainforests cover 6% of the world's surface, they host half of the world's plant and animal species.

It is also important that rainforests generate so much of the earth's oxygen. Given all those facts, it really is important that we talk much more about rainforests, particularly the Amazon rainforest, because its deforestation is one of the great crises facing the world. We talk about the climate change emergency, quite rightly, but contributing to that is the rainforest emergency, and we need to address the issue urgently. The process of deforestation adds to the carbon dioxide emissions that the world suffers from.

We source a number of products from the rainforests, but the production of palm oil is perhaps the main issue in encouraging people to deforest. Palm oil is important to many people, including small-scale farmers in developing countries. The countries that are causing deforestation are themselves developing. The problem is not easy to solve, especially as the research shows that growing palm oil substitutes could require even more land. This is not an easy problem.

The UK has played its part in addressing the problem and moving towards the use of sustainably produced palm oil. It has to be a Government initiative, because, although I am certainly in favour of consumer responsibility and putting as many warnings on packaging as we possibly can, there are more and more requirements for packaging and it is getting rather crowded, which could lead to people ignoring the messages. It is up to the Government to ensure that what we import is produced sustainably.

Of course, like climate change itself, we in the UK cannot solve all the world's problems, but we certainly need to give a lead. I am pleased that we are doing that, but we have to take the rest of the world with us if these problems are to be solved and we are to protect the planet in the way that we want and need to.

Helping countries that might otherwise cut down forests and helping those countries that benefit from the importation of cheaply produced palm oil might be a very important role for us to play, and it might be a very good use of part of our aid budget. As Bill Gates said:

"People cut down trees not because people are evil; they do it when the incentives to cut down trees are stronger than the incentives to leave them alone."

I might add that they do it when the incentives are also more immediate, because if people are starving, they are understandably more concerned about that than what they see as some distant concept of climate change.

For other products that we source from around the world, the fact that we can now negotiate our own trade deals provides us with the opportunity to try to stress to other countries how seriously we take these issues, just as negotiators from all developed countries should do.

The solutions are not simple. An emphasis on sustainability is one way forward. The possible development of synthetic palm oil might be another way forward, but I really believe that it has to be accompanied by help for others if it is to work.

We in the UK have enjoyed relative prosperity since the industrial revolution, and we have polluted the planet as we have gone along. We need to help others to reach the same level of prosperity without their polluting the planet in the way that we have. Perhaps I might suggest that that is another reason for us to maintain our aid levels at 0.7%. Perhaps this is yet another example of how doing so ultimately benefits the UK. As I say, we cannot do it all on our own. COP26 provides an ideal opportunity for us to set out a structure within which we can lead the world on this issue.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Before I call the next speaker, Mr Law, are you experiencing some technical difficulties there? As I said at the start, Mr Speaker was very clear: people appearing virtually should have their cameras on throughout and should be present throughout.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP) [V]: I have had some internet instability, but it seems to be okay now, Mr McCabe.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Thank you. I call Alex Sobel.

3.13 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op) [V]: It is excellent to see you in the Chair, Mr McCabe. I once again find myself in agreement with the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), as I was in the tourism and travel debate. I thank him for securing this vital debate, which could not have come at a more appropriate time, as we marked World Rainforest Day yesterday.

Last February, Chief Raoni, a chief of the Kayapo people in north central Brazil, visited the UK and addressed a number of us, including the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish), who spoke earlier. He told us about the destruction of their lands by strip-mining, farming and industrialisation. It was not just a threat to the rainforest—his people were being killed if caught, in their own lands. Since then, I have kept in touch with the non-governmental organisations and Chief Raoni, who say that the destruction and human rights abuses have sped up since covid, with little ability to curb the rapacious nature of the forest destroyers and the Brazilian President acting more as a co-conspirator than as a protector of our greatest natural resource.

Chief Raoni's biggest ask is to make indigenous lands protected reserves, with not just legal protection but security and human rights defenders on the ground, supported by us in the international community. However, the demarcation process is threatened under President Bolsonaro, who is a right-wing populist climate change sceptic who continues to open the door of protected lands to mining and agribusiness.

Last month, Chief Raoni and another top indigenous leader, Chief Almir Surui, asked the International Criminal Court to investigate Bolsonaro for crimes against humanity, accusing him of unprecedented environmental damage, killings and persecution in the Amazon. Will the UK Government be supporting Chief Raoni and Chief Surui, who are on the front line and have lost members of their tribes to those who destroy the rainforest?

Immediate action is so important as the climate crisis picks up speed and temperatures steadily rise. The lungs of our planet are burning. The Amazon rainforest is at

a tipping point. Droughts and wildfires are now the norm, with 2021 set to be a particularly bad year. Just yesterday, an international study led by the University of Leeds warned that huge areas in the eastern part of the Amazon face severe drying by the end of the century if action is not taken to curb carbon emissions.

Under Bolsonaro, we have seen record levels of deforestation, with an area seven times greater than London destroyed last year alone. Crucially, the Amazon may begin to contribute more greenhouse gases to the air than it absorbs by 2050, or possibly even sooner if the expansion of this work under Bolsonaro continues. His predecessor President Lula brought in protections that we saw work, and the rainforest loss was curbed. However, that work has all been undone in quite a short space of time. Now the Brazilian Government are pushing laws to make deforestation easier.

Bill 2633 in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies encourages and legalises land grabbing of public lands, and is one of the key parts of the President's legislative agenda. Bill 510 is a Brazilian Senate bill that also encourages land grabbing. These bills, encouraging land grabbing of public lands and authorising mining construction in indigenous lands, are set to be pushed through before the summer recess next month.

We need to consider this in our own law making. The Environment Bill will require firms to carry out due diligence on whether or not commodities come from areas that have been illegally deforested. Yet that only addresses illegal deforestation. If Bolsonaro's Government are successful, what is currently illegal will become legal, and the Environment Bill will be unable to stop it or curb it in any way. We urgently need the Bill to be amended in the other place, where it now rests, so that we are not creating demand for the destruction of the Amazon.

The Conservative party promised to fight against Amazon deforestation, yet one of their biggest donors is an investor who profits from the destruction of Brazilian rainforests. If the Prime Minister is happy to take Crispin Odey's money, questions have to be asked about his commitment to protecting the Amazon.

The Amazon is thought to be the home of 10% of known species on Earth, including 16,000 species of trees, 3,000 species of fish, and more species of primates than anywhere else. I work closely with the WWF, and hosted its Brazil director in March last year, right here in Portcullis House. The WWF told us that new species are being discovered all the time. Between 1999 and 2015, 2,200 new animal and plant species were discovered in the Amazon, including a river dolphin, a vegetarian piranha and eight species of monkey, including one that purrs like a cat. Are these not just wonderful, joyful things?

The outstanding biodiversity of the Amazon is not only important for the natural ecosystem, it also provides many benefits to us as humans. The plants and animals are used for food, research, medicine and textiles. Any reduction in biodiversity can also contribute to increased disease risks, and after this past year we all know what zoonotic diseases and global pandemics are. In its initial report on the origins of covid-19, the WHO pointed out the threat of natural ecosystem destruction breaking down the buffer zone that protects us from wildlife-borne viruses.

[Alex Sobel]

Just as a virus born in one country can sweep across the globe, deforestation of the Amazon has the capacity to devastate not just Brazil, but the entire world. While Brazil acts as the primary custodian, maintaining the rainforest should not solely fall on their shoulders. Internationally, we must reflect critically as to how we consume the planet's resources. COP26 will be a pivotal moment to focus on efforts to protect the Amazon rainforest and tackle unnecessary deforestation, with Brazilian representatives right here on our own shores.

The natural world does not reflect man-made borders, which is why we need multilateral co-operation on this issue. Now more than ever, the UK Government—even though they are retreating from their international development commitments—need to provide funds to protect the rainforest and its people. I will finish with the words of Chief Raoni:

"I'm overwhelmed with sadness when I see how our lands are being destroyed more each day".

3.19 pm

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr McCabe. I join other hon. Members in congratulating the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on securing the debate and on laying out clearly and convincingly the reality of the situation in Brazil today. Although he painted a bleak and depressing picture, what he said needed saying, and I thank him for saying it.

We all recognise the importance of the rainforest and the disaster that would follow from its destruction, but it seems that, rather than doing everything possible to save it, the Government of Brazil have effectively given a green light to criminal networks to pursue illegal logging, mining and cattle ranching, thereby accelerating the destruction of the forest. It is right that President Bolsonaro is called out, as he has been in this debate, but we should not fool ourselves into thinking that we are blameless in all this. We are not, because, as the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) says, on our doorstep—in this city—financial institutions are complicit in the destruction of the rainforest. *The Guardian* revealed in 2020 that British banks and finance houses had given more than \$2 billion to Brazilian beef corporations implicated in deforestation.

Of course, although the implications of the Amazon's destruction affect the entire planet, they are most keenly felt by the indigenous peoples whose territories are being stolen and destroyed and whose human rights are being routinely violated. The Brazilian Amazon is home to approximately 25 million people, but it is also the poorest region in Brazil, with the worst socioeconomic indicators. Since coming to power, President Bolsonaro has scaled back enforcement of environmental laws, weakened the power of the federal environmental agencies and removed many of the protections and rights of the indigenous people.

As Sônia Guajajara, the leader of the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, said recently:

"He is committing one crime after another against the peoples of the forest and against the environment."

She says that he is not only a risk to indigenous peoples but that

"it has turned into a global problem, because what he's doing here has an impact on the planet".

As the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) said, so fearful are the indigenous people of Bolsonaro and his policies that they have petitioned the International Criminal Court, asking that an investigation be opened into allegations of human rights abuses.

Sadly, across the world, indigenous people are among the most marginalised groups in society. They have historically faced systematic discrimination in everything from healthcare to education and from work to legal rights. They often have little or no political representation. Routinely, their lands have been seized and they have been forced to relocate when others have decided that they have to. All too often, they face persecution and violence and the destruction of their culture, language and traditional way of life. And the people of the Amazon rainforest are no different.

As Myrna Cunningham, a Nicaraguan woman and president of the Centre for Autonomy and Development of Indigenous People, says:

"Indigenous peoples have a different concept of forests. They are not seen as a place where you take out resources to increase your money—they are seen as a space where we live and that is given to us to protect for the next generations."

Unfortunately, Myrna Cunningham's concept and vision of what the forest is and how it should be used is not shared by everyone. As we have heard, President Bolsonaro, since coming to power, has actively pursued policies that erode protections for indigenous land and the indigenous people of the forest, and make it easier for non-indigenous Brazilians to carry out economic activity in the Amazon. He has attempted to shift more authority away from agencies whose job it is to protect indigenous rights, and handed it over instead to the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply, which has a vested interest in expanding development in the rainforest. During Bolsonaro's first year in power, there was a staggering 135% increase in illegal invasions, illegal logging, land grabbing and other infringements in indigenous areas. According to the Brazilian Government's own figures, the level of deforestation of indigenous land is now higher than it has been in a decade.

Of course, there is a terrible human cost for those communities seen to be standing in the way of so-called progress, as forest clearings frequently result in violence, forced eviction, harassment, intimidation, death threats, arbitrary arrests of community leaders and even murder. Human Rights Watch reported that illegal deforestation and violence in the Amazon were largely being driven by criminal gangs. Twenty-eight people have been murdered, four have faced murder attempts, and there were more than 40 cases of death threats in 2019 alone.

One indigenous reserve that has suffered more than most is the area of the Yanomami, which in one year saw deforestation soar by almost 1,700%, and where there are no fewer than 536 current requests for mining rights. I will conclude with the words of Davi Kopenawa, a spokesman for the Yanomami people, who said:

"The Whites cannot destroy our house for, if they do, things will not end well for the whole world. We are looking after the forest for everyone, not just for the Yanomami and the isolated peoples. We work with our shamans who understand these things well, who possess wisdom that comes from contact with the land."

I just wish more shared that wisdom.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): I am going to shave a few seconds off each of the Front Benchers' speeches to give Mr Shannon a chance, but I ask him to wind up at 3.31.

3.26 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I certainly will; it may not even take me that length of time, but I will do my best to lengthen my speech to six minutes.

First of all, I thank the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) for having set the scene so well on a really important issue. Every one of today's speakers has outlined why the issue is important. We may not live in Brazil, but what happens in Brazil affects us here, which is why the debate is so important, and we look forward to the Minister being able to give us some assurances on the matters that have been raised. It is also always a pleasure to follow my friend and colleague, the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara). There are very few debates in which he and I are on the same side: more often than not, it used to be debates about human rights issues, and today is an example of that. This debate is about human rights, but it is also about what is good for us in the world.

When I was very young—which was not yesterday—I remember one saying that my mother always said to me, which was, “The trees are the lungs of the world.” The Amazon rainforest, with all the massive trees it has, is clearly the lungs of the world as well, so when they are being destroyed to the extent they are, that should affect us all. We should become very concerned about it, bearing in mind that the latest data released by Global Forest Watch found that primary forest loss was 12% higher in 2020 than the year before, including the loss of some 4.2 million hectares—an area the size of the Netherlands—of primary humid tropical forest: in other words, those particular trees were unique to the world. The Minister has already been asked many questions, but will he consider taking appropriate action to reduce demand in our country for the goods resulting from that deforestation? If that happens, and if we are able to join with other countries—the EU, the USA, and much of the western world—we may be able to reduce the level of deforestation, which is really important.

However, this is not just about deforestation: a combination of other things is happening. Vast areas of the Amazon rainforest will be at risk from extreme drought—that is one of the things that is happening at this moment in time—and there is a need for the world to take rapid action to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Whether we are climate change sceptics or believe in it, the reality is that it is happening. Scientists have predicted that the dry season will make things even worse than they already are: the eastern region of the Amazon will become increasingly arid, and it will become increasingly warm as well, putting already vulnerable trees that cannot respond to the drought stress they are already under at risk from forest fires. Many Members have referred to those forest fires: that will be worse for Brazil and the world as well, because carbon dioxide then adds to the greenhouse gas effect. What happens in Brazil affects us here and everywhere else. An international study has found that drought could affect a third of the Amazon by the end of the century, although there could perhaps be more rain in the western Amazon area.

As part of the Amazon dries out, it could turn into a savannah—I think the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) referred to that. There are deep concerns that this drought could be even worse than previously thought, so the Amazon is at risk from deforestation, climate change and drought. That should

be ringing alarm bells for not just our Government but Governments across the world. Vital global resources must not be taken for granted. We must protect and expand forests rather than reduce them. They can absorb and store carbon; there has been much research and model trials on that. The relationship between the water, soil and trees, and the interaction between the atmosphere and the land surface, show strongly that this is truly an emergency.

We need to encourage Brazil to reduce the deforestation and to act to prevent any more loss. We can do that by gentle persuasion, as the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell said, but it may take something more. If it does, and if we are acting for all the world, I have to say that that is something that has to be done.

3.30 pm

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I last spoke on the topic of deforestation in the Amazon less than two years ago, in a Westminster Hall debate prompted by a petition signed by more than 120,000 people. I welcome the fact that we have another opportunity to raise the issue, and I thank the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) for presenting this important debate.

Back in 2019, Extinction Rebellion had just begun its two-week protest in and around Westminster. The shared message that day from MPs in the Chamber, protesters on the streets and the thousands of our constituents who put their names to the petition was that deforestation in the Amazon is one of the great man-made tragedies of our time and that urgent action was required to stop it spiralling out of control.

Sadly, as we have heard in the debate, the urgent action required has not materialised; rather, the situation has become more perilous, with deforestation rates in Brazil hitting a 12-year high in 2020. Many of the fears expressed two years ago that the Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro would, for economic gain, cause environmental destruction have now become reality. It is being reported that deforestation during his Administration is today more than double than in the same period under his predecessor, and just last month deforestation soared by two thirds from the same month last year, according to Brazil's National Institute for Space Research. Furthermore, professors at the National Institute of Amazonian Research have expressed concern that legislative changes currently before the Brazilian Parliament could result in increases in unsustainable deforestation that would have previously been illegal. The World Wildlife Fund has warned that the proposed changes

“will destroy the legal framework that has enabled Brazil to control deforestation in the past, making it impossible to control deforestation in the Amazon for the next decade”.

That matters to us all. The Amazon rainforest is invaluable to our environment and fragile ecosystem, producing as much as 20% of the world's oxygen and acting as a natural carbon capture for vast amounts of greenhouse gas emissions. Deforestation threatens the 30 million people who live there, including up to 400 indigenous groups, and many thousands of plants and animal species. It also threatens to fundamentally hinder attempts to tackle climate change, reversing any progress made so far and contributing to rising global temperatures, with all the devastation that that will bring.

[Chris Law]

The Scottish Government declared a climate emergency in April 2019, followed a month later by the UK Parliament. It is therefore imperative that we collectively do all that we can to combat environmental destruction of natural habitats such as the Amazon rainforest. If we are serious about the climate emergency, we must use every tool available to us to ensure that we lead the international pressure to end this destructive deforestation in the Amazon.

At the leaders' climate summit hosted by US President Joe Biden in April, Jair Bolsonaro vowed that Brazil would become carbon neutral by 2050 and recommitted to net zero deforestation by 2030. However, as we know, that empty rhetoric does not reflect reality. In the first six months of Bolsonaro's term, enforcement measures to protect the Amazon, such as levying fines and destroying logging equipment in protected areas, fell by 20%, and inspection requirements for timber exports have been significantly relaxed. Enforcement agencies have been underfunded and sabotaged, and the 2021 federal budget for the Ministry of Environment and agencies was cut by nearly a third compared with last year. One campaign group put it bluntly, stating:

"The Amazon has become an open bar for land grabbers, illegal loggers and miners."

The Brazilian Environment Minister said the country would need \$1 billion in foreign aid to support efforts to reduce deforestation in the Amazon, while President Biden has previously stated that foreign Governments should provide Brazil with \$20 billion. Will the UK Government therefore reduce their aid cuts and ensure that no projects to prevent deforestation in the Amazon are cancelled and in fact ensure that support is increased? Sadly, we probably know the answer.

We learned just last week that the UK Government cannot be trusted to maintain their commitment to projects vital to our planet's health. Just weeks after the UK's COP26 President visited Indonesia and called on it to move forward with plans to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office cancelled a green growth programme designed to prevent deforestation in the Indonesian Papuan provinces three years into a five-year programme. We urgently need to know the Government's rationale for cancelling that project, what impact assessments have been undertaken and how serious Ministers are about tackling deforestation across the globe. This is a completely scandalous decision that once again highlights the real-life impact that UK aid cuts are having and demonstrates the UK's failing as a leader on the world stage. As with Bolsonaro, this UK Government's rhetoric does not reflect reality.

We need to hear how the UK Government plan to tackle deforestation in the Amazon and how they are co-operating with other Governments around the world to do so. What recent discussions have UK Government Ministers had with their counterparts in Brazil? Will they publicly condemn increasing deforestation, the deliberate underfunding of agencies tasked with protecting the environment and the continued attacks on indigenous people and their land? In any trade talks and agreements with Brazil, will protection of the Amazon be put front and centre to ensure that the UK does not share in the profits of the rainforest's deliberate destruction? Furthermore, do the UK Government agree with several

US Senators that any funding provided to the Brazilian Government should be contingent on their having a clear plan to curb deforestation, including significant and sustained progress in reducing deforestation and, importantly, ending environmental crimes and acts of intimidation and violence against forest defenders? Given the importance of the Amazon rainforest to us all and its role in lowering the global carbon emission footprint, was this even discussed at the recent G7 summit? Will the UK Government commit to this as a priority at COP26 in November?

As Scotland will host COP26 this year in Glasgow, I will now turn my attention to domestic policy and reforestation on these islands. Due to a better, more efficient grant system and strong political will to meet targets, the SNP Government lead the way in the UK on tree planting, with Scotland planting 22 million trees last year alone, making up nearly 85% of the UK's mainland tree planting in 2020. Around 9.5 million tonnes of CO₂ are removed from the atmosphere each year by Scotland's forests. The first quantitative study of its kind in the UK evidenced the natural capital benefits of planting new woodlands in our green recovery, which will help to meet Scotland's goal of net zero by 2045. Given that Scotland is unrivalled in the UK nations for tree planting and environmental protections, the other UK nations ought to follow Scotland's lead and demonstrate to the world through their own practices just how important the protection of forests is to all of us.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Order. Mr Law, you are into your last minute. I am sorry to interrupt you, but the debate is about deforestation in the Amazon. I ask you to come back to that to conclude.

Chris Law: Thank you, Mr McCabe. As the UK Government encourage others to follow suit, they have to do enough domestically to protect the environment and to make sure that we reforest, as well as talking about deforesting. Deforesting will inevitably lead to a need to reforest, because there is a balance, to which we may not be able to return.

Finally, I do not want to have to make these points again in yet another Westminster Hall debate in two years' time, and nor do I want to hear further reports of increasing rates of deforestation, logging, resource mining, tree burning for farming and cattle-raising, or—last but not least—land seizures from indigenous people. I want to speak positively about successful global efforts to protect the Amazon and the people, flora and fauna who call it home. I want to hear about the protection of forests throughout the world and to celebrate reforestation projects across these islands. However, that will happen only if each and every nation takes its responsibilities on reaching net zero and protecting the environment seriously, and if we are vocal and forceful in tackling deforestation head on, not just in the Amazon but everywhere else too. We all know that the Amazon rainforest serves as the lungs of all nations across the world. Therefore, it is imperative that we urgently address this climate emergency together. No nation should be allowed to participate in, or be a bystander to, this self-inflicted damage to the planet.

3.40 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a pleasure to contribute under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe, to this very timely debate secured by the

right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling). There is a great deal of cross-party consensus. I obviously agree with the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) about the aid cuts. I hope the Minister will give an assessment of the impact that the reductions being made by the Department will have on the subject of today's debate.

Without a doubt, the Amazon rainforest is a vital bulwark in the international fight against climate change. It is apt that we are having this debate as the Government prepare to host the critically important conference of the parties climate summit in Glasgow later this year. It is impossible to overstate the importance of the Amazon. It has long been considered a vital carbon sink, and the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) related that to his own experience of farming. Scientists estimate that the vegetation and trees making up the forest contain a staggering 76 billion tonnes of carbon. It is also home to a rich tapestry of wildlife and rivers. It was lovely that my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) and the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) quoted the indigenous leaders, who have spoken with such heartfelt poignancy about their current position.

Despite that, the situation today remains precarious. Some scientists estimate that if we lose just 5% more of the Amazon, it will trigger a tipping point. The forest will no longer be able to sustain itself and we will lose the Amazon as we know it. The warning signs have been there: from 2012 to 2016, there was a 200% increase in carbon loss. Before that, between 1992 and 2014, half a million square kilometres of Brazilian Amazon was either degraded or deforested. Other Members have cited very useful statistics. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) linked what we eat off our plates with the impact it has day in, day out in the Amazon.

Of course, there are no signs that there will be a reversal in fortunes while we have the current Government position in Brazil. Under President Bolsonaro, the Brazilian Parliament is about to improve, with the endorsement of a presidential decree, a legislative package that will alter key environmental legislation. That includes an amnesty for land grabbers and the approval of major infrastructure projects that will see swathes of the forest paved over.

What assessment has the Minister made of the excellent work of the international panel of jurists, chaired by our own Philippe Sands, QC, which has come up with a definition of ecocide as the fifth pillar of the International Criminal Court? Obviously, headings 1 to 4 are the human rights ones that we know well. What assessment has the Minister's Department made of the fifth—the new definition of ecocide? Does she believe that that legal instrument, if it is approved, will be useful in our deliberations on how to manage this crucial question?

As well as the very clear risks of climate change, we must be alive to the human dangers of ongoing and increasing deforestation. That has been so eloquently laid out by Members that I need not repeat it. In the past 18 months, we have become particularly attuned to the danger of pandemics, and there is a very real and clear risk, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North West said, that further deforestation may cause another deadly pandemic. Biologists and epidemiologists have been ringing the alarm about that for some time.

Does the Minister believe that that is an effective use of some of the global health spend in her Department, which I know she is trying hard to protect? Does she think this might be a worthy subject to fund, in terms of global health priorities? This is a moment when we are all focused on the way that coming into close contact with the animal kingdom can lead to deadly viruses such as covid-19. It is a question that desperately needs further research. We have the intellectual firepower here in the UK; I hope that the Minister, as a great champion for universities and the link between global health, universities and foreign policy, will opine on that. The Amazon is thought to be home to 10% of known species on earth, so risk of another zoological pandemic originating from the region could not be starker.

The UK is uniquely positioned to act. Many of us mentioned the global COP summit in Glasgow. What dialogue has the Minister had directly with the ambassador regarding the deforestation question? Did he suggest, as some Brazilian MPs suggested to me, that the Amazon grows back? Could she enlighten us about how that bilateral conversation is going, saying whatever she can say in public?

Turning to the role of the financial sector, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) made a very eloquent speech about our financial centre and the impact of our banks, our insurance and all the other instruments, which we might be able to challenge. I hope that the Treasury will become more activist about that. What protections are the Government putting in place so that trade between the UK and Brazil enshrines environmental and human rights protections during the negotiations? In a trade negotiation, it is amazing how far-reaching the discussions can be. Will the Minister also tell us where she thinks the Department for International Trade is up to in its discussions? I assume that they are at a preliminary stage, but now is a great time to be talking about the issues that we in Parliament are raising. There is no time like the present, especially when we are talking about the environment.

Other hon. Members have spoken so well in the debate, such as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who raised the question of drought. That is another specialism within the new FCDO that I know the Minister has many thoughts on. Has she given any consideration to that?

I want to finish there to give the Minister plenty of time and so that she can perhaps allow a couple of interventions. I thank hon. Members for taking part, and I want to put on record how deeply we care about the environment and our relationship with Brazil. I hope we can all send a message from our Parliament to theirs and when we can travel again I hope we can welcome Brazilian MPs here to discuss this issue in person.

3.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Wendy Morton): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on securing this debate. We have had a very broad debate with a lot of contributions from right across the House. This issue means a lot to my right hon. Friend and quite clearly to Members across the House. It means a lot to me as well. Given the breadth of the debate, I will endeavour to

[Wendy Morton]

answer as many questions as I can. On whether I will have time for interventions, let us see how I canter along, but I will try my best.

Protecting the Amazon is a priority for the UK. The pandemic has been a powerful reminder of the great global challenges that pose an existential threat to our security and prosperity here in the UK. We recognise that in our integrated review of UK foreign policy, in which we said that tackling climate change and biodiversity loss is our No. 1 international priority. Climate change and biodiversity loss are inseparable. We cannot stop climate change without protecting the natural environment, and we cannot protect the natural environment without tackling climate change. Conserving the Amazon is a crucial piece of the puzzle.

As we heard, the Amazon is one of the world's most precious places. It is one of the most biodiverse places on earth. Its role in the global ecosystem, producing oxygen, absorbing carbon dioxide and regulating rainfall and temperatures, is huge. It is home to numerous indigenous people. Around a quarter of all drugs used today are derived from rainforest plants. It is estimated that the Amazon stores almost five years' worth of global emissions of carbon dioxide. If deforestation is allowed to carry on, it will reach a tipping point—potentially in the next 10 years. Unchecked, the Amazon will be turned from carbon sink into source of emissions. That is one of the gravest risks that the world faces. It is a critical time for action on climate change, as we prepare to host COP26 in November. We know there is no path to net zero without a massive escalation of efforts to protect and restore nature, and crucially to protect the Amazon.

As President of COP26 and recently President of the G7, we have put nature at the heart of our response to tackling climate change. The leaders' 2030 Nature Compact set out G7 ambition to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, highlighting nature's role in tackling climate change; tackling deforestation through supporting sustainable supply chains; and participating in the COP26 forest, agriculture and commodity trade dialogue.

The problems with deforestation do not stop with climate or biodiversity. There is a strong link with security. Across the Amazon, illegal deforestation is inseparably bound up with criminal organisations. They operate transnationally, trafficking wood, minerals, drugs and people. Tackling illegal deforestation is vital, whether through alternative livelihoods or law enforcement co-operation. More than anything, it requires strong and principled political leadership.

It is not a challenge for any one country or even one region alone. The world's tropical forests benefit all of us, and all countries have a shared responsibility as consumers and producers alike. The furniture we buy and the food that we eat can make a difference. We know that to protect the Amazon we need to support the efforts of countries in the region. There are three that contain more than three quarters of the forest between them: Brazil, Colombia and Peru. We cannot achieve our aims without Brazil, and I welcome Brazil's recommitment to zero deforestation in the Amazon by 2030, which it announced at the Earth Day summit this year.

We are eager to see the robust implementation plans that Brazil will need to deliver on that commitment. We are using our diplomatic capabilities and ODA programming to encourage the Brazilian Government to recommit to implementing and enforcing the Brazilian forest code, which is an important legal mechanism for protecting the Amazon rainforest. For Brazil, setting out those plans will bring advantages. It will shore up investor and consumer confidence and unlock private sector financial flows.

We are working at a national level with Brazil and with individual regions, for example, supporting the state of Mato Grosso to reduce deforestation, through our climate finance programmes. Brazil needs to tackle its problems of deforestation urgently, and we are closely watching the rates of deforestation and Brazil's actions, as the dry season approaches.

A number of hon. Members referred to vulnerable communities and indigenous peoples. We are engaging with state Governments and local authorities. We have a results-based agreement with the states of Mato Grosso and Acre, which helps indigenous communities to develop sustainable income sources, and strengthen food security. Around 20,000 families have benefited so far.

Through the ICF partnerships for forests programme, the UK also supports almost 2,000 indigenous people, to strengthen their livelihoods through sustainable forest management. Our embassy international programme works to better understand the needs of indigenous peoples, supporting vulnerable communities during the pandemic.

As we ask other countries to act on climate change, it is only right that we make our own commitments. We have committed to double our international climate finance to £11.6 billion over the next five years, and to invest at least £3 billion of that in solutions that protect and restore nature. We are engaging the multilateral development banks and asking them to put nature first across all their work, and to support countries to fulfil their environmental commitments.

As we announced at President Biden's climate summit, we are helping to build the Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest finance coalition, which aims to mobilise \$1 billion in financing. It will kick off what is expected to become one of the largest ever public-private efforts to protect tropical forests and support sustainable development.

Reducing our footprint overseas is critical to that development. This year, through the forest, agriculture and commodity trade dialogue, we are bringing together the biggest producers and consumers of the commodities that drive deforestation—cocoa, cattle, soy and palm oil. Together with those countries and co-chair Indonesia, we are agreeing actions to protect forests and other carbon-rich ecosystems, such as the Amazon, while promoting trade and development.

Catherine West: While the Minister is speaking about the private-public partnerships, could she comment on the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) on the banking—financial—sector, which we are famous for, so that it is a virtual circle?

Wendy Morton: I am about to come on to that point. In May, our joint statement, drafted with the 24 signatory countries on collaboration, was endorsed by critical

Amazon countries, such as Brazil, Colombia and Peru. I have talked about a responsibility to reduce our impact at home. We are bringing forward a law that will make it illegal for larger businesses in the UK to use forest risk commodities produced on land used illegally. That will make sure there is no place for illegally produced commodities on our supermarket shelves, and support other countries to enforce their own forest protection measures. At the same time, we are working with UK businesses to improve the sustainability of their soy and palm oil supply chains through roundtables on these.

On the point raised by the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) about the importance of engaging with the financial sector on deforestation, the UK Government are funding a phase 2 global resource initiative taskforce, tasked specifically to make recommendations on addressing deforestation and linked finance. It will report with recommendations to the Government in the autumn.

Those initiatives are helping UK supermarkets and restaurants reach 100% sustainable soy and palm oil to reduce the UK's environmental footprint overseas. Alongside that engagement with businesses, we urgently need financial decision making and investments to take account of nature. The launch of the taskforce on nature-related financial disclosure this month marks an important milestone in that process and builds on our leadership in green finance.

Chris Grayling: All the Minister has described is part of a great step forward in the policies of the UK Government, and I commend them. However, the reality is the urgency of what is happening in the Amazon is serious. I encourage the Minister, and her colleagues in the Foreign Office and diplomatic service, to step up the pressure. Does she agree that we cannot afford to wait to stop the deforestation in Brazil? Will she commit to telling the diplomatic service to step up what it does

with the Brazilians, and look at other ways of putting pressure on them to bring this to a halt as quickly as possible?

Wendy Morton: My right hon. Friend makes an important point, and reminds us of the importance of climate change. We do engage with the Brazilians. The Foreign Secretary recently discussed with the Brazilian Foreign Minister how we can work more constructively together to deliver COP26 objectives. UK Ministers and diplomats in Brasilia routinely engage with the highest levels of the Brazilian Government, on this and many other important items. Protecting the Amazon is critical if we are to tackle climate change and restore nature, and for long-term prosperity in the region. The UK is working closely with our partners there to support their efforts to reduce deforestation and protect the Amazon.

3.59 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): With a few seconds left, I thank the Minister for her remarks and colleagues on all sides for joining in this debate. We need to keep the pressure up. The simple message for the Minister to take back to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is that this is urgent, it is accelerating, we cannot afford for it to carry on, and we have to use every tool at our disposal, whether small or large, to bring it to an end as quickly as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered deforestation in the Amazon.

3.59 pm

Sitting suspended.

Levelling-up Bids: North Somerset

4.5 pm

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that they should clean their spaces before they use them and as they leave, and that Mr Speaker has recommended that we wear masks.

I call John Penrose to move the motion.

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered levelling up bids in North Somerset.

It is good to have you in charge of our process, Mr McCabe. It is also good to see my fellow Somerset MP and constituency neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), who is here to support the debate and is expecting to speak later, as well as the Minister, who I hope will respond fully and positively to some of my questions and provide reassurances during the course of the debate.

The debate is about North Somerset Council's bids last week for both the levelling-up fund and the community renewal fund. The bid documentation is somewhere in the bowels of the Minister's Department and is being gone through in huge detail, so I do not propose to take up an enormous amount of time by dwelling on what it says, other than to summarise briefly and say that my right hon. Friend and I strongly support both bids. It is quite noticeable that, at the moment, North Somerset Council is being run by a rainbow coalition, which is political speak for anybody except the Tories, yet here we are—my right hon. Friend and I, as the two local Conservative Members of Parliament—supporting the bids too. This is a cross-party, non-party political and pretty much unanimous set of proposals, which we urge the Minister to take very seriously indeed.

It is true that Weston has come an extraordinarily long way in recent years. Since I was elected 16 years ago, the place has become unrecognisably better, but even its most ardent supporters—I put myself right at the front of the queue—would say that we still have a great deal more that has to be done. The two bids for the levelling-up fund and the community renewal fund are a key part of taking the next steps in North Somerset's journey overall, but particularly Weston-super-Mare's journey.

Without going into too much detail about what is in the detail of the bids, I will highlight three main areas. One is the renewal of our local heritage assets. Weston-super-Mare was primarily built during the Victorian seaside town heyday, and it has some beautiful architecture. It has many beautiful bits of local heritage to it, with some of it going back much further than the Victorian era—for example, there is an iron-age hill fort. However, renewing those assets and making current use of them, so that they can continue to be used and looked after—they should be part of the town's future, not just its past—is essential. That is a key part of the bid. They give the place its character and its sense of place, and are an absolutely essential part of the bid.

Equally, the bid involves a whole series of proposals for more festivals, activities and attractions—everything from street theatre to buskers—in order to create a sense of theatre, a sense of dynamism and a buzzing

atmosphere, which will make the place great not just for local residents to visit and live. As we are a seaside town and a visitor destination, that will also make it a great place for visitors. Of course, visitors have traditionally been one of the town's lifeblood industries, because we are a tourist destination, so that is an essential piece of the bids.

Last but not least, the bid dovetails with the Weston place-making strategy, which means that we have input from local businesses and residents, and from the council, to try to ensure that Weston as a location has a sustainable mix but also a balanced mix of reasons to live there, to visit there and to do business there and create wealth. The place-making strategy is essential, and it is also a key part of what the council has put together for the two bids.

So, if the bid is so flipping brilliant, why am I worried, why have I asked for this debate and why do we have the pleasure of the Minister's company this afternoon? The answer is very simple. It is that in spite of the quality of the bid and of the cross-party backing that I mentioned earlier, there is one fly in the ointment. It is that, as the Minister will know, North Somerset Council as a whole—the entire district—is currently designated as a priority 2 area for both the funds that we are bidding into. It is not a priority 1 area, but a priority 2 area. Potentially, that is a problem because it might demote us in terms of the importance—even the urgency—and eligibility of our bids for those funds.

I am here to argue today that that designation is actually a mistake—or it would be a mistake if it were to happen—simply because North Somerset as a district overall is a place of stark contrasts. The constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset is one of the wealthiest constituencies in the country, whereas, to put it simply, my constituency of Weston-super-Mare is not.

For example, we can compare my constituency with two neighbouring district council areas, both of which are designated as priority 1 areas. I am sure that the Minister will be familiar with them; they are Sedgemoor District Council and Mendip District Council. They are right next door to the town of Weston-super-Mare. They are almost identical in terms of their populations to the population of my constituency as a whole. So, if my constituency was a district council, it would be pretty much the same size as they both are. Yet my constituency has a higher proportion of people claiming benefits than either of those two priority 1 areas, even though my area is technically designated as a priority 2 area.

My constituency has a lower healthy life expectancy than either of those two neighbouring districts, even though they are designated as priority 1 areas and my area is designated as priority 2. My constituency has a worse average travel time to employment than either of those two districts, even though they are designated as priority 1 and my area is designated as priority 2.

So I hope the Minister will understand why I am concerned. If my constituency was a stand-alone piece of geography, and not part of the broader North Somerset Council area, we would easily qualify as a priority 1 area. However, because of the accident of postcodes, if I can put it that way, and because of the averaging effect, we do not qualify as a priority 1 area. Of course, that is not to say that the need in my constituency of

Weston-super-Mare is not extremely serious or, indeed, every bit as serious as that in the other district councils I have mentioned, both of which are priority 1 areas.

I will go further and say that I have just given the Minister the figures for my constituency as a whole. Within my constituency, the situation is even starker. If we look at two wards in the centre of the constituency, Weston-super-Mare South and Weston-super-Mare Central, they have indices of multiple deprivation that would rank them in the top—or worst, depending on how we look at it—3% or 4% of wards in the entire country; in fact, parts of one of them are in the worst 2%. They are equivalent to anywhere else that is right at the top of the priority 1 areas. It is not just that we would scrape into priority 1 area designation: we would be right at the top of the Minister's list of concerns, and rightly so, because of those indices of multiple deprivation scores.

So, what do both I and my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset hope to hear from the Minister when he gets to his feet in a minute? The answer is very simple. We hope to hear from him that he is able to give strong weighting to those overall scores—scores that are at a more detailed and more granular level than the scores for the district as a whole—when assessing the bid. As I mentioned right at the start, I hope that it will qualify under its own steam in any case.

We do not want a strong and capable bid to be disallowed because of an accident of postcode and because of the averaging effect. I hope, therefore, that the Minister will be able to reassure me and the residents of the constituency of Weston-super-Mare that that will not be the case, and that the bureaucratic process can be bent and manipulated sufficiently within the rules to allow the genuine need—as shown by the genuine levels of multiple deprivation—to be properly taken account of when these bids are finally totalled up.

If the Minister can do that, I may not be able to guarantee that we will erect a small statue in his name somewhere in the middle of Weston-super-Mare, but I can at least promise him that we will easily be able to carry him shoulder high along the Weston seafront, given the importance of the bids to the people of Weston-super-Mare. I will now sit down to make sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset has an opportunity to add to what I have already said and to explain the perspective from the other part of the North Somerset district council area.

4.15 pm

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): I am here to support the case made by my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose). I am all too aware that my constituency does not qualify for money from the levelling-up fund and we have only a small chance of getting any money from the community renewal fund, but I am here to give my support for two reasons: first, the generic, and secondly, the specific.

On the generic case, too often in our country, as many of us will attest from our time in Parliament, areas of deprivation that happen to be in the same district or constituency as areas of relative affluence can disappear in the data. The sensitivity and specificity of the data can mean that they do not show up at all. That is certainly the case with the town of Weston-super-Mare, where, as my hon. Friend has said, the data is very clear. However, if we add the data of the rest of the parliamentary

constituency, we see that it is not at all clear, and if we then add the data from the rest of the North Somerset district—which, as he has said, includes my constituency, one of the most affluent in the country—it can all but disappear.

When we consider the differences in Weston-super-Mare itself, we find that the unemployment rate is twice that of my constituency next door. The health profile of my constituency is much better than that of Weston-super-Mare. Income is higher and the quality of jobs is better.

Lest anyone thinks that this is a case of pure altruism, let me turn to the specifics. Given that Weston-super-Mare is the biggest town in our district, its status matters. It gets many more tourists than places such as Clevedon, which is a very well-kept, upmarket Victorian tourist town in my constituency. Most visitors, however, go to Weston-super-Mare, and the quality of the services they receive is important to the status of the district as a whole.

It is also very important that, just because someone lives in a relatively poor part of a wealthy area, they must not be disregarded. I have often felt that the two things that nobody in this country wants to be is poor in a rich area or sick in a healthy area, because when it comes to services, they tend to be not ignored but not seen by those who plan public provision. Therefore, this debate is important for all the reasons that my hon. Friend has set out today and for the purposes to which the money could be put. Although my constituents recognise that they would not benefit directly from the money, they would benefit indirectly by the improved status that Weston-super-Mare could enjoy.

In conclusion, given that this is being done on a constituency basis, one of my councillors asked, “Why won't our constituency get levelling-up money?” I had to point out to him that it is the status of our constituency, as demonstrated by many of the indicators, that people are levelling up to. It is not something to level up from. I can therefore say, with the greatest sincerity, that we are completely as one—including our council, whose leadership does not share our political views—in believing that this would benefit all of the people in North Somerset, whether they be direct recipients of the money or indirect recipients of the benefits it would achieve. I say to my hon. Friend the Minister that the bids to both the levelling-up fund and the community renewal fund are entirely cross-district bids, for all the reasons set out so eloquently by my constituency neighbour. I hope that the Minister will take fully into account the point that deficiencies in the sensitivity and specificity of data should not mean that, just because someone happens to be poor in a wealthy area, they are not seen by this Government.

4.20 pm

The Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government

(Luke Hall): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr McCabe. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose) on securing this debate. He spoke with eloquence and passion about the importance of supporting his constituency and the need to level up in Weston-super-Mare. His desire to support his community is shared by all parts and corners of this Government and certainly by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

[*Luke Hall*]

Levelling up is a crucial part of our Government's agenda. We are committed to unlocking economic prosperity across all parts of the United Kingdom. That is why we will publish the levelling-up White Paper later this year. We will set out bold policy interventions to improve livelihoods and opportunities in all parts and all corners of the country. It will set out the next steps in our plan to enable more people to get on in life without feeling that they have to leave their hometown or home community just to get the job or types of services they want.

We want to address these long-standing geographical inequalities. We want to deliver economic opportunity and improve livelihoods in all parts of the country so that, wherever someone is born, they have the chance to achieve what they want to in life. That means creating new, good-quality jobs. It means boosting training, productivity and skills in places that have seen economic decline and the loss of industry, and not through a broad, one-size-fits-all approach, but by nurturing different types of economic growth and building on the strengths that different types of places and communities have.

Nowhere is more important in these types of conversations and debates than places such as Weston-super-Mare. We have heard about how skills and wages lag behind the average in the south-west and many other different parts of the country. That is why the levelling-up fund as a concept is such an important vehicle for investing in communities just like Weston-super-Mare. We want to work with councils such as North Somerset Council to invest in the type of everyday infrastructure that my hon. Friend outlined, regenerating town centres and high streets, investing in transport and supporting cultural and heritage assets right around the country. That is a key part of the levelling-up agenda. It is about local communities and councils such as North Somerset determining and identifying their own priorities and using the funds as vehicles to develop and submit proposals and to level up in their area. It is about empowering communities.

The deadline for bids was last Friday. We have received significant interest from right around the country. The assessment process is just starting, but of course we were delighted that North Somerset submitted its bid last week.

We have heard some information about the proposal this afternoon and it is important for us to assess its impact. It is interesting to hear about the transformation of the pier building and the Tropicana Weston, two of the historic buildings that bookend the north and south end of the pier, which is so important to the town and to the regional tourism economy. It is also about bringing back into use vacant spaces in the main shopping area in Weston, helping to create new employment spaces and enhanced wayfinding and connections through the town centre.

I completely understand the passion and importance associated with these bids. I understand my hon. Friend's belief in them, his desire for them to succeed and the importance he places on the potential to transform Weston's future, enabling economic growth, improving the town's economic resilience and tackling deprivation.

The bids focus on regeneration, town centre improvements, cultural assets and transport improvements. They accurately reflect the themes of what we are trying

to achieve with the fund, so I thank North Somerset for its bids. I also thank my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) for their support for them and for making clear how important they are to the community. I hope they understand that I cannot comment too much further on the bid itself today. However, we will certainly work to the timescales set out in the prospectus, ensuring that the decisions are delivered in a timely way.

On the levelling-up fund's methodology, the bids will be assessed against the criteria set out in the prospectus and the strongest bids will be shortlisted. My hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend note that Weston-super-Mare, which is part of North Somerset, falls into category 2, despite it having similar characteristics to a number of category 1 places. When we designed the fund we tried to purposely make sure that councils are able to target the pockets of deprivation within their local authorities, as my hon. Friend has identified.

In the case of North Somerset's bid, two supportive MPs have helped to shape a bid within a council area, as will be noted as part of the process. The bid aims to tackle the most deprived part of the local authority area. That is noted as part of the assessment process. We will look at how the bid addresses challenges in the town and whether they relate to issues to do with health, unemployment or the availability of well-paid jobs for people living in Weston-super-Mare. The focus on tackling deprivation in Weston is in line with the objectives of the fund.

The methodology that sits behind the index of places is set out in the prospectus that we published on gov.uk. It is based on the metrics covering places' need for economic recovery, regeneration and improved transport connectivity, as clearly identified by my hon. Friend in his speech. Those metrics do not determine either the outcome of the bid or the place's eligibility to bid. Again, we certainly take account of the fact that two Members of Parliament have supported the bid, targeted at a pocket of deprivation. I do not know if that warrants a statue in Weston-super-Mare—a sandcastle, perhaps.

My hon. Friend also raised a point about the indices of multiple deprivation and asked about them not being included in the methodology of the fund. That is an important point. We considered looking at the IMD as part of the index, but it is important to consider that IMD does not represent in all circumstances a one-size-fits-all approach to measuring economic need. It does not completely accurately reflect, in this circumstance, the policy outcomes of the fund that we have established, which is about transport, high street and cultural regeneration. There are some things that IMD does not consider—for example, productivity. Raising productivity is a key part of what the fund is trying to address. Therefore, IMD was considered but we think that the way in which the indexation was set up is ultimately right.

My hon. Friend also referenced the UK community renewal fund, which is another important funding stream that this Government are delivering. We think it will improve the overall funding landscape available to places like Weston-super-Mare. We have tried to establish a one-year transition programme that is free of some of the shackles and bureaucracy of the EU structural funds, to allow places to design bids to tackle the problems that they identify. The £220 million fund will be available to communities next year.

We have received North Somerset's £2.8 million bid. It includes a number of employment-based bids, including tailored support for jobseekers in the most deprived communities. That will be noted. Among the proposals is a financial inclusion project, a network of community hubs in rural areas and targeted business support, so we were interested to receive that. It sets out how, taken together, these will all work to create new education and training opportunities that will lead to the establishment of new local businesses and help to steer people towards the right employment and education opportunities.

I want to highlight the importance of the role of Members of Parliament in this process. This debate is a prime example of the way in which we have designed the fund to put such importance on Members of Parliament coming together, bringing communities together, including local authorities and local stakeholders, and acting as facilitators in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare and my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset have highlighted that they have managed to do that in Weston-super-Mare, working together to tackle the challenges in the way they have outlined. We have given MPs the opportunity to write formally in support of bids, and we have received that letter from my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend.

John Penrose: The Minister is being very helpful and is showing that his Department is already getting to grips with the details behind the bids, so I thank him for his remarks so far. Could he just make sure that in the five minutes or so that are left, he focuses on the point about priority areas? He has been helpful on that topic, but I am still not quite clear whether starting from a priority area 2 designation automatically relegates us to being a long way down the list of projects being considered, or whether the other factors that I have talked about and which he has also mentioned—very carefully and fulsomely—will allow us to vault up the list of eligible projects and get a better showing in the eventual decisions on allocations.

Luke Hall: It is really important to say that that indexation is just one part of the wider assessment process. Yes, the categorisation—category 2 in this case—is taken into account, but the assessment also takes into account a number of other factors, such as the support of Members of Parliament. I think it is really noteworthy that two Members of Parliament are backing a bid that is targeted at the areas of deprivation. I urge my hon. Friend to look at the information on gov.uk, which clearly sets out that the categorisation is just one part of the assessment process. Yes, the weighting has an impact, but so do the bid's strategic fit, deliverability and value for money. Those are all important parts of the process. It is not solely determined by the categorisation level 2.

I would also like to remark on the importance of other investment in North Somerset, outside of just those two streams of funding. Across the south-west,

the Government are investing over £400 million in the region through the getting building fund, the future high streets fund, and the towns fund, which is delivering so much for the south-west. If we look at the business support that we have put into North Somerset, for example, we see £73 million of support for businesses and business grants. We have also ensured that Weston has benefited from the getting building fund. I think it is receiving a £1.7 million investment in the town centre, as part of the wider £13.5 million package across the area, for shovel-ready projects in Weston.

The need for regeneration and investment in the high street is also evident in so many of our communities. The funding that has been allocated is already going to be supporting the vacant Weston General Stores site, creating new work spaces for entrepreneurs, micro-manufacturing, events and community spaces. That will help to breathe huge new life into the town centre as well, so that is not to be underestimated. Residents can also look forward to the reopening of the Portishead rail line for the first time in 50 years. That is going to be a vital transport link between North Somerset and the surrounding employment areas.

Of course, these interventions—the levelling-up fund, the community renewal fund, the getting building fund and the other policies I have outlined—build on the £200 million we have invested across the wider area in recent years to support housing, skills and transport. That includes the two state-of-the-art training centres providing work-focused education at Weston College, the almost £12 million with which we have supported the Food Works innovation centre near Weston—a regional centre of excellence in that growing sector—and the major town centre transport improvements, including new cycle and pedestrian links across the town centre. There is huge investment in the region, and in Weston-super-Mare as well.

I hope that some of my remarks have helped reassure my hon. Friend that a number of factors go into the assessment of this bid, and it is not just the category place that determines the outcome. I very much look forward to seeing all the detail of the bid. We have had a number of them and we now have to look through them in detail. I know that he is as passionate as I am about levelling up in communities in the south-west and, of course, in Weston. As we have set out, we want every community to have the opportunity to shape its own future through locally designed solutions. I very much look forward to working with him on doing that as we look forward to the road to recovery for Weston-super-Mare.

Question put and agreed to.

4.35 pm

Sitting suspended.

Green Energy in the North-west

4.50 pm

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members participating physically and virtually that they must arrive for the start of a debate and remain for the entire debate. Members participating virtually must leave their camera on for the duration of a debate, so that they are visible at all times both to one another and to us in the Boothroyd Room. If Members attending virtually have any technical problems, please email the Westminster Hall Clerks; the email address is westminsterhallclerks@parliament.uk.

Members attending physically should clean their spaces before they use them and before they leave the room. I 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 sit in the Public Gallery if they cannot find a seat in the horseshoe. Members may speak only from the horseshoe where there are microphones. Members not on the call list may intervene from the horseshoe but should not take the place of someone on the call list, as they have priority. After Mick Whitley has made his speech, I will impose a four-and-a-half minute time limit on speeches.

4.51 pm

Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab) [V]: I beg to move,

That this House has considered green energy in the North West.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I am immensely grateful to hon. Members for participating in this important debate. I thank the Minister for joining us and the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead). I am aware of his decades-long interest in this issue, and warmly welcome the depth of knowledge and experience that he brings to the debate.

I secured this debate because I believe that by pioneering a just transition away from fossil fuels, we have the potential not only to curb the very worst excesses of climate meltdown but to breathe new life into left-behind towns such as my constituency. Massive investment in renewable energies, low-carbon hydrogen and the retrofitting of homes has the power to create hundreds of thousands of jobs nationwide. That will bring badly needed investment to communities that have been ignored by Westminster for far too long. That could restore hope to young people with the offer of all-energy apprenticeships, a range of vocational training opportunities and, above all, dignified and well-paid jobs.

The north-west is perfectly placed to lead the transition to a renewable and low-carbon energy source. After all, our region was the cradle of the first industrial revolution. Our factories, foundries and shipyards gave birth to the industrialised world and, with it, today's climate crisis. To paraphrase the Mayor of Greater Manchester, it is fitting that the north-west should once again be in the vanguard of a new industrial revolution—this time, a clean one. We already have all the key building blocks needed for this historic transition, from a highly developed renewables sector to world-leading carbon capture and storage capacities, our fantastic knowledge and economy and, most importantly, communities and leaders committed to tackling the climate emergency head-on.

My worry is that the Government's decarbonisation strategy lacks the ambition and vision to deliver climate or economic justice for the people of the north-west. Analysis from Carbon Brief suggests that that 10-point plan unveiled last year would deliver just 80% of the cuts to carbon emissions required to meet the fourth and fifth carbon budgets. The Industrial Strategy Council has described the plan as

“not yet a...roadmap for delivering Net Zero.”

I am concerned that the Government's sequential approach to creating low-carbon clusters risks leaving the north-west behind. We desperately need a coherent national strategy for green investment that could benefit all the UK's regions and nations. We must be far more ambitious, not just in the speed and scale of decarbonisation but by recognising the huge potential for creating jobs. The needs of communities such as Birkenhead must sit at the heart of our decarbonisation plans. That is not to say that I disagree with the Government's proposals in their entirety. The plan is right to recognise the vital role that blue and green hydrogen can play in helping to meet net zero goals, especially in the hard-to-reach sectors of the economy such as steel, international shipping and aviation.

Low-carbon hydrogen does not just have a role to play in delivering a greener, cleaner economy for future generations. It also has the potential to create up to 75,000 jobs within the next 15 years, as well as contributing £18 billion to the British economy. The Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult centre estimates that the UK could earn up to £48 billion a year from hydrogen exports to Europe by 2050. That means that the green industrial revolution and the post-pandemic economic recovery are partners, not enemies.

The Government's stated ambition of achieving 5 GW of low-carbon hydrogen production capacity by 2030 is welcome, but as a nation we must go further and faster. Last year, Germany pledged €9 billion to the development of low-carbon hydrogen, while France committed €7.2 billion. The UK risks falling far behind our neighbours in Europe.

Already, Merseyside is beginning to benefit from the development of a low-carbon hydrogen economy. Thanks to the hard work of the metro Mayor, Steve Rotherham, and the head of low carbon, Mark Knowles, Liverpool has become the first city in the north of England to trial hydrogen buses, with the St Helens BOC plant acting as a new refuelling facility. Meanwhile, INEOS Runcorn is helping to make the north-west a centre of green hydrogen production. It is a member of both the North West Hydrogen Alliance and Net Zero North West.

Low-carbon hydrogen can help to decarbonise our homes and offices. That is why I am a strong supporter of HyNet North West, which is attempting to develop a low-carbon hydrogen network stretching from north Wales across the Dee to Liverpool, Greater Manchester and Lancashire. HyNet estimates that it will be able to deliver 35% of the UK's gigawatt hydrogen target by 2025 and will deliver enough carbon capture and storage capacity for 10 million tonnes of carbon dioxide by 2030. It is estimated that that project could create 6,000 permanent jobs and contribute about £17 billion of gross value added to the regional economy by 2050.

The Government should be doing more to encourage hydrogen as a domestic heating source. That begins by encouraging demand by phasing out the sale of natural

gas boilers in much the same way as they are ending the sale of ICE—internal combustion engine—vehicles, and it means giving low and middle-income homeowners the financial support that they need to buy low-carbon alternatives such as heat pumps or hydrogen-ready boilers. I ask the Minister to give serious consideration to the proposals that HyNet submitted to the green recovery challenge fund, to accelerate mains replacement in Merseyside and Greater Manchester. With an additional £250 million of funding, HyNet could deliver a hydrogen-ready network about five years ahead of the current programme.

The advent of green hydrogen and electric vehicles will double UK electricity consumption by 2050. The question of how we meet that increased demand is pivotal. In recent years, offshore wind has undoubtedly been renewable energy's greatest success story, producing more and more clean electricity every year. In the north-west, a gigawatt of capacity has already been installed. That is enough to meet the needs of more than 1 million households. The Burbo Bank wind farm in Liverpool bay alone produces enough electricity to power 80,000 homes, and its continued expansion is likely to bring increased work and investment to towns such as mine.

We should celebrate the amazing advances in offshore wind capabilities, but we should be careful that the industry's successes are not allowed to blow away other forms of renewable energy, which may be essential to meeting the soaring demand for clean electricity in the coming decades. I am concerned that the lion's share of contract for difference funding is going to offshore wind, with other industries missing out.

The Government are doing too little to cultivate the development of wave and tidal power. It is estimated that half of Europe's wave and tidal power resources are in the UK. With the potential to meet a fifth of UK electricity demand and create 16,000 British jobs, and with 80% of the specialist supply chain located in the UK, investments in tidal power have the potential to create jobs across the engineering and manufacturing sectors. In Merseyside, the proposed Mersey tidal project could generate four times more electricity than the entire offshore wind capacity in Liverpool bay. That is enough to power 1 million homes, as well as creating work on both sides of the river.

Despite that enormous potential, there is not a single mention of tidal power in the 10-point plan. The 2020 energy White Paper stated merely that the Government would consider the role of tidal power in helping us meet the net zero objectives. That is simply not good enough.

I appreciate that the up-front costs of such a project are immense, but they are well worth it. I also recognise that we must give serious consideration to the ecological impact of such developments. We need to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises in tandem—clean energy cannot come at the expense of vulnerable natural habitats—but I agree with the Environmental Audit Committee that many benefits of tidal power, including its predictable and reliable energy output, more than justify the initial expense.

As someone who spent 27 on the shop floor of a Vauxhall car plant, it would be remiss of me not to mention the car industry. The electric vehicle revolution has the potential to revitalise an industry that has been devastated by the pandemic, but only with the unequivocal backing of Westminster. The Government must be far more ambitious in their vision for British car making,

beginning with a commitment to the construction of three more gigafactories, to be in operation by 2025. I am sure my hon. Friends from Merseyside and Cheshire will join me in saying that the first of those should be in Ellesmere Port.

I look forward to the contributions of all hon. Members. I am aware that time is short, so I will conclude my remarks. The scale of the crisis we face demands a total transformation of our energy system. That will have profound implications for every part of our lives, from how we heat our homes to how we travel and power our economy. I am sure that that will be reflected in a diversity of contributions. Although I believe we should be honest about the scale of the challenge we face, we should equally embrace the enormous opportunities that a just transition to green energy affords us and our communities.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): We will have a four-and-a-half minute time limit from now.

5.1 pm

Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) on bringing forward this very important debate.

I believe that the growing green-energy sector in the north-west and north Wales is integral to the success of our region. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Mersey Dee North Wales, I am committed to supporting it in any way that I can. I am also pleased to be holding a local COP26 summit in my constituency this coming Friday.

Green energy infrastructure will increasingly provide direct and indirect employment, help establish the region as a centre for technological development and contribute to the UK-wide goal of net zero carbon emissions by 2050. My comments today will be almost entirely positive, but I want to put on the record my concern that significant work has yet to take place to begin to decarbonise the region's transport. Travel in the area predominantly takes place by car, but there is currently a distinct lack of electric-vehicle charging infrastructure. Although many of the elements in the Government's 10-point plan provide our region with an outstanding set of opportunities, it is important that we are not left behind on that issue.

There is also particular work to be done to achieve a modal shift from road to rail, and achieving that will require investment in rail infrastructure, as per the Growth Track 360 plan, and the decarbonisation of the existing network. The Irish sea is home to a number of offshore windfarms, including North Hoyle, Rhyl Flats, Burbo Bank and Gwynt y Môr, for which an extension, Awel y Môr, is currently being sought. Round 4 of the Crown Estate's leasing programme proposes the development of three new areas of seabed between north Wales and the Isle of Man, possibly with new floating turbine technology. The region is also home to a significant nuclear sector cluster, known as the north west nuclear arc. It remains extremely important that attempts are made to deliver a Wylfa Newydd nuclear power station on Anglesey.

I am extremely pleased that the north-west is one of the Government's industrial super-places. Critical to that is the work of HyNet, which aims to be the world's first low-carbon industrial cluster, serving north-west

[*Dr James Davies*]

England and north-east Wales. HyNet will convert natural gas to hydrogen at Stanlow, with carbon dioxide being successfully captured and stored in the former hydrocarbon fields in Liverpool bay, just off my constituency. I have engaged positively with HyNet representatives about their work, and I very much hope that when my right hon. Friend the Minister is discussing the Government's cluster sequencing decision before 25 October, she looks favourably on HyNet North West.

Our region is also blessed with a lengthy coastline. The Morlais project in Anglesey is a tidal-flow demonstration zone, while tidal-range projects are increasingly of interest. One tidal lagoon has been proposed between Colwyn bay and Prestatyn, while another would be located in the Dee estuary at Mostyn. I know that there is huge interest also in the Mersey.

Tidal range has the potential to offer plentiful and reliable energy over the course of an exceptional operating life, while providing a valuable coastal flood-defence function in many cases. The UK's world-leading tidal resource and expertise across finance, engineering and construction offer a significant opportunity for this alternative renewable energy source to help to reach our requirements while creating jobs and growth in priority regions such as ours.

The Tidal Range Alliance on behalf of the whole industry recently submitted a request for £20 million of grant funding to undertake pre-feasibility assessments of the most promising tidal-range projects and key staging technologies and constraints. In addition to my ask on HyNet, I would be grateful, therefore, if the Minister would look favourably on the proposed tidal-range assessment fund, as I believe it could pay dividends. Our region will be critical in leading the way on green energy.

5.6 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I, too, thank my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) for securing this really important debate for us in the north-west of England.

My remarks are about how a UK invention made in the north-west has exciting potential to reduce carbon emissions across the world, create green energy and generate thousands of skilled jobs and apprenticeships here at home. I am referring to a cutting-edge piece of geothermal technology called the geo-engine, based in my hon. Friend's constituency. The creators of the geo-engine have been meeting with north-west MPs to try to secure support for their technology. By supporting them in bringing this world-leading technology to market the Government could show the world that the UK's words are matched by its actions when it comes to helping the world to meet its emissions targets. It would be a clear example on which the COP26 President, the right hon. Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma), could draw as the UK hosts the conference in November.

I am pleased that the Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), is in her place and I look forward to her response. She might recall that in a written answer to me on 7 June, she said:

"The geo-engine could help achieve the ambitious decarbonisation targets set in the North Sea Transition Deal for offshore gas published by BEIS in March."

I was expecting her to see the wider benefits of the technology. I hope that she will be able to acknowledge the benefits that the geo-engine has to offer when she winds up the debate, and perhaps meet my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead, the inventors of the geo-engine and me so that we can look at how it can be rolled out globally from the home of the north-west of England.

Let me explain the technology and its wider applications. The environment is harmed by the process of carbon dioxide flaring, which is used to burn off natural gas in CO₂-contaminated natural gas fields around the world. It accounts for around 300 million tonnes of CO₂ annually. That figure continues to rise as uncontaminated gas reserves dwindle. The geo-engine, however, is able to eliminate CO₂ flaring by powering carbon capture and storage and creating surplus power that can be fed into the grid as net zero energy or used to create blue or green hydrogen.

With gas fields located around the world, there is a huge opportunity for the export and adoption of this UK technology. The UK could also benefit, so the investors believe, from the use of geo-engines in abandoned oil fields by recirculating the geothermal power sourced from hydrogen for hydrogen production. That could assist the UK significantly in its net zero energy future. The University of Liverpool and the geo-engine inventors are currently investigating that possibility further.

I have explained how, by supporting the geo-engine, the Government can help to meet carbon targets not only in the UK but in countries across the world. In the little time I have left, I will make clear the benefits for the UK beyond meeting its emission targets. If the Government are serious about building back better, there is no better way to do so than by supporting a home-grown invention with global importance and the potential to boost UK exports. The creators of geo-engine want to create thousands of skilled jobs in the north of England in the direct manufacture of the geo-engine and its specialist supply chain. It is a no-brainer, so let us make the north-west the real hub for green technology. I urge the Minister to please look seriously at backing the geo-engine.

5.10 pm

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I thank the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) for securing this really important debate.

The Government have taken a global leadership role in setting an ambitious trajectory to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. My constituency has seen the closure of the Fiddlers Ferry coal-fired power station, which has been a physical landmark in the north-west of England over the past 12 months as the UK has shifted its focus from coal-fired power stations to more sustainable forms. However, that has had an impact on experienced, secure jobs in my part of the north-west.

We in the north-west are in a prime position to support the green industrial revolution, with local and regional industry acting as a springboard for low-carbon growth. With a diverse range of low-carbon projects already happening on the ground, I am optimistic that the north-west is destined to make a significant contribution to the UK's net zero carbon emissions target. This is a legacy that we need to build on over the next few decades as we head towards our 2050 net zero target,

from offshore wind and hydrogen to carbon capture and electric vehicles. Warrington in particular is a regional centre of excellence in the nuclear sector. These specialisms are conceived in northern minds and built by northern hands, and while it is right that our clean energy plans should be ambitious, much like the first industrial revolution, they must come with a positive return for local people.

I mentioned the jobs we have lost. We need skills change. We need more employment, and most importantly for the economic growth of our region, we need this to come quickly. I am really excited, therefore, by the prospect of HyNet, to which the Government have already committed £33 million and which is currently being developed by Cadent. As the Minister knows, HyNet will involve the development of new hydrogen pipelines across Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cheshire and the creation of the UK's first carbon capture and storage infrastructure.

HyNet has the potential to create £17 billion of added economic value for the north-west region and could create up to 5,000 jobs in the region by 2025. It will also deliver more than a million tonnes of CO₂ savings per annum—the equivalent of taking more than 600,000 cars off the road every year—and will have a decarbonising effect against other sectors such as transport, industry and home heating. In short, it really is a game changer for the north-west. I am keen to ask the Minister, given the likely readiness of HyNet, whether she will look carefully at this project being given priority—track 1—as one of the first projects to be moved forward in 2025.

In the time I have left, I will also mention some of the smaller projects, which can fuel and heat our homes deep within local communities. I was really pleased to learn that Lymm Community Energy, in my constituency, has secured funding from the rural community energy fund to assess the feasibility of constructing a 5 MW solar farm. The project has the potential to supply local residents, businesses and community facilities with electricity, and is investigating whether it could accommodate battery storage too. The proposed solar farm would support 1,500 homes and would save around 1,130 tonnes of CO₂ emissions annually. As well as that, any financial surplus generated will be put back into a community benefit fund that would support local projects and organisations. The combination of the large-scale HyNet project and the smaller Lymm energy project will fuel our homes, businesses and transport in the future. I look forward to seeing these projects achieve net zero and level up the country.

5.15 pm

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) for calling today's important debate. We both share a passion for new job creation and investment in infrastructure across Merseyside and our north-west region.

As my hon. Friend said, the north-west of England was the birthplace of the industrial revolution. The history of our region, the ingenuity of our people, our culture and our belief in the dignity of work as the tide that lifts all boats, mean we are well placed to lead on the coming industrial revolution—to innovate, to build and ultimately tackle the climate crisis head on.

Although we look back at our history, we do not dwell on it. Rather, it acts as a catalyst to ensure that we meet the demands of the 21st century, to create good jobs, to use the climate emergency as an economic opportunity for a just transition that takes manufacturing workers and communities on a journey that leaves no sector behind, especially the jewel in our crown—the automotive sector.

A new generation of leaders is taking up the fight to realise those demands. The Government talk a big game on levelling up. All I hope is that the substance behind the slogans matches the scale of the ambition that our metro Mayor Steve Rotherham has for Merseyside. The Liverpool city region was the first region to declare a climate emergency in June 2019, and the metro Mayor has committed to reaching net zero carbon by 2040, a decade ahead of the UK target.

The tidal range of the Mersey estuary provides us with a unique opportunity to create a low-carbon electricity generation project that has the potential to create up to 5,000 jobs. Highly skilled, green manufacturing jobs should power our economic recovery beyond the pandemic. It is calculated that the Mersey tidal power project has the potential to generate up to four times the energy of all the wind turbines in Liverpool bay: enough energy to power 1 million homes.

Sadly, we do not have much time this afternoon, but I want to use the time I have to champion the Mersey tidal power project. The Government have the levers at their disposal to make that happen, so give us the tools to get on with the job, not least through the north-west energy hub. In the year of COP26, we need bold affirmations in our devolved Administrations to assist in the UK-wide strategy to address the climate emergency.

As Mayor Rotherham's manifesto states,

"The River Mersey has been the lifeblood of our fortunes for centuries."

He is right. Let us make it so for the next century.

5.18 pm

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab) [V]: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) on securing this very important debate. We are facing a climate emergency and I pay tribute to the innovative work being done by scientists, engineers and architects across the north-west to address the challenge. Work like that of architect—[*Interruption.*]

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Order. Margaret Greenwood, I am sorry to interrupt. A Division bell is ringing in Westminster Hall at the moment, which means we are not hearing you at all. I understand that everyone here is proxied, so no one needs to leave. If you want to wait a moment until this stops, and start a little bit back, we can pick up your speech—because you are not getting a fair deal here.

Right, Ms Greenwood; I am terribly sorry about that. I sometimes forget how much I love this place. If you would like to go a few sentences back and pick up, I think that would be the fairest way to proceed.

Margaret Greenwood: Thank you very much, McCabe. The architect Colin Usher, who has built himself an award-winning home in West Kirby, said that it uses heat pumps, solar panels and exceptional insulation. As

[Margaret Greenwood]

a result, it cost him and his wife just £15 a year for heating, lighting, cooking and hot water when the house was completed around six years ago.

The Energy Saving Trust has said that, for the UK to reach its net zero targets, we need to roll out heat pumps at pace and scale, yet the Government scrapped the green homes grant just over six months after its launch. More than 20 organisations, representing builders and construction businesses, energy companies and civil society groups, have called for households on low incomes to be supplied with free heat pumps in order to kickstart the market for low-carbon heating equipment and meet the UK's climate targets, in a proposal that addresses both the climate emergency and the issue of fuel poverty. Can the Minister set out her response to that proposal?

My right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) has recently called for an electric vehicle revolution in every part of the country, in order to boost the car manufacturing industry and create jobs. Here in the north-west, that strategy is urgently needed. The electrification of the automotive industry is of great importance, as the north-west is home to many key automotive factories—including the Vauxhall plant in Ellesmere Port, where a number of my constituents work. For them, it has been an uncertain time, with the chief executive of Stellantis saying earlier this year that it was

“considering the closure of its Ellesmere Port factory unless the UK government offers financial support after extended negotiations.”

Last month, however, it was reported that recent discussions between Stellantis and the Government have been extremely positive and productive. Can the Minister give us an update on those discussions? Will she back Labour's call to kickstart in this Parliament the development of three additional giga-factories to produce the batteries for electric vehicles? Will she accelerate the creation of charging points, particularly in north-west England, and will she pledge to make electric vehicle ownership affordable for people on lower incomes?

I pay tribute to the metro Mayor of the Liverpool city region, Steve Rotherham, for the work he is doing to address the challenges of climate change. The Mersey Tidal Commission has been established to look into ways of harnessing the power of the River Mersey as a source of clean, renewable and predictable energy for generations to come. It is estimated that a tidal barrage on the Mersey could generate enough electricity to power up to 1 million homes across the region, creating thousands of local jobs.

In March this year, the Environmental Audit Committee wrote to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to say that there is “substantial potential” for the tidal sector to make a “significant and distinct contribution” to the UK's future mix of energy generated from renewable sources. It is therefore disappointing that the Government's support for tidal energy has been only lukewarm up to now. Will the Minister personally take up this issue and give Liverpool city region the support that it needs?

5.23 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I am grateful to the hon. Member for

Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) for securing this really important debate on an issue that matters not only to all of us here, but to our constituents. I want to draw to the Minister's attention a few points that are especially relevant to Cumbria, and I hope she can answer some of my questions.

In rural communities such as mine, the growth in the provision of ground source heat pumps in buildings around Cumbria, but particularly in the more rural areas, is hugely encouraging. I would be really grateful if the Minister spent some time looking at the problem whereby small businesses—very often farms—end up being charged ludicrous sums of money to get connected to the grid for the ground source heat pump to work. I have spoken to Electricity North West, which acknowledges that that is not great, but the company is allowed to do it, so it does so. The cost is sometimes about £7,000 or £8,000 per connection, which is massively debilitating for dairy farms and other small businesses in rural communities. That is the first thing I would love the Minister to look at.

Secondly, would the Minister look again at building regulations and insist that the provision of renewable energy is integral to all new builds, particularly solar panels? I understand why there is resistance to this: it adds cost to the bill, and green bills can sometimes be more expensive. However, that could be offset—more than offset—if the Government revised the Land Compensation Act 1961 to reduce the price of land at the same time. That would massively reduce the cost of building, meaning that it would be entirely affordable to insist on solar panels in every new building. Let us remember that retrofitting properties is far more expensive than doing the right thing in the first place when they are built.

Thirdly, could the Minister acknowledge that the Government's ending of the feed-in tariff schemes for hydro energy and electricity has been massively damaging to that sector? A wonderful hydro-energy company in my constituency, Gilbert Gilkes & Gordon, has had to let go of almost 20% of its workforce indirectly as a consequence. Will the Minister announce now, or soon, ways in which the Government can provide incentives for hydroelectricity and ensure that the likes of Gilkes can expand in the future? It seems most peculiar in a county such as Cumbria, which I admit is occasionally damp and contains England's fastest flowing waterways, that we are making such limited use of that water. Companies of great heritage, such as Gilkes, could be making sure not only that we employ more people in great jobs locally, but that we make use of the natural energy that is so abundant in the lakes and the dales.

Finally, I draw the Minister's attention to something that MP colleagues in Cumbria and I have written to the Government about: the exciting prospect of tidal energy across Morecombe bay. This is an opportunity to connect the Furness Peninsula—or, as we say, “Lancashire over the sands”—with mainland Lancashire and, more importantly, to generate energy from that source. This Government need to take the blame, as do previous ones, for the fact that despite the United Kingdom having the largest tidal range on planet Earth after Canada, we tap nearly none of it. Morecombe bay is an opportunity to do just that.

I set these things in front of you, Mr McCabe, and the Minister, and I eagerly await her response. I suggest that all these proposals, and the many others put forward

by hon. Members sat around the table and on the internet, could make Cumbria a—if not the—leading green energy provider in the UK, creating thousands of good, long-term jobs, contrasting beautifully with the somewhat less progressive proposal for a coalmine in west Cumbria, which I hope the Minister will agree to scrap.

5.28 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr McCabe. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) for securing this debate and for the excellent points in his introductory comments. As he said, he has a long, proud association with Ellesmere Port through his time at Vauxhall Motors; that company, with many others, is synonymous with my town. It is vital for their future prosperity that we get this right. They all impact the local economy and they also use huge amounts of energy, contributing about 5% of total energy usage in the UK. Faced with that fact, companies are not oblivious to the need to change and have been working together on a whole series of projects that will contribute to reaching net zero and enhance our local economy at the same time. *[Interruption.]*

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Order. The Division bell is ringing again. I think we will do the same thing as before and stop until it finishes.

Justin Madders: Several Members have talked already about the HyNet North West project, which is vital for the future of industry, not just in my constituency but in the whole sub-region, if it is to meet the challenges of decarbonisation and increased energy costs.

In our area, we are fortunate enough to have an unbeatable combination of industry and geology, which means we can transition to a hydrogen-based economy faster than anyone else. Our current infrastructure can be easily converted to operate with hydrogen. HyNet believes that, as a result, it can capture up to 800,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide every year. As we have heard from various Members already, there is cross-party and indeed cross-border support for HyNet; I refer not just to the border between England and Scotland, but to the equally important border between Cheshire and Merseyside.

It is vital that we get this transition right. Let me give one example of what that can mean. In my constituency, CF Fertilisers employs hundreds of people and supplies about 40% of the UK fertiliser market. It is also the front end of key supply chains for the production of products such as building insulation, Perspex products for car manufacturing, and key bathroom products such as sinks and baths, as well as respiratory medications, so moving to hydrogen will play a huge role in greening large parts of other sectors, too. There is a brighter future down the road, but to get to that point gas prices and emission costs need to remain affordable for companies such as CF Fertilisers over the next five years. They need as much certainty as can be offered by Government. We do not want winners and losers in different parts of the country to be played off against one another. We need to recognise the particular challenges that ammonia producers have. If the Minister needs further details, I am happy to provide them after the debate.

To reiterate a point made by several Members, it is critical to our part of the world that we get the green light to go ahead in phase 1. CF Fertilisers is just one of

many businesses where lots of jobs are at risk if we do not get a sustained and consistent approach from Government. There is no doubt that the ambition in my area is there. The question is: will it be matched by Government? Germany is investing 10 times the amount that we are in its quest to deliver the same amount of hydrogen by 2030 that we hope to produce, so we really cannot afford to effect this transition by half-measures. For people's livelihoods, for the thousands of jobs that it would create and for the future of the planet, we need this transition to be full steam ahead, if colleagues will pardon the pun.

The concept of a just transition is not only realistic but essential if we are to achieve the aims that I think we all want to achieve. When I walk around my constituency in 10 years' time, I want to see people going about their daily business in electric vehicles that have been manufactured in Ellesmere Port, powered by batteries that have been made locally, driving into secure, well-paid jobs that they can raise a family on in a manufacturing industry that is enjoying a renaissance thanks to the advances we have made in carbon capture and hydrogen. I want us to be living in a time when emissions have gone down but wealth has gone up. That is the future I want. I hope that the Government share our vision and will work with us to make it a reality.

5.34 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): We are indeed in strange times: those of us who have been in the House for quite a long time have a Pavlovian reaction every time the bell goes off—we jump up and run down the corridor. To resist doing that, and to resist saying anything in the meantime, is a new skill that we need to get used to.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) on having secured this afternoon's debate. It is a really important debate that sheds light on two things in particular, and he is to be commended for the excellent way he presented the case for renewable energy in the north-west.

First, we must recognise what an important part of the country the north-west is, in terms of both its renewable resources and their utilisation for the benefit of the country as a whole. Some of those resources have been mentioned in the time permitted to us this afternoon. A number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood), spoke about the tremendous tidal resource in the north-west. Not many people know that the tidal range in the Mersey estuary is the second highest in the UK, closely followed by the Morecambe Bay tidal range. Parts of the north-west should be in the driving seat when it comes to utilising tidal energy for the future benefit of the UK. Of course, we already have substantial penetration of offshore wind in the Irish sea and a number of installations close to the north-west coastline, but anyone who has seen the offshore wind projects timeline charts put out by RenewableUK will know that, despite the tremendous offshore wind resource in the north-west, development of offshore wind has essentially stalled in that area. The hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Dr Davies) mentioned that some new leases are under way, particularly for floating wind, but performance at the moment is, frankly, very poor when it comes to developing this tremendous asset that the north-west has.

[*Dr Alan Whitehead*]

We have also heard from hon. Members not just about the north-west's physical assets, but its human assets, including the assets of ingenuity and thought that have gone into the HyNet project. I unequivocally commend that scheme to this House for its breadth of imagination, its importance, and its ability to bring jobs and skill chains to the north-west, which will benefit the north-west and the country as a whole. It combines carbon capture and storage and hydrogen and brings forward industrial processes, and the developers of that project are to be applauded—[*Interruption.*]

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Order. I am conscious that I cannot alter the finishing time, which is still 5.50. I am really sorry about this, Dr Whitehead.

Dr Whitehead: I will shout my way through it, Mr McCabe. I am trying to draw our attention this afternoon to the north-west's rich renewable resources, and how imperative it is that those resources be exploited for the benefit of the whole country as soon as possible. Hon. Members have underlined why that is so important.

The second important point to discuss is what the Government are doing about exploiting the resources and supporting the people, local councils and industries of the north-west in getting those schemes under way. The marks are pretty low here. I mentioned the lack of development of offshore wind, and my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Wirral West said Government support for tidal power was lukewarm. That was extremely kind of her, because as far as I am concerned, Government support has been stone cold. That needs to be urgently reversed, in order to bring the resources for secure, stable, low carbon energy forward in the way we know is possible, in Morecambe, the Mersey and other sites in the north-west, to the benefit of the whole country.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Order. I think you will have to wind up there, Dr Whitehead.

Dr Whitehead: I was about to, Mr McCabe.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Now would be good.

Dr Whitehead: It is important to put the two parts of the debate together—what the potential is, and what the Government are doing about it. Those two things need to be in close harness. If the result of this debate is better Government support for renewables in the north-west, that would be a very good achievement indeed.

5.42 pm

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) on securing this important debate. I assure the House that this Government are ensuring that we have an energy system that delivers a cleaner and greener future. We are determined that every place, every community and every industry in the UK, including of course the north-west, has the support it needs to successfully transitioned to green energy.

We only need to look at what happened with coal and wind in the last few decades and the political consensus that has formed around reducing our emissions to see that the nation is embracing a move to green energy.

Members have shared their passion and commitment to a just transition to net zero in this debate. The energy White Paper, which we published in December last year, set out plans for the historic transformation of the UK's energy system for a cleaner future, including fully decarbonising our electricity generation by 2050. We have shown that rapid progress on decarbonisation is possible, alongside a thriving economy.

We recognise, of course, the need to ensure that industries move to clean energy in a sustainable way, which is why we have announced in recent years the industry strategy challenge fund, the industrial energy transformation fund and the clean steel fund. Those funds support the meeting of green energy goals in key industrial regional clusters and sectors. In addition to those funds, the Prime Minister's 10-point plan for a green industrial revolution set out how we will work with industry to help deliver our net zero targets in a way that creates employment opportunities in green energies as they emerge. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter) raised some important north-west leadership points in relation to nuclear, which were very interesting to hear, as it is a key low carbon part of our future energy mix.

In the 10-point plan, there is a commitment to deploy carbon capture usage and storage in at least two industrial clusters by the mid-2020s and a further two clusters by 2030, with an ambition to capture 10 megatonnes of CO₂ per year by 2030. In May this year, we launched the first phase of the CCUS cluster sequencing process. On the concerns about other technologies of the hon. Member for Birkenhead and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Paula Barker), they will be pleased to know that allocation round 4 of the contracts for difference later this year will include less established technologies, including floating offshore wind, advanced conversion technologies and tidal stream. The delivery of at least two CCUS clusters is not the extent of the ambition, with a commitment to support four by 2030 at the latest. The Government are also clear that, in order to reach net zero, all industrial clusters will need to decarbonise and CCUS is going to play a key role in enabling that.

The industrial decarbonisation strategy and the forthcoming heat in buildings and net zero strategies will set out how targeted investment, underpinned by support for technology innovation, will help enable a more sustainable long-term path, while protecting jobs and supporting levelling up across the UK. I hope that will give my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Dr Davies) and the hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) reassurance on many of the transportation issues that were raised.

This debate gives us an opportunity to recognise the significant contribution the north-west has already made and plans to make to investing in green energy. I will take a moment to recognise a couple of those excellent contributions. Winnington in Cheshire will be home to the UK's first industrial carbon capture and utilisation plant. The £15.7 million project will be funded by Tata Chemicals Europe, with the support of a £4.2 million grant from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy through our carbon capture and utilisation demonstration programme. The plant is near completion and due to commence carbon dioxide capture operations this year.

The hydrogen energy and carbon capture and utilisation storage project, HyNet North West, which many colleagues mentioned, is an innovative low carbon and hydrogen energy project that will unlock a low carbon economy for the whole of the north-west and north Wales, and put the region at the forefront of the UK's drive to net zero. The project will receive almost £33 million of funding from the industrial decarbonisation challenge, and will be important for our efforts to decarbonise industry in support of the Government's wider net zero ambition. I am really looking forward to my visit to HyNet North West later in the summer. I would be happy to meet the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) to learn more about the geo-engine technology, when my diary allows.

Finally, since 2015, Electricity North West has spent £33 million on innovation projects which have already delivered £46 million of benefit to consumers across the north-west. I am sure hon. Members agree that these kinds of bold and innovative investments, such as those happening in the north-west, will be vital to positioning the UK as global leader in the future energy industry. This Government are absolutely committed to working closely with communities and industry to enable that transition to green energy.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) will be pleased to read the heat and buildings strategy when it is published soon, as it will answer some of his questions. I am sorry, Mr McCabe, but I am still quite excited that I brought carbon budget 6 into law yesterday and signed the legislation this afternoon, which means that we are genuinely world-leading in the challenge that we have set ourselves. When we publish the first net zero strategy of any country in the world in the autumn, we will be genuinely demonstrating our world-leading effort to get to net zero by 2050. That will be achieved through creating green jobs, targeting investment and supporting the innovative technologies that we are seeing across the north-west and across the UK, which will help us to achieve a cleaner and greener future for us all.

5.47 pm

Mick Whitley: I thank you for serving as chair today, Mr McCabe, and all hon. Members for contributing to the debate, which has benefitted greatly from their enthusiasm and expertise, and I am not forgetting the Division bells either.

I welcome the comments made by the hon. Members for Vale of Clwyd (Dr Davies) and for Warrington South (Andy Carter) on the HyNet North West project, and I am glad to see these proposals attracting support from across the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) put me to shame by highlighting the important work that a company based in my constituency is doing to combat the effects of climate change, while also driving economic growth across our region. He is right to highlight the enormous potential of the geo-engine, and I echo the important comments he made about the necessity of the Government's report.

My hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Wavertree (Paula Barker) and for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) rightly expanded on the many ways that Merseyside can play its role in combating climate breakdown, from harnessing the immense power of the Mersey tidal range to greening our transport. I have no doubt that these are issues upon which we will campaign together in the future. I also thank the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) for his insightful contribution on the issues facing rural communities as we decarbonise our energy system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) rightly described the profound impact the transition to a low-carbon economy could have on his constituents in particular, and the region more widely. I agree with every word he said. As I said in my opening remarks, the shadow Minister's interest in this issue is long-standing and his passion was clear for all to see.

Finally, I thank the Minister for her thoughtful response to the points I and others raised.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered green energy in the North West.

5.49 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 23 June 2021

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Nuclear Power Station Decommissioning

The Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The Government are today entering into a new set of arrangements to deliver safe, lower-cost and more efficient decommissioning of the UK's operating nuclear power stations, once they stop generating power.

Those nuclear power stations are all owned and operated by EDF, and the new arrangements have been negotiated by the Government to provide significant cost savings for the taxpayer, with the potential to achieve upward of £1 billion of savings without compromising on safety and security. They will also provide the Government with enhanced oversight of the decommissioning costs.

The new commercial arrangements relate to the fleet of seven advanced gas-cooled reactor (AGR) stations—Hunterston B, Hinkley Point B, Dungeness B, Hartlepool, Heysham 1, Heysham 2 and Torness. EDF last year announced the end of generation of Hunterston B and Hinkley Point B in 2022 and recently, Dungeness B with immediate effect. The other four are all scheduled to close on a rolling basis by 2030.

The new arrangements do not relate to the Sizewell B station, which is of a different technology—pressurised water reactor—and is due to continue operating until at least 2035. The new arrangements also do not cover the Hinkley Point C station, which is currently under construction.

Once a nuclear station closes the nuclear fuel from that station must first be removed (defueling) before it can be prepared for deconstruction. Then, following deconstruction, the site can be remediated.

The new arrangements we have negotiated will incentivise EDF to achieve the defueling of the AGR stations in a cost-effective and timely manner and include real risk share. EDF Energy have agreed to up to a total of £100 million in charges for underperformance in return for the potential to earn up to a total £100 million for good performance across the AGR fleet.

Shortly after EDF has completed the defueling activity, and subject to regulatory approval, the ownership of the AGR stations will transfer to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA), on a station-by-station basis, to prepare for and manage the long-term decommissioning. The NDA will deliver this mission alongside their ongoing mission to decommission the first-generation Magnox nuclear power stations. This will allow the NDA to employ their unique expertise and experience of nuclear decommissioning and seek synergies with their wider mission to achieve savings for the taxpayer.

These new arrangements will harness the best of both organisations: EDF's in defueling as an extension of its operational activity; NDA's in decommissioning as the nation's civil nuclear decommissioning authority—in order

to deliver best value for the taxpayer, while maintaining strong regulatory oversight on safety, security, environmental and health matters.

The NDA and EDF will co-operate to help ensure a seamless transfer of the AGR sites and to enable efficiencies and identify and realise cost savings across the AGR decommissioning programme.

Under previous arrangements, EDF was responsible for the full defueling and deconstruction of the AGR stations, using funding provided by the Nuclear Liabilities Fund (NLF), a segregated fund managed by trustees and underwritten by Government. EDF's AGR defueling and decommissioning work will continue to be funded by the NLF.

To facilitate these revised arrangements, designation directions have been laid in Westminster and jointly with Scottish Ministers in Holyrood—for Scottish stations—which provide the appropriate vires for the NDA to undertake their pre-transfer work and obligations on these stations.

I will deposit the designation directions in the Libraries of the House and further details are available at the www.gov.uk website.

[HCWS114]

DEFENCE

Summits, Conferences or Events: Defence Contribution

The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heappey): A new order has been made under section 56(1 B) of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 to enable reservists to be called into permanent service to support HM Forces in connection with military operations in support of summits, conferences or events.

The Ministry of Defence is regularly tasked to support summits, conferences or events. As part of this support, reserve forces will be on standby, as part of a whole force approach with regular forces, to deliver a range of defence outputs such as, but not limited to, the reinforcement of regular units, provision of specialist knowledge, skills and experience, and support to partners across Government.

The order shall take effect from the day on which it is made and shall cease to have effect 12 months from the date on which it is made.

[HCWS115]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Broadcasting Policy

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Oliver Dowden): Today, we are announcing our intention to publish a Broadcasting White Paper in the autumn. In order to inform the White Paper, we will consult on the future of Channel 4 and on regulating video-on-demand services.

We believe that the need for public service broadcasting (PSB) remains as strong as ever and it is therefore necessary to bring the UK's broadcasting framework into the 21st century.

The forthcoming White Paper will look ahead to the challenges of tomorrow, ensuring the UK's broadcasting system is dynamic, relevant and can continue to meet the needs of UK audiences in the future. This will include

proposals on prominence, to ensure that high quality public service content is made easily accessible to UK audiences across online platforms. The White Paper will also be influenced by Ofcom's ongoing PSB review, the Government's own strategic PSB review, as well as the recommendations of the Digital Radio and Audio Review which will report this summer.

This summer we will launch a consultation on the future success and sustainability of Channel 4.

Since its inception almost 40 years ago, Channel 4 has delivered on its remit, aims and objectives, and has done an excellent job in managing the uncertainty in the market over recent years.

However, Channel 4's current ownership model and remit places material restrictions on its ability to keep pace with the challenges posed by the fast-evolving media landscape.

Now is the time to proceed on the basis that an alternative ownership model—but one where it keeps a public service remit—may be better for the broadcaster and better for the country.

We will also launch a consultation on the regulation of video-on-demand services. Services such as Netflix, ITV Hub or Amazon Prime Video provide huge value to UK audiences, and in many cases significant, and growing, contributions to the UK economy. However, they are also services that are regulated far less robustly than traditional broadcast television stations, particularly in relation to the regulation of content standards and audience protection, and some services are not regulated in the UK at all.

So this summer we will consult on whether it is time to set the same basic rules for video-on-demand services as we do for traditional broadcasters.

[HCWS113]

EDUCATION

Condition Improvement Fund

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson):

Today, I am announcing the allocation of almost £483 million for 1,466 Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) projects across 1,199 academies, sixth-form colleges and voluntary aided schools to maintain and improve the condition of the education estate.

This funding is provided to ensure schools have well maintained facilities and give students safe environments that support a high-quality education. Many of the projects funded by CIF will lead to more energy efficient buildings and will reduce energy bills for schools. Since March 2015 CIF has delivered 8,018 projects and continues to deliver 1,571 projects across the school estate with essential maintenance projects.

Details of today's announcement are being sent to all CIF applicants and a list of successful projects will be published on gov.uk. Copies will be placed in the House Library.

Attachments can be viewed online at:

Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament

[HCWS116]

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