

**Monday
17 January 2022**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Monday 17 January 2022

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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

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Monday 17 January 2022

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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

SEVENTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 707

THIRTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2021-22

House of Commons

Monday 17 January 2022

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Small Boat Channel Crossings

1. **Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): What progress she has made on reducing the number of illegal small boat crossings in the channel. [905030]

6. **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): What progress she has made on reducing the number of illegal small boat crossings in the channel. [905035]

7. **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): What steps she is taking to reduce the number of migrants crossing the channel illegally. [905036]

18. **Dr Jamie Wallis** (Bridgend) (Con): What progress she has made on reducing the number of illegal small boat crossings in the channel. [905049]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): I would like to begin my remarks this afternoon by paying tribute to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington. He was a member of the shadow Home Affairs team, and he sadly passed away the week before last. Jack was well loved by everyone and a hugely respected Member of this House. Along

with all colleagues, I would like to pay my respects to him and send my condolences to Harriet and their family.

These crossings are unfair, unacceptable and lethally dangerous. They are totally unnecessary, as France and other EU member states are safe countries with long-established asylum systems.

Stephen Crabb: I thank the Home Secretary for that reply, and I associate myself wholeheartedly with her remarks about the late member for Birmingham, Erdington.

I know that the Home Secretary has been requesting the assistance of the Royal Navy to reduce the number of illegal channel crossings, and I look forward to seeing growing co-operation between her Department and the Ministry of Defence. Does she agree that it is surely right to deploy all the available resources and tools to shut down the routes used by the cruel people smugglers and to protect lives at sea?

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend's question is an important one because, as all hon. Members will be well aware, I asked for MOD naval assets and support back in 2020, because no Department can resolve the complex issue of channel crossings on its own. It is also right, having called for MOD involvement, that we now bring the whole machinery of government, the ultimate utility, together to ensure that we work collectively to protect our borders. My right hon. Friend is right about the wider issues on immigration, and that is why we have the new plan for immigration.

Andrew Selous: I fully echo the Home Secretary's remarks about the late Member for Birmingham, Erdington. He was well liked and respected by many of us on this side of the House.

Does the Home Secretary recognise the anger felt about this issue, not least by the many people who fully respect this country's proud tradition of asylum and the tremendous contribution made so many people who have come to this country legally?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why this Government are unapologetic for the fact that we now have the Nationality and Borders Bill and the new plan for immigration. We are operationalising these changes primarily because we need a system that is firm but also fair to those who need genuine help when fleeing persecution and claiming asylum. That is effectively what this Government are doing.

Philip Davies: If everyone is agreed that the channel crossings are so dangerous, we must clearly do whatever is necessary to stop them. Surely the quickest way to stop them is simply to turn the boats back and escort them back into French waters. I do not think it would take long for the word to get around that these crossings were futile. Has not the time come to do just that, on humanitarian grounds as well as to protect our borders from illegal immigration?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend will know that that is the policy of this Government. Border Force was commissioned to do this with the MOD, and through the hybrid ways of working that I have commissioned across Government, they will be doing exactly that. Routes have been tested and technology is being used, and the way in which boats can be pushed back has also been well tested, with the basis to do that. That is our policy.

Dr Wallis: My right hon. Friend is aware that the British people want to see decisive action being taken to reduce the number of small boat crossings in our channel. Does she therefore share my disappointment that the Opposition refused to support our measures to end vexatious and unmerited claims, and chose instead to side with those entering the UK illegally?

Priti Patel: We could rerun the debate on the Nationality and Borders Bill, which I would happily do. This Government are determined not just to reform what is a broken asylum system—we are lifting up every aspect of the dysfunctionality of the system—but to tackle the root causes of illegal migration. In March 2021 the new plan for immigration was published, and we had the Nationality and Borders Bill in this House last autumn. The Opposition seem to be on the wrong side of the argument. They do not really want to support an end to illegal migration or stop the people smugglers.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Is there any truth in the reports that the Government want to have asylum seekers processed offshore in countries such as Gambia? Has any such country actually agreed to this? Does the Secretary of State accept that having people processed hundreds or thousands of miles away might meet the letter of our obligations to asylum seekers but certainly does not meet the spirit?

Priti Patel: I absolutely disagree with the right hon. Lady's question. Had she read the new plan for immigration—the policy statement published for the benefit of all Members in March 2021—she would know that this Government are considering all options for outsourcing processing and for removing people with no legal basis to be in our country. I completely recognise that she disagrees with the policies of this Government—[*Interruption.*] It matters not which countries. We will continue to discuss this with a range of countries, because I, as Home Secretary, and this

Government are determined to fix the decades-long problem of a very broken asylum system. Frankly, under successive Labour Governments there were mass failures to remove people with no legal basis to be in the country.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I join the Home Secretary in paying tribute to our dear friend and colleague, Jack Dromey. We very much look forward to the tributes later this month. Especially today, at Home Office questions, we very much miss his kindness, his passion and his wit alongside us on the Front Bench.

We hear that responsibility for ending dangerous crossings of the channel is to be taken away from the Home Office and handed to the MOD, but we have been here before. In 2019 the Government brought in the Navy to patrol the channel, and those patrols ended after just six weeks, having cost £780,000 and without a single boat having been intercepted. Can the Home Secretary explain how today's proposal will be any different from 2019 and prevent lives from being lost at sea?

Priti Patel: Of course I can. I restate what I have said in the House many times about the hybrid approach we need: no one Department can solve this issue in the channel on its own. Let us be crystal clear about this. I originally commissioned the military aid to the civil authorities request that went to the Ministry of Defence very early on, back in 2020. Of course my decision to bring in the MOD is vindication of our need to strengthen our defences in the channel.

This is about a number of things—[*Interruption.*] I can hear Opposition Members making noise about this issue. However, the reality is that we want to stop illegal crossings. People are dying in the channel and in the Mediterranean. All aspects of pushbacks and turnbacks—of the approach we take in the channel—are operational. This has been tested, there is a basis on which to do it, and individuals are trained. The MOD, maritime policing and Border Force originally came together, and they will continue to work together. This is, first, a global migration issue but, secondly, the British public will support the Government in doing everything possible to protect our borders. That is why a blended approach is absolutely vital.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I wholeheartedly endorse the Home Secretary's comments about the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington.

The Home Secretary should have pointed out that, unlike the endless Downing Street parties, arriving in the UK to claim asylum is not unlawful, as the Court of Appeal reminded her just last month. It is only her atrocious anti-refugee Bill that will see Afghans, Syrians and Uyghurs arrested, prosecuted and imprisoned for up to four years. Why does she see relentless flouting of lockdown rules as forgivable for the Prime Minister but seeking safety here from Assad, the Taliban or genocide as worth four years in prison?

Priti Patel: I always enjoy the hon. Gentleman's contributions. As we saw on Report and Third Reading of the Nationality and Borders Bill, the Scottish National party choose to deploy political gimmicks—I am being

kind to the SNP—to frustrate the will of the public when it comes to reforming asylum and illegal migration. It is fair to say that the Conservative party in government, through the Nationality and Borders Bill and the new plan for immigration, will do everything possible to tackle the unscrupulous exploitation of people who cross illegally and will provide sanctuary to those who need our help and support—those fleeing persecution who need refuge. Frankly, when local authorities in Scotland are not even helping to accommodate these people, I take no lectures from the Scottish National party.

Stuart C. McDonald: That answer was about as convincing as the Prime Minister's apology. The Home Secretary has quite a nerve to talk about political gimmicks, given that she is the first person to be sent out to the Dispatch Box to further Operation Red Meat; the proposals leaked out over the weekend have absolutely nothing to do with saving lives and everything to do with saving the Prime Minister's career and her political career. The Home Secretary sending in the Royal Navy against small boats full of refugees and asylum seekers is pathetic, inhumane and an abuse of the Royal Navy, and her grubby shopping around for places to offshore asylum seekers to is an outrageous and dangerous big white elephant. Instead of ripping up the refugee convention and locking up refugees, why does the Home Office not start working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and others to live up to our humanitarian obligations?

Priti Patel: The hon. Gentleman needs to understand global migration challenges and the international exploitation of human lives and human beings that takes place, because clearly he has no recommendations or answers. His local authorities across Scotland refuse to house people who have come to our country. Frankly, I will take no lectures from him. He can carry on with his political gimmicks, but the Scottish National party's lack of policy says a great deal.

Rape Prosecution Rate

2. **Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Attorney General on taking steps to increase the prosecution rate for rape. [R] [905031]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Rachel Maclean): We are determined to increase the number of rape cases reaching court, which is why we are working closely with the Attorney General and the Deputy Prime Minister to implement the rape review action plan, published in June. Progress includes publishing the first scorecard on cases, in order to understand where the system is failing to deliver; piloting a new approach to investigations through Operation Soteria; and launching a victims' Bill consultation.

Matt Western: Two fifths of police forces actually lack specialist rape units, despite clear evidence showing that they are important to achieving successful case outcomes. Warwickshire shut its RASSO—rape and serious sexual offences—unit in 2014 and its domestic abuse unit last year, yet it has the worst conviction rate. Next week, I am going to hold a summit on violence

against women and girls. I want to know from the Minister: why do the Government oppose Labour's calls for RASSO units to be restored to all police forces? Can she explain whether there is any correlation between the conviction rates achieved, with Warwickshire's being the worst in the country, and the loss of such units?

Rachel Maclean: It is obviously not the case that we are opposing measures to improve rape prosecutions. That is why we are funding five police forces to pilot this new approach to rape investigations, and we have committed to expand this through 14 police areas. Moreover, we are providing comprehensive funding to independent sexual and domestic abuse advisers to help bring these atrocious cases to court.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I spent Friday morning with a young 20-year-old rape victim who is now in her fifth year awaiting a trial. I then spent the afternoon with a young woman who has been groomed and sexually exploited for a decade. She told me that on occasion she has been forced to have sex with up to 50 men a day. The police cannot guarantee her safety, in her complex case of organised crime, so she has come forward and withdrawn numerous times. Both the accused rapist in the first case and the many, multiple gang members involved in the second are walking free, able to abuse, groom and rape as many women and children as they like.

These cases are not rare; they are not unusual. Operation Soteria has already made it very clear to Ministers that there is a real need for more specialism and priority within police forces, so the Minister saying that she is going to pilot it in 14 more areas and find out the exact same thing is not going to be enough. There is a need for specialism, and a need for it now, so why are the Government not backing Labour's calls to ensure that every police force area has a RASSO unit? Will she answer that?

Rachel Maclean: All of us speak to and work with victims of horrendous crimes. Ministers are constantly engaged in that kind of work. That is why we are putting more funding into the police to enable them to tackle these hideous crimes. The hon. Lady has referred to a number of specific cases. She has not been clear which police areas or local authorities are involved, but we are very happy to work with her on these specific cases. To be clear, let me say that funding for these important specialisms has been increased, and we are increasing funding to the police to the tune of £15.9 billion.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): The two points made by Labour Members were very powerful and have had a huge impact on the House, and I thank them for making them.

I simply rise to say that there also needs to be a very careful balance, because, from time to time, people are accused of rape when they are innocent. I do not want to see the pendulum swing from one extreme to another and injustice being done in another way.

Rachel Maclean: I thank my hon. Friend for raising such an important issue. These and many other issues are captured in the rape review. Every Member of this House will be concerned about the level of rape

prosecutions, which is why the Government are working across Departments to improve the system overall, and it is absolutely right that we do so.

Mr Speaker: I call Dame Diana Johnson—I welcome the right hon. Lady to her first Question Time as Chair of the Home Affairs Committee.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Minister will know that, in 2015, in her report on rape investigations and prosecutions in London, Dame Elish Angiolini recommended that the specialist RASSO police officers should investigate rape cases. We heard much evidence to back that up in the inquiry that the Home Affairs Committee has just concluded. I have a question for the Safeguarding Minister, who appeared before the Committee in December. At the time she could not tell us how many police officers were RASSO trained, or, indeed, how many of the new recruits to the police had been RASSO trained. Is she able to do so today?

Rachel Maclean: I congratulate the right hon. Lady on her election to the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee. I look forward to responding to her in due course. She raises an important issue. It is important to say that specialist training is taking place through Operation Soteria and a number of other avenues. I am very happy come back to her or to write to her with those figures.

Removal of Failed Asylum Seekers

3. **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): What progress she is making on removing failed asylum seekers from the UK; and if she will make a statement. [905032]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Tom Pursglove): Our new plan for immigration will overhaul our asylum system and speed up the removal of failed asylum seekers. The Bill will introduce new measures to prevent repeated last-minute, meritless claims that are designed to frustrate proper removal. We are determined to return people who have no right to be here and arrive in the UK illegally.

Mr Robertson: I thank the Minister for his response. This country has a proud record of accepting refugees and treating asylum seekers fairly, and long may that continue. Does he agree that, in order to retain confidence in our system and to avoid it being a draw to people taking very dangerous and unnecessary journeys, asylum seekers must have their cases considered very quickly, and, if they have not established a right or a need to be here, they should be removed quickly?

Tom Pursglove: My hon. Friend gets to the nub of the issue by saying that we must have a fair but firm system. Returns have undoubtedly been hard hit as a result of the pandemic, and we want to see a quick recovery from that. The issue of attrition is also important. We are addressing that through the Nationality and Borders Bill, and I appreciate his support for that. On returns agreements, we need, of course, to secure more. Those with India and Albania prove exactly what can be done.

Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab): Hundreds of people in my constituency of Enfield North are residents in this country on the European Community Association agreement visa, also known as the Ankara agreement,

which allows them to set up businesses in this country. When they try to extend their stay in this country, the majority of them are not able to renew their visas. There have been hundreds of emails in relation to this from across the country. The delays in some cases are 14 months, and they mean that those people are unable to renew business leases and housing and residential contracts. What assurances can the Minister give to my constituents whose lives are at a standstill that these timings will be reduced and that they will receive a timely response to their applications?

Tom Pursglove: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. She will know that Ministers in the Home Office are always keen to try to assist in these matters wherever possible. If she could provide me with the specifics, I would be very happy to take those cases away and have a look at them.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Does the Minister agree that one of the problems with genuine victims of human trafficking is that they are lumped together with asylum seekers? The quicker we can return bogus asylum seekers, the quicker we can get help to the genuine victims of human traffickers.

Tom Pursglove: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who raises an important point. It is fair to say that the Nationality and Borders Bill and the new plan for immigration focus very much on returning those who have no right to be here, while ensuring that those who require our protection and are genuinely in need of support do get that support as quickly as possible.

Domestic Abuse: Support for Victims

4. **Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to improve support for victims of domestic abuse. [905033]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Rachel Maclean): Our landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021 will strengthen our protection of victims and ensure that perpetrators feel the full force of the law. Furthermore, we will be publishing the first ever domestic abuse strategy to transform the whole of society's response to domestic abuse to prevent offending, support victims and pursue perpetrators as well as strengthening the whole system needed to deliver those goals.

Barbara Keeley: A recent meeting of the all-party parliamentary group for ageing and older people reviewed the shocking figures for femicide and violence against older women. Women aged over 60 are one in five of femicide victims, representing 75% of the 280,000 older people between 60 and 74 who are victims of domestic abuse. Further, the crime survey for England and Wales has only just started collecting data on people over 74, and that data is beset by problems of under-reporting. Does the Minister recognise the need for both more effective data collection and support services that are designed around and suitable for older domestic abuse victims?

Rachel Maclean: I thank the hon. Lady for raising this important issue. She is right that more needs to be done. More is being done, and we will set out more ways that we will help older victims in our domestic abuse

strategy, which we will publish shortly. It is vital that every victim of domestic abuse, no matter their age, can get the right help. That is why we have provided additional funding to support victims of rape and domestic abuse, and we are giving local authorities more money to enable them to play their part.

Windrush Compensation Scheme

5. Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): What steps she has taken to expedite the processing of Windrush compensation scheme claims. [905034]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): We take our commitments to the victims of the Windrush scandal seriously, and our focus is on resolving claims as quickly as possible. To enable us to do that, we have recruited 40 new caseworkers, with 35 more in the pipeline for the coming months. We have also refreshed and streamlined internal processes to reduce processing times and improve user experience for those applying to the scheme.

Catherine West: A recent report criticised the Home Office, which was forced to apologise to charities and community groups that were meant to be supporting victims with their applications. The budget remains as full as ever and underspent. It took two years for one of my constituents to receive a reply, which is an absolute disgrace considering the age profile of Windrush victims. What will the Minister do to put that right? Will he outsource the process to a proper independent group that will get on with the job?

Kevin Foster: As we have said before, outsourcing would merely introduce further delays into the process when our focus should be on getting compensation out to the victims of the Windrush scandal. The hon. Member will be aware that the changes we made in December 2020 saw us pay considerably more compensation, offering an average of £3.1 million a month, with more than £38.7 million in compensation now offered. To be clear, there is no “budget” here; we will pay the compensation that is due to people, and there is no ceiling on what will be paid.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): I remind the Home Secretary of the legal maxim, “Justice delayed is justice denied.” This Government promised to try to right some of the wrongs with the Windrush compensation scheme in a time-limited manner. In November, the Home Affairs Committee found that only 20% of claimants had applied, and that only 5% had received any compensation. Twenty-three people have died before receiving their compensation. Is it not high time that the responsibility to provide justice to the ageing Windrush generation was passed on to an independent body capable of delivering it?

Kevin Foster: Again, we would make the point that moving this operation out of the Home Office would merely further delay the provision of the compensation that we all want to see paid. As I have touched on, we are recruiting more caseworkers and speeding up the process. Given the age cohort we are talking about, we are aware that some people have sadly passed away. However, that is why we are more motivated to speed up

the process and make a real difference. As I have said, we have more staff coming in, and we will streamline the process to make it not only quicker, but simpler for those claiming compensation to engage with the team.

Online Safety Tools

8. Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) (LD): What discussions she has had with (a) the Equalities Office and (b) women’s rights campaigners on the effectiveness of (i) the Path Community app and (ii) other online safety tools. [905037]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Rachel Maclean): I speak regularly with the Equalities Office and campaigners on ways to tackle violence against women and girls. We believe that women should not have to change their behaviour to stay safe, which is why our strategy sets out preventive measures to tackle violence against women and girls focusing on changing misogynistic attitudes; however some people might choose to use one of the many apps, including the Path Community app, that are available to them.

Sarah Olney: Many women’s rights campaigners, including Reclaim These Streets, have called apps such as the Path Community app insulting to women and girls. They claim it does nothing to tackle men’s violence against women, so why are the Government continuing to push the app and present it as some kind of solution?

Rachel Maclean: I thank the hon. Lady for giving me the opportunity to put on the record that we are not specifically pushing—I think that was the word she used—or promoting or backing that one app. As I said in my answer, there are many apps, and many women use those apps of their own choice. Of course we welcome that choice for individuals; on the other hand, it is vital that the Government play our part in tackling violence against women and girls through the multiple other measures set out in the “Tackling violence against women and girls strategy”, which I invite her to read.

Police Funding

9. Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to ensure that the police are adequately funded to enable them to reduce crime. [905038]

12. Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): What progress the Government have made on improving resources for South Wales Police. [905042]

20. Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to ensure that the police are adequately funded to enable them to reduce crime. [905051]

23. Saqib Bhatti (Meriden) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to ensure that the police are adequately funded to enable them to reduce crime. [905054]

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): The Government are proposing a total police funding settlement approaching £17,000 million in 2022-23, an increase of up to £1,100 million compared with this

year. Assuming full take-up of precept flexibility, overall police funding available to police and crime commissioners will increase by a whopping £796 million next year.

Peter Gibson: Although Darlington has received almost £1 million in safer streets funding, off-road biking continues to be an antisocial behaviour problem causing crime in my constituency. Will the Minister meet me to discuss what more can be done to tackle this?

Kit Malthouse: I am pleased to hear that that substantial award from the safer streets fund is making a difference in my hon. Friend's constituency, and of course I would be more than happy to meet him to talk about how we can better fight crime in his patch.

Alun Cairns: Vale of Glamorgan, like many rural areas, experiences horrendous animal welfare incidents, from illegal dog breeding and hare coursing to fly-grazing and horse neglect. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Chief Inspector Rees and her team of officers on how they have used the additional resources that have been made available to combat some of the worst crimes we could possibly imagine?

Kit Malthouse: I am more than happy to join my right hon. Friend in congratulating his local police force on their work in this area, and I am pleased to hear that his non-human constituents are as important to him as the human ones. He will be aware that some of these truly appalling crimes need to be addressed much more assertively, and I hope he has noticed that, in the Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Bill, we are tabling amendments specifically on hare coursing, which will help to fight that awful crime.

Andy Carter: Bearing in mind the security statement coming after this question session, will my right hon. Friend assure me that he is working with both law enforcement and security services to understand what more can be done to increase capacity to counter hostile activity that has the potential to damage democracy but operates below the legal threshold?

Kit Malthouse: I know this is a matter of concern to the whole House, which I know is to be addressed by the Home Secretary shortly. As I hope my hon. Friend knows, police capacity—that relates specifically to the question—has been increased not just in territorial policing but in other arms of policing, recognising as we do that, while it is important to fight crime on the ground in all our constituencies, it is also important to fight it there as well.

Saqib Bhatti: I am pleased that the Government are well on their way to delivering on their pledge to deliver 20,000 police officers, 867 of whom are in the west midlands, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the decision by the Labour police and crime commissioner to close Solihull police station goes a long way to undermining safety and security for my constituents in the north and the south of my constituency?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend will know that there was a passionate Adjournment debate just the other night to discuss issues in west midlands policing. As I said during that debate, it is strange that at a time of

unprecedented expansion in UK policing, the impression is being given, in his constituency and elsewhere, of a retreat. I was in the west midlands on Thursday and I know that the chief constable and others are working hard to get on top, but I would hope that in the light of the expansion of policing in my hon. Friend's part of the world, their property strategy would be reviewed again.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Workers in local food shops in Cambridge have had a tough time in recent years, facing organised shoplifting and threats of violence. It took the intervention of E. J. Matthews, a notable PC, to help to sort that out, but they are now facing organised ramraids. What resources can be made available to Cambridgeshire police to tackle this awful crime?

Kit Malthouse: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, Cambridgeshire police has expanded quite significantly, in terms of pure police numbers, over the past couple of years, but I hope he will also have noticed the work that is being done by the national retail crime steering group, which I chair, to look specifically at crime in this area. Given what he has mentioned about ramraiding in his constituency, I will go away and look at whether a pattern is emerging across the east of England and hope that I can encourage the police to address it.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The Minister has just said that there is an unprecedented expansion, but back in the real world, antisocial behaviour increased by 7% last year: it is a growing problem across so many communities in my constituency and around the country. Although the new officers are beginning to come on-stream, does he even begin to understand the damage that the cuts not only to police numbers but to services such as youth services have done to communities like the ones I represent?

Kit Malthouse: Year on year, last year and the year before, we actually saw a fall in police-recorded incidents of antisocial behaviour, but we have seen fluctuations in that crime type over the past few months as the variations in covid lockdown regulations have changed. We are keeping a close eye on it. The hon. Gentleman will have noticed that in our "Beating crime plan", published in July last year, we encouraged police and crime commissioners—I hope he will encourage his to do this as well—to form their own antisocial behaviour taskforces so that they can really pinpoint and address this most local of crime problems very effectively.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): The Minister will be aware that proper community policing is vital for preventing crime and saving lives, yet across London, since the Prime Minister was Mayor, we have seen community policing slashed, and in Richmond borough, in particular, we see our officers routinely extracted to other events. Yet in the same period knife crime has doubled. He will be aware that in September there was the fatal and brutal stabbing of an 18-year-old Afghan refugee and college student in Twickenham. So when will we see a boost to community policing in the Twickenham constituency and across Richmond borough, as this Government have promised us so many extra police officer numbers since 2019?

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Lady is stretching it a bit to say that crime over the past three or four years was the fault of the previous Mayor, who has not been in office for some time; she may not have noticed. It is hard to notice who is in office in London at the moment. Nevertheless, I hope she will welcome the recent decision by the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police to reinstitute neighbourhood policing, and that she will see the extra numbers of police officers—many hundreds—that have now been recruited in London appearing in her constituency soon.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Current recruitment is welcome, of course, but will the Minister at least acknowledge and be honest with the House that there are 24,000 fewer police officers, police community support officers and staff in the police workforce since 2010 because of this Government's cuts, and that has a real impact?

Kit Malthouse: I will certainly acknowledge that police numbers fell post the 2010 election, but only as long as the hon. Lady acknowledges that her party crashed the economy, causing us to make much-needed and very vital economies in our national spending. If we had not undertaken those economies, God knows what financial state we would have been in now, following what we have had to do during the pandemic.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): The great town of Tunstall sadly missed out on its recent safer streets fund bid. Analysis from Staffordshire police and Stoke-on-Trent City Council shows that we suffer disproportionately from more burglary, aggressive begging and feral youths committing antisocial behaviour, so we want to see improved lighting, CCTV extended and gates for alleyways. Will my hon. Friend agree to meet me so that he can hear about this bid and why the great town of Tunstall deserves this investment?

Kit Malthouse: I am certainly happy to meet my hon. Friend. We will see future rounds of the safer streets fund, and I hope his police and crime commissioner and his local authority will make a bid. I will be more than happy to meet him, not least because the commitment and conviction he shows should be at the forefront of their bid to convince us all to fund this.

Police Community Support Officers

10. **Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): What plans she has to increase the number of police community support officers. [905040]

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): The decisions on how to use funding and resources are operational matters for chief constables, working with their democratically elected police and crime commissioners. They are best placed to make these decisions within their communities, based on their knowledge and experience, including decisions about the right balance of their workforce.

Mohammad Yasin: Our Conservative police and crime commissioner was elected on a platform to fix the unfair funding formula for Bedfordshire police, but his solution to raise much-needed funding to put more police on our streets is to raise local council tax. With two large towns and an international airport, Bedfordshire

police should not be funded as a rural force. Will the Minister give our force the resources it needs before expecting my constituents to pay more?

Kit Malthouse: Obviously the Bedfordshire police and crime commissioner is doing a fantastic job. He won a resounding victory in the recent election, and I know he continues to enjoy significant support in that county. As I hope the hon. Gentleman has heard me say in the past, we are committed to coming up with a new funding formula for policing. The formula we use at the moment is a little bit elderly and creaky. He will be pleased to hear that I had a meeting just this morning with the chair of the new technical body that is putting that work together. We hope to be able to run the formula before the next election.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): The Minister has brushed off criticisms from the Labour Benches, but is he aware of the disquiet on his own Benches? Only last week, Conservative MPs lined up in Westminster Hall to describe a broken system that is

“stacked in favour of the perpetrators rather than the victims.”—[*Official Report*, 12 January 2022; Vol. 706, c. 258WH.]

One said:

“Across the UK there are people afraid to leave their homes after dark, scared to go to the shops...That cannot go on...The police quite simply do not have the powers or resources.”—[*Official Report*, 12 January 2022; Vol. 706, c. 257-8WH.]

We agree. That is why neighbourhood policing is at the heart of our new proposals. We will put a police hub in every new community, create neighbourhood prevention teams and fund a next generation of neighbourhood watch. I wonder whether the Minister has anything new to say to his own disaffected Back Benchers, or is crime simply not “red meat” enough for the “big dog”?

Kit Malthouse: Hilarious. I understand the hon. Lady is playing catch-up on policing, and she may have missed the 11,000 police officers we have recruited so far. She may have missed the significant falls in knife crime, acquisitive crime and all neighbourhood-type crimes, as we have seen recently. Policing and fighting crime are a challenge, as I know more than most. It is always two steps forward, one step back. It is right that hon. Members on all sides should be anxious and concerned about crime in their constituencies, but that is why we are recruiting 20,000 police officers, why the Prime Minister has made crime a priority and why he wants to roll up county lines and deal with youth violence. This is a fight that we can win, but over time. While we are having some success as it stands, there is always much more to do.

Knife Crime

11. **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What steps she is taking to reduce knife crime. [905041]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): My hon. Friend will know that all efforts are being made on reducing knife crime. As the Policing Minister has just said, the latest police-recorded crime figures have shown a fall in offences involving knife crime, but at the same time, a great deal of investment is taking place when it comes to violence reduction units, alongside the investments in the police force.

Huw Merriman: I welcome the work from the Home Secretary on reducing those numbers, but sadly last year saw the highest number of teenage murders in London since records began. Can I therefore commend the “No More Red” campaign set up by Arsenal football club, supported by Ian Wright and Idris Elba? As Ian Wright points out, and as I found out myself as a volunteer in a youth centre, they offer the chance to give people a better route in life, away from gangs and crime. Too many have closed in recent years. May I ask the Home Secretary what we can do to get charities to set more up?

Priti Patel: It is not every day I can come to the Dispatch Box to celebrate and praise the Gooners, but in this case I take great pride in joining my hon. Friend. The “No More Red” campaign, which I have been following, is fantastic. My hon. Friend’s point speaks to the power of charities alongside the Government’s work, because they are the ones at the grassroots that can reach out to young people in constituencies and engage them so they do not get into the cycle of a life of crime.

Pending Asylum Applications

13. **Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): What recent estimate she has made of the number of asylum applications pending initial decision. [905043]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): We accept that the asylum system is broken, often taking too long to reach decisions. We are working to fix it via the Nationality and Borders Bill. Alongside that, we have plans to speed up the decision-making process and reduce unnecessary delays. I hope the hon. Gentleman will reconsider his opposition to the Bill and play his part in helping to fix our broken system.

Afzal Khan: The Conservatives say that the asylum system is broken, but having been in power for more than a decade, the truth is that they are the ones who broke it. Asylum seekers are some of the most vulnerable individuals. The Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit revealed the emotional and physical trauma they experience—the anxiety, insomnia, self-harm, depression, deterioration of relationships with friends and support staff and reduced engagement with vital services. How has the Home Office’s ability to make initial decisions been allowed to collapse so completely under this Government? What steps will the Minister take to intervene to ensure the situation is addressed with urgency?

Kevin Foster: I am sorry to hear that it sounds like the hon. Gentleman will not be reconsidering his opposition to our reform plans, most notably in the Nationality and Borders Bill, while his party offers no meaningful alternative. The Home Secretary, the whole team in Government and I will continue to focus on our work to reform and update the system, to ensure it offers resettlement based on need, not the ability to pay a people trafficker. That is what our focus will continue to be and we are working towards that.

Topical Questions

T1. [905055] **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

Priti Patel: The Nationality and Borders Bill was overwhelmingly backed by elected MPs and is now being debated in the other place. Ahead of its Royal Assent, I am operationalising new changes on disrupting and deterring illegal migration, in line with the new plan for immigration which, as the House knows, was announced and published last week. We continue to work with our French counterparts. Law enforcement has achieved 67 small boats-related prosecutions since the start of 2020; we have dismantled 17 small boat organised criminal groups and secured more than 400 arrests.

I am reforming the entire asylum system to bring effective casework into decision making, speeding up processing and introducing fast-track appeals to remove those with no right to be in the UK. I have developed new operational solutions to deter illegal boat arrivals. That is a whole Government effort. As a result, I confirm that we have commissioned the MOD as a crucial operational partner, to protect our channel against illegal migration.

John Lamont: In the light of the news late last week about MP security, will the Home Secretary assure me that the Home Office is working with other Government Departments and devolved Administrations to protect our democracy from those who want to do it, and our country, harm?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I will come to my statement shortly, when I will talk about that issue in much more detail. There are important issues about protecting our democracy from our adversaries, individuals and countries that want to do us harm. That is a whole of Government effort.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I join the tributes to Jack Dromey, who was in our team and should have been with us today. His kindness, principles and determination mean we badly miss him.

On 25 January 2021, the Home Secretary commented on a Met police video of officers breaking up an illegal party in London. She said,

“This illegal gathering was an insult to those hospitalised with COVID, our NHS staff and everyone staying at home to protect them...Police are enforcing the rules to save lives.”

Why has she now changed her mind?

Priti Patel: I welcome the right hon. Lady to her role; I did not get the chance to do that when we last met to debate the Nationality and Borders Bill. With regards to the coronavirus regulations, I stand by my comments, primarily because during the time of the virus and the pandemic, the entire country was doing incredible work to ensure that the virus was not being spread. My views have not changed on that; they are absolutely consistent. On policing throughout the pandemic, we asked the police to do extraordinary things. As she knows, however, the police are operationally independent of me. They

were following the guidance issued by the Government at the time and did very good work to protect the public.

Yvette Cooper: I am glad that the Home Secretary stands by her words and her defence of the police, but how on earth can she then defend the Prime Minister, who has publicly admitted breaking the rules? She is not even waiting for the Sue Gray report. Beth Rigby asked her:

“Are you reserving judgment until the Sue Gray report comes out?”

And she said:

“No. On the contrary, I have publicly supported the Prime Minister”.

Tens of thousands of fines were given out in the months when Downing Street was holding parties. She told the police to enforce those rules but she is now defending someone who has admitted breaking them. The Home Secretary’s job is to uphold the rule of law. Does she realise how damaging it is to public trust and to trust in the police to undermine the rule of law now?

Priti Patel: Perhaps the right hon. Lady has forgotten that, in this country, the police and courts are independent of the Government, and I will always respect that principle. Rather than seeking to prejudice, pressure, smear or slander—as it is fair to say that she and perhaps the entire shadow Front Bench and her party clearly are—it is important to let everyone get on and do the required work. We should continue to support the police in the right way and let them do their job in an objective way. I find it pretty rich that she talks about upholding the rule of law on the day that in the other place her party is doing everything possible to undermine support for the police through its opposition to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

T4. [905058] **Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con): In the run-up to Christmas, hare coursing caused a huge problem across Leicestershire, no more so than in Bosworth. Hare coursing brings with it damage to property and crops, and the intimidation of farmers and residents, so it must stop. The National Farmers Union and local farmers came together with our new rural crime unit in Leicestershire to try to deal with it, but what more can the Government do to ensure that we clamp down on hare coursing in Leicestershire?

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): Like my hon. Friend, I have seen a rise in that kind of offence in my constituency. As the crops are cut and those animals become more apparent, it obviously becomes more of a problem. As I said earlier, I hope that he will see that in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which I hope the whole House will support, we are introducing a range of offences to deal with that crime which, for the first time, will attract a prison sentence of up to six months.

T2. [905056] **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): To return to the Home Secretary’s answers to my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary, in September 2020, she said that she would “call the police” if she saw her neighbours having a party in their garden. Is she confident that the Chancellor was aware of that advice?

Priti Patel: If I may say so to the hon. Lady, I repeat the comments that I made earlier. I appreciate that she may be trying to demonstrate some humour, but the Prime Minister has apologised. At the same time, it is right that the police, who are operationally independent, get on and do their job in the right and proper way, as they have been doing.

T5. [905059] **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): Historically, security-sensitive information has been shared with the Opposition Front Bench, but given last week’s revelations that a former Labour Front-Bench spokesman was in receipt of significant funding from a member of the Chinese Communist party, will there be a review of that arrangement?

The Minister for Security and Borders (Damian Hinds): I am conscious of the statement to follow, but my hon. Friend is right that those are concerning matters. In truth, they are not restricted to a single British politician or a single party. The security briefings that he mentioned continue to play an important role.

T3. [905057] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Last week, at a briefing for Members with the Minister for Afghan Resettlement, Home Office officials indicated that while the Department is not introducing a specific family reunion route, there is some flexibility on visa requirements for Afghan family members of British citizens. Will the Minister confirm, as we were told, that there could be flexibility on visa fees, income requirements and demands for lost or destroyed documents, because that would offer real assistance to constituents who took Ministers’ advice to flee to third countries and are now trapped there?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): To be clear, the wider immigration system obviously operates separately from the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme, but we are carefully considering what the requirements are, and not least how we can ensure people can actually access the system to make applications because, as the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, for obvious reasons we cannot run our usual application centre that we would have in Kabul given the Taliban’s control of the territory.

T6. [905060] **Rob Roberts** (Delyn) (Ind): The Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust has identified a growing trend of theft or vandalism of defibrillators in Wales. I cannot imagine the despair somebody would feel on witnessing a cardiac event and rushing to get a defibrillator, only to find that it has been broken or stolen. Does the Minister agree that that is a deplorable crime, and will he meet me to discuss what steps the police can take to stop antisocial behaviour generally and this terrible crime in particular?

Kit Malthouse: It must be hard for everybody to imagine what kind of twisted mind would think it was a good thing to do to break or steal a defibrillator, and I would be more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to examine the problem in his constituency and, indeed, to see if it is a problem elsewhere.

T7. [905061] **Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Between 2018 and 2021, there were 3,625 spiking reports across 15 police forces in the UK, but just 44 people were charged. Perpetrators are being let off,

while victims are being let down. Will the Home Secretary give her backing to Labour's amendment being voted on this evening in the other place for an urgent review into the incidence and reporting of this crime, as well as of the adequacy of police investigations and the impact on victims?

Priti Patel: The hon. Lady raises the very important and, frankly, quite pressing issue of spiking and its impact across the night-time economy and, much more widely, across society. We are looking in much of the work we are doing in policing at how we can review the matter and how we can actually give the support required.

T8. [905062] **Andrew Bowie** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): The confirmation of the extension of the seasonal agricultural workers scheme is of course welcome. However, as things stand, those visas will be valid for only six months. Given the developments in technology and science in the horticultural sector, the seasons are much longer, so will my hon. Friend give consideration to extending the visas to nine months, helping alleviate the pressures farms face?

Kevin Foster: I have to point out to my hon. Friend that extending visas beyond six months comes with issues such as payment of the immigration health surcharge and the requirement to issue a biometric residence permit, where appropriate. There are some quite considerable issues with the request, but I am always happy to talk to him about how we can support the businesses in his constituency, and I would point out that visas are already not restricted to working at one farm.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The reality is that the seasonal agricultural workers scheme has been woefully inadequate. In the last few years, we have seen fruit and veg being left to rot in the fields. Why then do this Government think it is clever to introduce a further taper, making it worse, and does the Minister understand the damage he is doing to agriculture?

Kevin Foster: It is safe to say that we have not seen the maximum number of visas taken up. The hon. Member may want to have a think about some of the issues that might have affected international travel for seasonal work over the past two years—particularly relating to a global pandemic. Ultimately, our goal is the right goal, and I think it is fair. I think what the vast majority of people across the UK believe is that in the first instance we should actually focus on making sure that job offers go to our domestic workforce and that key workers are appropriately rewarded.

T9. [905063] **Christian Wakeford** (Bury South) (Con): Following the events that took place in Texas this weekend, will the Home Secretary provide an update on the UK investigation into the British perpetrator of the attack on the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue, and on the measures taken to ensure the security of the UK Jewish community, and can I further ask whether the perpetrator was known to the security services?

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for his question; this is a very important matter. Just prior to questions this afternoon, I had a bilateral call with my homeland

security counterpart in the US. Let me say a few things. First, we are working with the FBI—in fact, we have been since the incident took place—and there is a great deal of intelligence sharing and work taking place. Of course, when it comes to our domestic homeland, a range of measures are being undertaken right now, including protective security for the Jewish community. The investigation is obviously live, so I am unable to talk about the specifics.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): Child sexual, criminal and online exploitation are all increasing in this country; they can all be addressed by joined-up working by Government Departments, robust data collection on perpetrators and a police IT system that is fit for the 21st century. That all takes money, vision and leadership. Can the Home Secretary provide that?

Priti Patel: Let me start by thanking the hon. Lady for her question and for her work in this area. In particular, she has worked a lot with me and my Department on the issue of grooming gangs and child sexual exploitation. A wide range of work across the whole of Government is taking place on this, including local authorities, social services and public health. That work is crucial, as is—I know she knows this and has seen it—the incredible investigatory capability of our National Crime Agency, as well as policing, to go after the perpetrators. That work is getting stronger and stronger.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Christian Wakeford), a month ago, Feras Al Jayoosi was convicted on four counts under the Terrorism Act 2000, including twice walking around Golders Green with a large rucksack on his back and a Palestinian Islamic Jihad t-shirt on. Three days ago, Tahra Ahmed was convicted of two charges of stirring up racial hatred, after a complaint about a Facebook post that claimed the Grenfell Tower fire was a “Jewish sacrifice”. My constituents face this daily, often by people from outside the area who are coming in to incite violence and outrage against them. Can the Home Secretary please advise, in addition to the measures she has mentioned about the disgraceful behaviour in Dallas, what my constituents can expect to receive from the police and security services?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is right to raise this. Let me be very clear: in no way and under no circumstances are any of the acts that he has spoken about acceptable. They are thoroughly unacceptable and that is why the police in particular are doing everything possible to go after the individuals. As he will know, certain individuals have been on various watchlists, radars and so on, where we come together to ensure that the Jewish community, and his constituents in particular, are fully supported and fully protected.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The community in Keyham has serious concerns about the amount of pump action weapons being held in residential areas. Will the Home Secretary agree to meet a delegation from Keyham to discuss the concerns about how rules on holding pump action weapons in residential areas can be tightened?

Priti Patel: The hon. Gentleman has raised a vital issue and I thank him for his work locally, and the work of his local authority and policing. I know he has been in contact with the Policing Minister on this issue. We will happily meet him and others from his community. I know this is a particular issue and it is something that we need absolutely to come together on and to work together to resolve.

Ruth Edwards (Rushcliffe) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that, last year, the British public had £78 million stolen from them by clone scammers and people posing as legitimate companies online? Will she work with colleagues from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to set out in law robust identity checks that all online platforms should have to make, before letting people take out advertising on their site?

Damian Hinds: My hon. Friend is right about the scourge of fraud and its prevalence online. We brought fraud into scope for the draft Online Safety Bill. I am

conscious of the issues that she mentions about advertising and we continue to work with colleagues from DCMS on that.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): In our communities, we have asylum seekers who are ready and willing to work in sectors that are experiencing acute shortages, such as fruit and veg picking and HGV driving, but those occupations still do not appear on the shortage occupation list. When will the Government widen that list, or will they simply sacrifice the economy for their hostile immigration environment?

Kevin Foster: It is worth noting that those whose applications have been outstanding for over a year through no fault of their own can access jobs on the shortage occupation list, and we are expanding that to include care workers next month. This highlights an opportunity for 31 out of 32 local authority areas in Scotland to become part of the dispersal accommodation scheme, so that some of these people will be living in their communities.

Foreign Interference: Intelligence and Security

3.34 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on foreign interference in UK politics.

I, like all Members across this House, am utterly appalled that an individual who has knowingly engaged in political interference activities on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party for a number of years targeted Members of Parliament. It is a fact that this kind of activity has recently become more common, with states that have malign intentions operating covertly and below current criminal thresholds in an attempt to interfere with our democracy. Members of both Houses of Parliament should ensure that they are aware of the threat of foreign interference.

State threats to and malign influence on the UK are growing and diversifying as systematic competition intensifies. State threats are persistent and take many, many forms. In fact, we have discussed that many times in this House, given some of the terrible incidents that have taken place, including espionage, interference—that means political interference as well—sabotage and physical threats to individuals.

The Home Office has been working closely with the police and the Crown Prosecution Service for some time on potential measures to help to secure successful prosecutions for this kind of activity. I am unequivocal in the tasking that takes place with our security partners to protect our citizens and institutions from hostile state activity and foreign influence.

In relation to the MI5 security alert issued last Thursday, the parliamentary authorities, following careful and detailed discussion with MI5, issued an alert to Members of Parliament—MPs and peers—alerting them about specific individuals involved in direct political interference. In this case, the individual has well-established links to parliamentarians and facilitated political donations to serving and aspiring politicians, with funding coming from foreign nationals in China and Hong Kong. That was done covertly to mask the origins of the payments.

The individual has links to the United Front Work Department, which is the Chinese Communist Party. They have not been open about the nature of these links. MI5 concluded that this person acted covertly in co-ordination with the United Front Work Department, and is involved in political interference activities in the UK. As anyone would expect, those investigations are ongoing.

In this case, the aim was to make the UK political landscape favourable to the Chinese authorities' agenda and, in particular—I would not question this as there is no doubt—to challenge those who raise concerns about the Chinese authorities' activities on very pressing and pertinent issues such as human rights. Of course, this activity is not new, which is why our agencies are so diligent in the work that they undertake.

We can expect to see these kinds of alerts become more commonplace as a result of the work of our world-class intelligence agencies, which have adapted to counter these new and emerging threats. Security service

interference alerts are just one of several tools MI5 can use to highlight—and thus robustly mitigate—state threats such as malign political interference activity.

Decisions to prosecute individuals are made by the Crown Prosecution Service independently of politicians, so I cannot comment in detail about the work that is under way, but all Members should know that we already have strong security structures in place in the UK to identify foreign interference and any potential threats to our democracy. This case in particular demonstrates such robust action. Those structures enabled our world-leading intelligence and security agencies to issue this particular warning.

Protecting the UK from foreign interference is absolutely crucial. Our most recent integrated review highlighted the importance of strengthening our defence when it comes to state threats, and we are at the forefront of that activity. To build on the strong safeguards that are already in place, we are developing new national security legislation to make it even harder for states to conduct malign activity. We are also taking further steps to protect the integrity of our democracy by tackling electoral fraud and preventing foreign interference in elections through the Elections Bill. We will introduce new legislation to provide the security services and law enforcement agencies with the tools that they need to disrupt the full range of state threats.

As I mentioned at departmental questions, we are working with our allies to take steps to safeguard our open, democratic societies and to promote an international rules-based system that underpins our stability, security and prosperity. We will always take proportionate and necessary action in response to foreign interference in our political system when it comes to state threats, and we will always act in the interests of our country. I commend this statement to the House.

3.40 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement on such an important national security issue and for advance sight of it. As she will know, the Labour party always stands ready to work with the Government on national security and protecting our country from foreign interference.

May I take a moment to think of those in the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue community in Texas who will still be reeling from their terrible ordeal? People must be free to worship at synagogues and other religious sites, free from fear of violence, across the world. It reminds us that we must be unrelenting in our fight against antisemitism and against extremism. It is, of course, of deep concern that the hostage taker was a British citizen. I want to give thanks to our intelligence agencies and police forces, who are working in co-operation with their US counterparts and other international partners to investigate the issue further.

To turn to the Home Secretary's statement, the information that you, Mr Speaker, received from the Security Service last week was obviously extremely serious. We condemn in the strongest terms the attempts by China to interfere in Britain's democratic process. I support the Home Secretary's words on this important issue and, again, I thank the security and intelligence services for their work on this.

Obviously, there are further important questions about the extent of the deception and interference that took place in this case and the ongoing risks of malign activity from foreign states in our Parliament and across our democracy. I appreciate that the Home Secretary will be limited in what she can say in the Chamber; I am grateful to her and to the Security Service for the further briefing that has been arranged.

May I raise a concern about one point in the Home Secretary's statement? She says that this alert shows that our system is working. The work that has been done is clearly important, but I would be very concerned if that meant that the Home Secretary and the Home Office were complacent in this area, because we have seen a series of important warnings about attempts by both Russia and China to interfere in the Russian report and in the report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, particularly with respect to the risks from foreign money. Lord Jonathan Evans has said:

"I don't think we should assume"

that this

"would be the only case. I would be astonished if there weren't similar cases, for instance from Russia."

He has raised concerns that loopholes for foreign money have not been closed, and has described that as

"a live and present threat"

to our democracy.

The Russia report was published in July 2020, and we are still waiting for the full implementation. Nor have we yet had a proper response to the recommendations from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which is chaired by the former MI5 head. Can the Home Secretary assure us that she is not complacent about threats to our national security and to our democracy? Can she tell me when the Russia report's recommendations will be implemented in full and when the results of the consultation on foreign state interference, which closed last summer, will be published?

When will there be a response to the Committee's crucial recommendation on the funding of digital campaigns and to its important recommendation that more needs to be done on identifying the source of donations and the role of shell companies? Labour has tabled a common-sense amendment to the Elections Bill this very afternoon: new clause 9, which would close the loophole allowing foreign donors to hide behind shell companies. Will the Home Secretary now support that important amendment to ensure that donors to UK political parties have a connection to the UK?

Priti Patel: First of all, I take issue with the right hon. Lady's overall comment: there is no complacency. There is never any complacency at all. On issues of national security, it is absolutely vital and important that all parties, irrespective of their previous opposition to aspects of protecting our country from some of our adversaries, come together.

The right hon. Lady has asked a series of important questions not just about protecting us from our adversaries and malign threats, including state threats, but in relation to the Russia report. She will be aware that the Government gave a full response to the Intelligence and Security Committee Russia report in July 2020. Many of the recommendations were already in train, co-ordinating

Her Majesty's Government, the work across the Treasury, and all aspects of Government work, led by the Cabinet Office.

That comes together in relation to much of the work around protecting democracy, which, as the right hon. Lady will be well aware, sits with the Cabinet Office and is co-ordinated through our agencies in terms of understanding where the threats are, calling out malicious cyber-activity, sanctioning individuals, working further on global anti-corruption sanctions regimes and cracking down on illicit finance. That work is clearly co-ordinated at that particular level.

The right hon. Lady also makes reference to aspects of new legislation, and I touched on that issue myself during my opening remarks. She is right to say that the consultation took place last year. Work is under way, and there will be announcements in due course about the approach that the Government are taking to new legislation on state threats.

My final comment is that when it comes to state interference it is absolutely vital that not just all Members of this House, but members of the public—we have had many debates about this during previous elections—officials across Government and local authorities are highly attuned to the implications of state threat interference in democracy and when it comes to cyber. That is why across the whole of Government there is such extensive work on systematic integration and co-operation to ensure that institutions of the state are protected from hostile state interference.

Mr Speaker: We now come to Dr Julian Lewis, Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will undoubtedly be aware of the important distinction between agents of influence or covert propagandists, and espionage agents or spies. In her statement she referred to new national security legislation. In precisely what areas does she anticipate that new legislation interfering in the activities of agents of influence and of espionage agents?

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend has made an important point. In my statement I also alluded to the fact that, when it comes to interference and influence, there are so many facets, including in commercial and economic life. Those are the strands that we are pulling together—in fact the Security Minister, other colleagues across Government and I are developing that legislation so that we can close down that permissive environment and space where, frankly, there has been too much exploitation in the past.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson, Stuart C. McDonald.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I thank you for your letter, Mr Speaker, and the Home Secretary for advance sight of her statement. I join her in paying tribute to the work of our security and intelligence agencies and I agree with her that it is appalling that such activities have been ongoing for a number of years. Will she say a little about why the alert is happening now if the activity has been going on for a number of years? Will she address any concerns that the alert came later than it had to come?

[Stuart C. McDonald]

I also welcome the prospect of a refresh of some of our national security legislation. We will work constructively on that, but will the Home Secretary confirm when we will see that legislation? Will the remaining recommendations from the Intelligence and Security Committee report be fully implemented?

In her statement, the Home Secretary said that malign actors are operating covertly and below current criminal thresholds. Is it her view that those thresholds have to change?

Finally, the Home Secretary talked about making the rules around foreign money tougher. What about the millions of pounds of donations received by political parties, particularly the Conservative party, from unincorporated associations—a type of body that the Committee on Standards in Public Life warned was

“a route for foreign money to influence UK elections”?

Will that be stopped?

Priti Patel: There were a number of points there, but first I will address the hon. Gentleman’s question about legislation. That will come when parliamentary time allows. Specific work is taking place on the development of that legislation in the way I have spoken about; there are many aspects to cover.

The hon. Gentleman also touched on the Russia report, where I refer him to comments I made earlier. He also touched on some of the economic elements of malign activity and influence, in particular. It is fair to say that the security alert issued on Thursday last week pointed quite specifically to the type of activity taking place in relation to lower criminal thresholds. We are going to change the laws to ensure that we can look at those thresholds—that is important work that takes place. However, there is no doubt that foreign influence manifests itself in many, many ways: economic; through our institutions—not just Parliament, and some of these institutions’ involvement are well documented; and dirty money. That has been a long-running issue and it absolutely needs to be addressed.

Sir Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): It would seem that for some of us the old adage, “Beware of Greeks bearing gifts” does not seem to be well understood. The sad truth is that from time to time this activity has happened in our House. Looking to the future, and in welcoming my right hon. Friend’s statement, may I ask whether she agrees that not only is it incumbent on the Government, through their new legislation, to deal with the criminal threshold issue that she mentions, but that we must work, with the House authorities, on the granting of passes and the funding of all-party groups, to ensure that all these subtle but insidious and increasingly brazen attempts to influence Members are stamped out, and stamped out for good?

Priti Patel: My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right, and I thank him for his support, not just now, but when he was in government, on these issues and on thresholds in particular. Of course, Mr Speaker, the alert last Thursday was issued in conjunction with the parliamentary security directorate, and there is work that we will provide support on in terms of vetting and security. It is right that we all come

together, not just across law enforcement, but with the intelligence services, to ensure that we close down any gaps that have been exploited by those who want to do us harm.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Home Secretary has been very robust in defending the Government’s response to the ISC’s report on Russia. In the light of recent events, has she had an opportunity to review the clear recommendations in that report, particularly those pertaining to the Palace of Westminster and what we need to do?

Priti Patel: First, let me welcome the new Chair of the Select Committee and congratulate her on her election. There is no question—I should be very clear about this—but that we learn all the time about gaps and about not just new threats, but the type of tactics and techniques used by those who want to do us harm. It is right that we review absolutely every facet of security here. I come back to my earlier point about protecting democracy from malign interests. Working with the Cabinet Office in particular, which oversees this, that is effectively what we are doing.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend’s statement. Of course it is shocking that any Member of this House should allow themselves to be used by a foreign power, but one problem we have is that this issue is not suddenly emerging. We have now a real problem with China. There are more than 13 organisations hell-bent on such purposes, hiding in public view, working with the United Front and other organisations to report back to China. We know that there are four people we have failed to sanction that the Americans have sanctioned for complicity in the Uyghur genocide that is going on. The Government have got to get tougher even still. The problem is that in the integrated review, which she rightly referred to, we referred to Russia as a threat but to China as a “systemic challenge”. Given that the head of MI6 said that the “single biggest priority” for MI6 was

“adapting to a world affected by...China”

does she not think, as I do, that it is time to change our position and call China the threat that it really is to us?

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend speaks a great deal of sense on this issue. He has highlighted and spoken clearly about the direct threat, which we have seen, in this House alone, when it comes to undermining our democracy. I am very conscious that a number of our parliamentarians have been sanctioned by the Chinese Government for rightly speaking out—we live in a free country and an open democracy, and we are privileged to do so—against abusive actions of the particular Government at hand. It is right that we constantly review all our threats from adversaries, which manifest themselves in different ways. I can give him my complete assurance that I will be working with my colleagues across Government to make sure that that absolutely happens.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Through you, Mr Speaker, may I please thank Members from all across the House for the kind messages that I have received over the past few days? I welcome the Home

Secretary's statement and the work of the security services in protecting Parliament. Will the measures she has announced help MPs to get extra support when making the required checks about the true source of any donations? She will know that the security services told me that their alert was based on specific intelligence of illegal funding, which did not relate to the donations that paid for my office staff. Those ceased in 2020. Is she able to tell the House what steps she is taking to ascertain where the tainted money ended up?

Priti Patel: First, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will continue to work with the intelligence and security services and co-operate with them at the highest level with regards to the alert that has been published and also to the areas that he has referred to. It is a fact that, across this House, we will come together to do everything possible to protect the integrity of our democracy and all hon. Members from such malign interference and threats. I also look forward to working with you, Mr Speaker, to close down some of the permissive loopholes that have been so publicly exposed in the last few days.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): It is a great pleasure to hear my right hon. Friend's statement today. The work she has done on defending this country from foreign interference, and on protecting British nationals under threat of Chinese state propaganda and influence, has been impressive, from her work on the Foreign Affairs Committee to her work in the Department on protecting British nationals overseas. May I ask, building on the questions that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) rightly asked, what more we are going to do to ensure that this dirty money does not come into our community? She will remember that the work she did on the Committee in 2019 raised the idea of a foreign agents registration Act, which would have exposed to criminal prosecution those who put money into our system to undermine our democracy.

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend knows my views on the whole area of foreign agent registration. This is not shining a spotlight any more; this is putting the full beam of transparency on to the dirty money that comes into our country. If I may have your indulgence for a second, Mr Speaker, let me say that for those of us who have spent time reading banking reports and financial reports, following the money that has had the most corrosive influence in some of our institutions has been self-evident. I have already referenced the new legislation that will come forward. This is an area that we are keen to pursue, working with our colleagues across Government, and that is something that my Department will lead on.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I completely agree with the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith). We have to have our eyes wide open about the possible infiltration of British politics by Iranians, Russians and from China. The Government should indeed be sanctioning Chen Quanguo, Zhu Hailun, Zhu Changjie, Huo Liujun and, for that matter, Carrie Lam. They have been undermining human rights both in Hong Kong and in China. However, my biggest anxiety is that we have been saying for a long time—ever since the Home Secretary was on the Foreign

Affairs Committee with us and we produced the “Moscow's Gold” report—that we need to ensure that it is illegal to act as a foreign agent in this country. The Intelligence and Security Committee report says quite clearly in paragraph 1.11 that this still is not the case. I know that she has been consulting on it, but can I just tell her to get a blasted move on?

Priti Patel: The hon. Gentleman makes his point very powerfully; no question about that. He knows the work that I am trying to push forward, and the need to bring forward the legislation. We have had the consultation—we have to consult, clearly—and as I have said already, we are going to be bringing forward the legislation. We need the parliamentary time to do this, but we have a busy timetable—[*Interruption.*] No, we are absolutely working to do that.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I declare an interest as someone who has been banned, not bunged, by the Chinese Government. Mr Speaker, you boldly and rightly banned the Chinese ambassador from coming to the Palace of Westminster when seven parliamentarians and our families were sanctioned by China. Does the Home Secretary agree it will be right that anybody determined to be an agent of influence, or people close to them, have no place coming to this place or any Government Department, sharing our resources and having access to Ministers, parliamentarians and intelligence? Will she also ensure that there is a proper audit of the activities of the United Front Work Department and the harassment and intimidation it brings to members of the Chinese diaspora across the country?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend articulates very clearly the extent to which, across the board both here and in the diaspora, we have been experiencing intimidation and harassment. Having brought forward the scheme to secure British nationals overseas, I heard the most harrowing tales of the most appalling abuse of people from the BNO community who were subjected to all sorts of dreadful things. My hon. Friend is right, and I want to give assurance on a number of fronts. First, not just in relation to Parliament and this House but across Government, I make it clear that we are auditing individuals who could or may have had access to Government and Government Departments over a period of time, as well as auditing meetings that may have taken place not just with Ministers but with officials. These alerts will be shared with officials not just in Whitehall but across the country, including in local government, because we know that the footprint is much wider than just the heart of Government.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement. It is truly sickening that anyone would attempt to infiltrate our Parliament, circumventing the security of this place and even of Prime Ministers. I am also deeply concerned that, following a massive spike in racist attacks levelled at east and south-east Asians during the pandemic over the last two years, this serious incident may cause an entire community and ethnicity to become targets for abuse yet again. What will her Department do to ensure that does not happen?

Priti Patel: I thank the hon. Lady for making that important and powerful point. Of course racism and racist abuse against any community is abhorrent, and we have to work to stamp it out. She is right to highlight the fact that, throughout the coronavirus pandemic—this is a tragedy and awful to know—the south-east Asian community have been particularly vilified and subjected to racist abuse.

It is right that not just the Government but the Home Office, working with our community partners and the police, do everything possible to ensure that any racist incidents are dealt with in the right and proper way and that we give the right protective measures, awareness and support to members of that community.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): The granting of a parliamentary pass is a real privilege, and I think that all of us should take responsibility by helping the House authorities and the Security Service when we are looking at people for our own offices, because we have the right to nominate people. We bear responsibility for checking out these individuals. May I suggest, from my previous experience in the military, that one way of doing that is to make each and every one of us sit down with anyone who wants a pass or who comes into our office and jointly go through a detailed form, with very detailed questions, and jointly sign it?

Priti Patel: I return to my earlier comments about vetting and the support that is currently in place. We can work together to close down any issues of concern. For the assurance of not just all right hon. and hon. Members but the British public, who will no doubt be watching this debate and wondering how on earth any malign influence could enter the heart of our democracy, we will continue to work collectively to make sure we put all the protective measures in place.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): In her statement, the Home Secretary said it was a fact that this kind of activity has become more apparent, but the United Front Work Department has been in existence since 1949, it has a budget of £3 billion a year, and for many years it has used useful fools to propagandise its arguments. May I ask the Home Secretary about universities in particular? There is evidence, certainly from Australia and other countries where tough action has been taken, that the Confucius Institutes are backed by money from the United Front Work Department. Is it not about time we closed them down, and is she content that the Department for Education is responsible for monitoring this?

Priti Patel: The right hon. Gentleman referred first to the prevalence of the activity that we are seeing. Yes, there is more activity, for a number of reasons. Technology changes, these threats evolve and develop with time, and tradecraft adapts and evolves as well. That brings me to his second point, which was about our academic institutions. This is the subject of an ongoing discussion. I have been in many committees where it has been raised, including the ISC, and it is being discussed across Government. He asks whether the Department for Education is doing enough. We have spent a great deal of time working with the Department.

Let me say something about the legislation that we want to introduce. We are learning from other countries, such as Australia—indeed, I had a bilateral meeting just last week. This is also part of the work of Five Eyes. A lot of work is being done to look at the institutional impacts of hostile state activity, alongside issues such as foreign agent registration. We want to get this right through future legislation, and that is what we are working on.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): This is a really important issue, and one that has lessons for all parliamentarians and all political parties. It seems to me that the crucial issue, as the Home Secretary has highlighted, is the whole business of foreign donations and cash being used for inducements. That is the main reason why, during the 10 years in which I have chaired the all-party parliamentary China group, all our sponsors have been British organisations. Does she agree, first, that we need to get a grip of the whole issue of foreign donations, wherever they come from, because third-party countries can be used as well? Secondly, does she agree that the Committee on Standards needs to look more closely at whether any individual parliamentarian needs to be investigated? Thirdly, does she agree that while of course we must rise to the systematic challenge of China that was raised in the integrated review, we do not wish to avoid any engagement with a nation that is a fellow permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and with which we have much important business to do?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend makes a number of points. In relation to the House, standards and transparency, there are already measures in place, as we know, and greater work will take place, as I have said. Obviously we will support all aspects of Parliament to ensure that when more work can be undertaken on transparency, it will indeed be undertaken. When it comes to China's role in the world, in multilateral institutions and organisations, and our own values versus the type of values that the Chinese Government are proposing around the world, I think it is fair to say that there are many difficult issues. The House recognises that, as do I as Home Secretary and the entire Government. I have already alluded to issues such as human rights abuses, whether they involve the Uyghurs or even BNOs, whom I have helped assiduously. I have set up a bespoke scheme to ensure that they are safe, despite the measures that the Chinese Government are putting in place. We as a Government will always stand up for what is right in the world. That means international law and the rules-based system, and it means calling out those who have behaved in an appalling and inappropriate way in respect of some of the issues that I have touched on.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I remind the House that I serve as co-chair of the all-party parliamentary groups on Uyghurs and on Hong Kong, and that I am a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, which is chaired by the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith). I heard what the Home Secretary said about the implementation of the ICS's Russia report. I hope that there will now be a bit more urgency in the implementation of its recommendations, not least because we expect the publication of the

Committee's China report before too long. May I also say to the Home Secretary that if this is to be done effectively and the House and indeed this Parliament can then present a united front to the outside world, she should now be working with all parties across the House to build the consensus necessary to implement those recommendations?

Priti Patel: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments. On issues such as national security and intelligence co-operation, he is privy to much of our work and will understand the approach that we take. When it comes to legislation that is under development, we know that there are just so many aspects on which we need to legislate. I have already touched on criminal thresholds and the changing nature of the threats. We are also looking at schemes that are already running in other countries—jurisdictions overseas—to see how we can apply them to our own jurisdiction. It takes time to work through them, but I give the House every assurance that we will work in a collaborative way on these measures.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): Two years ago, I wrote a paper on how to bring in a foreign lobbying law into the UK—the Security Minister has a copy of that. With great respect to the Home Secretary, I think that these scandals will just carry on, as they have been doing ever since I came to this place, until we update our espionage laws, until we update our domestic lobbying laws, and until we bring in a foreign lobbying law. The Australians and the Americans—examples I looked at in the paper—have robust laws that cover banking, finance, law, politics and information. We need such laws, because otherwise these scandals will just keep on coming, as sure as eggs is eggs.

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He has also just touched on the wide-ranging nature of threats. That covers, as I have said, institutions, finance and all aspects of direct harm to individuals. As he will know, there is a great deal of work taking place on the economic and financial front. I know that he and the Security Minister discussed much of that as well. Let me assure him that, through the work that we are undertaking—he is welcome to have further meetings with us on this—he will see the way in which we are pulling these strands together and, importantly, learning from some of the other countries to which he has referred, including in his own report. We are looking to create similar schemes, but obviously within our legal framework and within the lawful way in which we can implement them.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The Chinese state holds a 33% stake in Hinkley Point, a 10% stake in Heathrow airport, and a 9% stake in Thames Water. Moreover, a number of the UK's top universities have ties with Chinese military-linked research centres. For more than 18 months now, Labour Front Benchers have been calling on the Government to undertake a comprehensive audit of every aspect of the UK-China relationship, so that our businesses, universities and public figures are aware of the risks and the threats to our national security. Will the Home Secretary now agree to get this audit underway as a matter of the utmost urgency?

Priti Patel: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and indeed for setting out the context of the question. He highlights the extent to which China has been investing in the United Kingdom across our utilities, various aspects of business, our institutions and academia, as we touched on earlier. The National Security and Investment Act 2021 is a response to many of the things that have taken place, predating many of us in office and some aspects of this Government as well. We must not only constantly keep a watching eye, but review and look at the investments that are coming into the United Kingdom. That work is taking place across the whole of Government.

Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for her statement. The word “covert” has been used quite a bit, but the Chinese Communist party is acting in plain sight. It is threatening the House and it is threatening MPs, and then it sanctions MPs who expose what it is up to. My question to my right hon. Friend is this: where is the organising force of this Government? I respectfully say the same to the Speaker: where is the organising force for this House in defending our democracy and also ensuring that we are not complicit in genocide? What support is being provided to parliamentarians who have been sanctioned, and to those individuals who gave evidence to the Business, Energy and Industrial Committee, especially the World Uyghur Congress, which feels threatened in this country? Why are we not blacklisting firms that are selling our data to the Chinese Communist party and selling us products made by Uyghur slave labour? Finally, will she do everything she can to get the individuals who run those prison camps in Xinjiang sanctioned—in particular, Chen Quanguo?

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend not just for her question but for her commitment and the work that she has been leading on. I thank all parliamentarians who have been so vocal on many of the abuses that have been well rehearsed and debated in this House.

On the support for parliamentarians who have been sanctioned, which is a really important point, that is where the House needs to be strong, and we are coming together with the parliamentary authorities to ensure that measures are put in place. She asked where is the might in Government. When it comes to defending democracy—as she will know, because she will have had discussions with my colleagues at the Cabinet Office as well—we lead on this, and, with other Departments, absolutely work in an aligned way on the specific details. A great deal is taking place that covers all aspects of threats. I touched on institutions, education and business, and the National Security and Investment Act, but there are also spaces such as cyber, and direct threats to individuals too.

My hon. Friend asked about sanctions on key individuals, and she is not the only Member to touch on this. I have heard the calls from all Members who have spoken on this issue and I will be raising it with my counterparts in the Foreign Office.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Our relationship with China has rightly evolved from the “golden decade” heralded by former Conservative Chancellor George Osborne. Today Members across

[*Chi Onwurah*]

the House have raised issues of political interference, university research technology transfer, the diaspora presence here, human rights, and investment in this country. The Secretary of State seems to imply that the work on the National Security and Investment Act will address all these issues, but it will not. Will she commit to the audit of UK-China relations that Labour has been calling for?

Priti Patel: A whole raft of work is taking place, not just on China but in relation to the integrated review, and I am sure the hon. Lady has seen that. There will be new legislation coming forward. A great deal of work, much of it unspoken, takes place with our security and intelligence agencies that influences the work on China of Government, Government Departments, and the agencies within Government. It is right that we do absolutely everything we can. New threats evolve, technology advances and tradecraft advances as well. That is why we put very significant investment and resource into not just law enforcement but our intelligence agencies, who inform Government Departments and Ministers in terms of the approaches that we should be using.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): The actions of the Chinese Government towards Members of this House, and apparently now within this House, are unforgivable. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss how, within the counter-hostile state Bill, we could put in place protection not only for Members of Parliament but for all British nationals when hostile Interpol red notices are placed on them? Does she agree that every Member of this House should be taking it upon themselves to make sure that we do not act as helpful idiots for our enemies?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend has summed it up quite well. Of course I will be happy to meet her in relation to the legislation that is under development. There is a very poignant note here. We have touched on defending democracy and exposure to Parliament by those that seek to do us harm, but it goes much wider than that, as I have already mentioned: to different institutions, to officials, to civil servants, and across the board. Everyone should be very, very well attuned to the types of engagements that they are having from individuals and what their motivations are.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): It goes without saying that we all have to do everything we can to prevent foreign influences from buying their way into our democracy, but there is an opportunity to deal with an aspect of that today—the shell companies that can be used to hide resources of money that is being used for that purpose. Why are the Government not supporting that move today?

Priti Patel: Work is under way in looking at that whole area. In fact, the Security Minister is also working with his Treasury colleagues and counterparts. A lot of work has taken place on it, and we are happy to write to the hon. Gentleman directly to give him an update.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Will the Government outline the action that they are going to take to work with UK businesses and universities to

ensure that they are more resilient and effective at protecting their data, research and intellectual property from theft and interference by foreign Governments?

Priti Patel: I reassure my right hon. Friend that much of that work is under way through the National Cyber Security Centre, which not only constantly puts out alerts across the board but has direct engagement with those institutions. That work, of course, will continue.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Further to the Home Secretary's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford), tonight this House will debate the Elections Bill. Although it is important to ensure that we can close loopholes that allow foreign money to flood into our British democracy, it is also important to ensure that we do not create new loopholes. I draw her attention to the changes that will allow millions more citizens who are overseas to donate to British politics. In the light of what she knows from the Russia report, which the Minister responsible for the Elections Bill has not read, as she told us in Committee, can she say whether the Bill makes us more or less safe from foreign interference in British politics?

Priti Patel: It is important to say that the Elections Bill covers a whole range of aspects, such as protecting democracy and electoral reform. It is important to recognise the work that is taking place across the board with the Cabinet Office. I know that Cabinet Office Ministers will speak much more about that later.

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I start by paying tribute to our outstanding security services, which keep us safe day in, day out. I have been astounded by the eye-watering sums that some individual parliamentarians received from Christine Lee and organisations connected to her. Does my right hon. Friend think that those individuals should pay back those sums, if not to the people who donated them, perhaps to a charity connected to human rights in China?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend raises some tantalising recommendations, it is fair to say, for consideration. It is important that anyone who has been in contact with the individual or who has received anything from the individual continues to co-operate with our intelligence and security services.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Friday's announcement came as a surprise to many people, but not to many in Hendon, because it was in fact my predecessor, Andrew Dismore, who established the British Chinese Project in Parliament. He subsequently went on many trips to China and the Hendon Labour party received more than £6,500 in donations. When I was first elected, representatives who I can only presume were connected to this individual came to me and I rejected their overtures. I agree with the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) that we need an audit of what has gone on in our political system and in our civic society.

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend makes an important and valid point. I would like to speak to him about some of the points that he makes.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): Half a million quid is a lot of money. If I had had that, I would probably have had a deeper scratch and sniff at it. However, by accident or whatever, people are seeking to undermine our democracy. Can my right hon. Friend tell me: are we going to nick ‘em, are we going to lock ‘em up, and are they going to face criminal charges?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend robustly makes her point. She will have heard in my statement about the issue with the CPS, the approaches that it takes and the criminal threshold. There are ongoing investigations that I cannot comment on, but a review of criminal thresholds will take place, because we need to see action taken against individuals who undermine our democracy.

Mr Speaker: I would like to add that, quite rightly, we will work closely, between the Home Secretary, the services and this House, to ensure that Members are kept safe and that we put the right protection in place. I also stress from this Chair that I think the sanctions against Members of this House and of the other House are wrong, and the time has come for China to lift them. The sooner it does that, the sooner trust can be rebuilt. While they exist, however, trust will always begin to fail.

BBC Funding

Mr Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture Media and Sport, I want to point out that there were extensive stories in the media over the weekend about the future of the licence fee and the BBC’s funding arrangements. I also understand that the Secretary of State tweeted about the subject—either that or she lost her phone—stating:

“This licence fee announcement will be the last.”

These are very important matters that affect all our constituents, and this House quite rightly has a keen interest in them. Any statement on a substantial policy development should have been made to this House before being made to the media.

I am glad that we have a statement today, but it is not good enough for this House to come second to the media, especially on subjects such as this that are of interest to us all. When the House is sitting, important policy statements must be made here before being made to the media, as required by the Government’s ministerial code. In any event, I will always ensure that the House has the opportunity to scrutinise important policy announcements, and the Government may well find that such opportunities are more frequent and more extensive if announcements are made to the media first.

I have the greatest respect for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and for the Secretary of State, but can we please ensure that such announcements are made here? If it was leaked and the Secretary of State felt that she had to respond, let us have a leak inquiry, because we have a major colander right across Government, and I do not want to see this happen again.

4.26 pm

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Ms Nadine Dorries): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I offer you my personal apology. I actually refused every media invitation both yesterday and today.

Under article 43 of the BBC’s royal charter, I am required to determine a funding settlement for the level of the licence fee for a period of at least five years from 1 April 2022. I am legally required to make my determination as far in advance as possible.

I also highlight that, this year, the licence fee settlement has featured S4C prominently for the first time. In line with the recommendation from the independent review of S4C completed in 2018, the licence fee will be the sole source of public funding for S4C.

Negotiations began back in November 2020, and both I and my predecessor met the BBC on several occasions during this period to discuss this settlement. As part of those negotiations, the charter requires that I assess both the BBC’s commercial income and activities and the level of funding required so that the BBC can effectively fulfil its mission and public purposes. In addition, this Government set out our own relevant factors to consider during the charter review in 2015-16: evasion, commercial income, household growth and industry costs.

As the Prime Minister has said, the BBC is a great institution. It has a unique place in our cultural heritage. Beyond our shores, the BBC broadcasts our values and

[Ms Nadine Dorries]

identities all over the world, reaching hundreds of millions every day. Likewise, the Welsh broadcaster S4C plays a unique and critical role in promoting the Welsh language, and in supporting our wider public service broadcasting landscape.

However, in reaching this settlement, I had to be realistic about the economic situation facing households up and down the country. The global cost of living is rising, and this Government are committed to supporting families as much as possible during these difficult times. Given that climate, we had to think very carefully about imposing any potential increase in the TV licence fee, particularly when any increase would expose families to the threat of bailiffs knocking on their door or criminal prosecution. When it comes to monthly bills, this is one of the few direct levers we have in our control as a Government. In the end, we simply could not justify putting extra pressure on the wallets of hard-working households.

Every organisation around the world is facing the challenge of inflation. I simply do not believe that those responsible for setting household bills should instinctively reach into the pockets of families across the country for just a little more every year to cover those costs. Today, I am announcing that the licence fee will be frozen for the next two years, and will rise in line with inflation for the following four years.

The BBC wanted the fee to rise to over £180 by the end of the settlement. Instead, it will remain fixed at £159 until April 2024. That is more money in the pockets of pensioners and of families who are struggling to make ends meet. We are supporting households when they need that support the most. This settlement sends an important message about keeping costs down while also giving the BBC what it needs to deliver on its remit. The approach to funding will be the same for the BBC and for S4C. However, I can announce that S4C will receive an additional £7.5 million funding per annum from 2022, to support the development of its digital offering. That is a 9% increase, following five years of frozen funding.

We believe this is a fair settlement for the BBC; it is a fair settlement for S4C and, most importantly, it is a fair settlement for licence fee payers all across the United Kingdom. Let us not forget that the BBC will continue to receive billions in annual public funding, allowing it to deliver its mission and public purposes and to continue doing what it does best.

To support the BBC even further in what is a fast-changing broadcasting landscape, the Government will more than double the borrowing limit of the BBC's commercial arm to £750 million. That will enable the BBC to access private finance as it pursues an ambitious commercial growth strategy, boosting investment in the creative economy across the UK. But as Tim Davie said in his first speech as director-general of the corporation, the BBC must be a "simpler, leaner organisation" that offers "better value" to licence fee payers. We agree with that. Ultimately, this settlement strikes the right balance between protecting households and allowing broadcasters to deliver their vital public responsibilities, while encouraging them to make further savings and efficiencies.

The licence fee settlement is only one step in our road map for reform of the BBC. In the last few months, I have made it clear that the BBC needs to address issues

around impartiality and groupthink. Those problems were highlighted definitively by the recent Serota review. The BBC's own leadership rightly recognised those findings in full and committed to deliver all the review's recommendations in its 10 point action plan on impartiality and editorial standards. I have had constructive discussions with the BBC about those issues in recent months. The BBC now needs to put those words into action. It needs to convince the British public that those changes are being made, and to provide regular and transparent accounts of its progress.

We will shortly begin the mid-term review of the BBC's charter, which will consider the overall governance and regulation of the BBC. A key part of that review will look at whether the BBC's action plan on impartiality has, in fact, materially contributed to improving the organisation's internal governance.

It is also time to look further into the future. As any serious commentator will tell you, Mr Speaker, the broadcasting landscape has changed beyond all recognition over the past decade. We are living in a world of streaming giants, on demand, pay per view and smart TVs. Technology is changing everything. Some 97% of homes already have superfast broadband. A family in Cumbria can stream five different movies in five different rooms in their house at any one time, and our gigabit roll-out is transforming those networks even further. More than 65% of UK households now have access to the fastest connection on the planet.

As the tech has changed, so have audience habits, particularly among younger viewers, so it is time to begin asking those really serious questions about the long-term funding model of the BBC and whether a mandatory licence fee with criminal penalties for individual households is still appropriate. As we have said before, we will therefore undertake a review of the overall licence fee model. Those discussions will begin shortly.

The BBC has been entertaining and informing us for 100 years. I want it to continue to thrive and be a global beacon in the UK and in the decades to come, but this is 2022, not 1922. We need a BBC that is forward-looking and ready to meet the challenges of modern broadcasting; a BBC that can continue to engage the British public and that commands support from across the breadth of the UK, not just the London bubble; a BBC that can thrive alongside Netflix, Amazon Prime and all its other challengers that attract younger viewers. The licence fee settlement represents a significant step in that journey and in our wider reform of the BBC.

I look forward to continuing to work with the BBC and others across the industry over the coming years to secure the future of these vital British services. I commend this statement to the House.

4.36 pm

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I completely agree with you, Mr Speaker, that it is a disgrace that an announcement of this importance was not made to Parliament first. I also look forward to the leak inquiry that you mentioned.

May I take this opportunity to congratulate the Secretary of State on coming top of the teacher's pet list? She was the first Cabinet Minister to tweet support for the Prime Minister; she was the first to volunteer to do a broadcast round; and now she has been the first to throw up a

distraction and find someone else to blame for the Prime Minister's disintegrating leadership: the BBC's reporting, of course.

The licence fee deal must be fair to fee payers while ensuring that the BBC can do what it does best. There should be no blank cheques. However, the Government claim that this is all about the cost-of-living crisis. I mean, pull the other one! What is it about the £13.57 a month that marks it out for such immediate and special attention to address the cost of living, over the £1,200-a-year increase in energy and household bills or the £3,000-a-year tax increases that the Culture Secretary's Government have imposed?

Is the licence fee really at the heart of the cost-of-living crisis, or is this really about the Government's long-standing vendetta against the BBC? Now it is part of Operation Red Meat to save the Prime Minister from becoming dead meat. Apparently, negotiations with the BBC had not even been finalised when the Culture Secretary gave the details to a Sunday newspaper on the very weekend when the Prime Minister's position was most in peril? I leave it to you, Mr Speaker, and others to judge the timing of that.

The Culture Secretary has proven today that Conservatives may know the price of the licence fee, but not its value. The last time they targeted it, the over-75s paid the price. What assessment has she made of the impact of the two-year freeze on BBC output and commissioning and on the wider creative industries more broadly? Is she happy to become the Secretary of State for repeats? *[Interruption.]* Oh, there's more coming—there is lots of fun to be had with this, don't worry.

This is not enough red meat for the Culture Secretary. She will not stop until her cultural vandalism has destroyed everything that is great about Britain. Vandalism is exactly what it is to tweet on a Sunday—with no notice, discussion or thought—the end to the BBC's unique funding, without any clue about what will replace it.

Perhaps the Secretary of State will explain how the BBC will continue valued services that just would not be commercially viable. First, how can it continue to support local journalism where so many have recently failed? In many areas, the BBC is the last local news desk standing.

Secondly, how would a commercial-only BBC be able to play such a crucial role, as the BBC has, in levelling up and growing the creative industries across our regions and nations, from Cardiff to Salford and elsewhere? The Government are silent on that one. I support the increased funding for S4C, but the Government claim to support the Union, so what assurance can the Secretary of State provide for the continuation of distinct broadcasting in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland when there is no licence fee?

Thirdly, would the Secretary of State's cut-back BBC be able to continue with the world service and its global soft power, which her Government's review described only last year as

“the most trusted broadcaster worldwide”?

Finally, what would happen to BBC Learning, BBC Bitesize, and children's educational programming, which, frankly, did a much better job than the Government, who could not even provide iPads, in getting high-quality education into children's homes during lockdown?

The impartiality of the BBC is crucial to trust in it. By explicitly linking charter renewal to the BBC's editorial—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Quite rightly, I wanted silence for the Secretary of State. I expect the same respect to be given to the shadow Secretary of State. To those voices that I keep hearing, I know who is behind the mask. If you want to go out early, do not make me help you on your way.

Lucy Powell: I know that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis) is actually a big fan of mine but he is just trying to hide it behind his mask.

The impartiality of the BBC is crucial to trust in it. By explicitly linking charter renewal to the BBC's editorial decisions, the Government sound more like a tinpot dictatorship than a healthy democracy. The BBC creates great quality, British-produced programming, from royal weddings to “Strictly Come Dancing” and great British drama, as well as championing new music. It is at the cutting edge of harnessing the digital age. Of course it needs to change with the times and review its output and reach, but it is a well-loved and trusted British treasure, and it is the envy of the world.

The Government are in trouble, however. The Prime Minister is casting around for people to blame, and the Culture Secretary has stepped up to provide some red meat. Well, it will not work. This is not how the future of our jewel in the crown and the cornerstone of our world-leading creative industries should be determined. She will have a fight on her hands if she wants to destroy it.

Ms Dorries: I think there were about 30 questions in that statement so I will address the top points. First, it is nobody's intention to destroy the BBC. In fact, I completely agree with the hon. Lady that it is a beacon, but the BBC licence fee is not a small amount of money for families across the UK who are working hard but struggling to pay that bill, and who face bailiffs at their door or a magistrates court appearance. Who are we to say that it is a small amount of money? That is a disgrace. It is a significant sum, and it is also regressive. Whether getting by on minimum wage or on a multimillion-pound presenter's salary, we fork out the same amount of money. That is not right. Only those who have not faced hard choices weekly on what they can and cannot afford for their families would claim that that was a small amount of money. As a point of principle, we cannot add to that bill at a time when every family faces pressure on their wallets.

Would the hon. Lady like to indicate from a sedentary position whether she supports freezing the licence fee for two years and helping those hard-pressed families? *[Interruption.]* Is that a no? The hon. Lady is shaking her head. She does not support freezing the licence fee to support those hard-pressed families who need every bit of help in the face of rising global energy costs and rising pressures from inflation. The hon. Lady has declined to help those hard-working families. What we are saying is that moving forward, we need to decide, discuss and debate. Bring it on—everybody in the House, let's discuss what a BBC in 2027 will look like. It is not a policy; we are announcing a debate and a discussion. Let's all get involved positively.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): May I say to my right hon. Friend that I am not impressed by the process or the proposal, and I do not think it necessarily leads to progress, either? I would be grateful to know whether there was an assessment of alternatives, when they were put to Cabinet Sub-Committees, when the Cabinet considered the proposal and why it is that this is the one thing on which a Government Minister will claim that we cannot have any kind of increase because people are short of money.

Other things that the Government run are linked to the retail price index or the consumer prices index, and it seems to me that it would be better to have a discussion in the House on whether we should have a moderated increase during the remaining years of the charter. If she did not say that this is the last time that there will be a charter with a subscription, will she please put the options in front of the House for people like me who say that if the choice is between the United States or the state, public broadcasting on the BBC and Channel 4 is better than having everything go to some of the big media people around the world who would not maintain the kind of BBC that we have had for the past 100 years?

Ms Dorries: The decision on what the future funding model looks like is for discussion. Some of us may not even be here by the time 2028 arrives, but it is up for discussion, and that is what we need to decide. I have the greatest respect for the Father of the House—he knows that; I have known him for 20 years—but I honestly cannot agree that the BBC can just continue to ask for more money from the British public year after year. I do not agree with that premise. Do not be under any illusions: the BBC will continue to receive billions of pounds, even under this settlement. It will get £23 billion of public money over the course of the charter to 2027. We cannot justify, in the face of rising inflationary pressures and increasing global energy prices, going to the British public and say, “Pay more. If you don’t, a bailiff will be at your door.”

John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for an advance copy of the statement, not that we needed it; she shared her thoughts with Twitter. Plus ça change. We all know that the timing is to distract from the Prime Minister. The Secretary of State claims that the move will protect pensioners from court cases, but that argument is disingenuous nonsense. It was this Conservative Government who abolished automatic free television licences for the over-75s. If pensioners are struggling with the BBC fee rate of 43p a day, imagine how they will cope with the cost of a Netflix or Sky subscription model. Everyone knows it means less programming at a greater cost.

The Secretary of State has spoken about exploring the options for the BBC, but in reality I suspect her mind is well made up. She let that slip in the Select Committee when she said to me:

“How do I even know if the BBC is going to be going in 10 years?”

Some custodian of public service broadcasting. The hostility towards the BBC and its future does not stem from a desire to protect pensioners, but rather from a visceral loathing of the Prime Minister’s critics. The Tory right hates the BBC almost as much as it hates

Channel 4. That is why the Culture Secretary, a dotting prime ministerial loyalist, is so determined to destroy both. She does not want to see Krishnan Guru-Murthy lead presenter of Channel 4 News, or Nick Robinson—a former chair of the Young Conservatives no less, and now lead presenter on the “Today” programme—pin down the Prime Minister or his slippery apologists. She knows, does she not, that the Tory right wants the broadcast media to be as sycophantic as most of the print press, offering fawning adulation to their leader. If the BBC is felled, and Channel 4 privatised, free speech will be the victim, and we know—do we not, Mr Speaker?—that the result will be yet more obsequious, unquestioning news.

Ms Dorries: I have no idea how anyone could make the leap from “let’s have a debate and a discussion in the House about how the future funding looks” to “privatisation”. It’s just—I have no further comment.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): Speaking strictly personally, I welcome the freeze, and the overt commitment to wean the BBC off the licence fee. As Lord Grade said on the “Today” programme this morning, nearly £160 is nothing to Gary Lineker, but it is a lot to our constituents. I and the House would like more details please about whether the licence fee will stop in 2028, or be phased out. The latter, in my view, gives the best chance of preserving the BBC’s status in our national culture. How will moving to alternative funding models work given, first of all, the paucity of broadband coverage, with old technology such as Freeview being embedded in the system? Will the central Government funding that has been mooted stand up legally, and also measure the key issue of impartiality?

Ms Dorries: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and support on the freeze, but I take issue with the point about paucity of broadband. Some 97% of homes in the UK have superfast broadband—[*Interruption.*] As I said, 97% of homes have superfast broadband, and we are rolling out gigabit. As I said in my statement, someone in a house in Cumbria can download five videos—five movies—in five different rooms in the house. We do not have a paucity. On whether the licence fee will be phased out and what a future funding model will look like, those discussions and analyses have not even begun, but all Members of the House should, and will, be part of those discussions. I imagine that the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee will be doing very important work on the issue moving forward, in terms of establishing a future funding model, and that work will continue in the future.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State say what impact assessment she has done of the impact that the change will have on households if fees were increased? What will be the impact on services provided by the BBC as a consequence of these freezes to its income, on top of the 31% that it has had cut from its income over the past 10 years? How will that affect the services provided by the BBC, and how will they survive her plans for the BBC?

Ms Dorries: Both I and my predecessor have been negotiating with the BBC for a considerable period, and the BBC will be meeting its mission and core purpose. The most important impact assessment is that fewer families will end up in a magistrates court.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): Like many of the best things in this country, the BBC licence fee may not work in theory but works really well in practice, as shown by very low levels of evasion. There are, of course, many alternative ways of funding it, but as the DCMS Committee, which my right hon. Friend referred to, concluded last year, the Government either need to “come out with a strong alternative to the BBC licence fee that it can put to Parliament, or strongly support the current model for at least the next Charter period (2028-2038).”

Does the Secretary of State have that alternative on offer?

Ms Dorries: I thank my right hon. Friend for his contribution. I am afraid that we differ in our opinions. We have five or six years—there is plenty of time to decide what a future funding model would look like.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): We abolished the radio licence fee in 1979 and moved to a TV licence fee, so I am not against moving towards an internet licence fee or something like it. But we need to know the details, the thresholds and the amount of money that would be raised. Does the Secretary of State accept that her announcement that this would be the last licence fee, without going through the consultation first, was reckless?

Ms Dorries: As I said, when the new model starts in 2027-28, many of us may not even be here—we are talking six years away. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's contribution and look forward to his being part of the discussion and debate about what we do in the future.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): As the Secretary of State will know, the Select Committee report that my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) just referred to acknowledges in its very first recommendation that

“the Government will need to act...to ensure that the public service broadcasting system remains sustainable in...today's...global media market.”

In that sense, I am glad that we are having the debate, even if I am a little unclear about where it came from this weekend.

Given that the Select Committee report is also clear that the Government need a credible view on what any alternative to the licence fee might be and on what their vision is for the future of public service broadcasting, what are my right hon. Friend's instincts as she kicks off this welcome national debate?

Ms Dorries: My instincts are let's start the discussion. Let's have a look at the—*[Interruption.]* That is what I am starting, Mr Speaker—unless, of course, Members of the House would just like us to decide and not have the debates and not have the discussion. That is where we are going: we are going to start that discussion—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) is speaking from a sedentary position; perhaps she would like to confirm whether she supports the freeze to the licence fee? A yes or a no—a nod or a shake—would be great. No? There we go.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Despite the fact that the removal of the free licence for the over-75s was a result of her own party's actions, the Secretary of State's tweet yesterday indicated that her

attack on the BBC was due to the over-75s being threatened with prison sentences and bailiffs knocking on their doors. Yet less than two weeks ago, she told this House that

“no enforcement action has been taken against anyone over 75 years of age”.—*[Official Report, 6 January 2022; Vol. 706, c. 131.]*

I know that the Secretary of State would not make such claims without evidence. Will she please now share with the House what data she found to support yesterday's comments?

Ms Dorries: The hon. Lady has drawn a direct link between two different parts of my tweet when there is no direct link; it is just one of many reasons why I want to look at how we fund a great British institution in the future.

Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con): I accept the need to freeze the licence fee. However, the conversation over the future of the licence fee is far from over. What steps will the Secretary of State take to protect the BBC's local services, which those who pay for it watch and enjoy, before the knives are sharpened within the BBC?

Ms Dorries: The conversation has not actually started. Local radio is an important point. Someone made the point about local BBC news coverage. Many of us used to have lots of independent news coverage in our constituencies that is no longer there. Some might say that the dominance of the BBC locally helped to contribute to that. My hon. Friend has some very important points to make and experience on local radio. I urge him to be part of the discussion and help us frame what things will look like moving forward.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Growing up, my cousins overseas always told me that they listened to the BBC when they wanted to know the truth. I now represent somewhere known as “BBC borough”, as there are that many ex-employees, including myself, around. Will she tell all of us where exactly the change was in the Conservative manifesto? Already, people are seeing it as just a distraction for party gain. I also have fond memories of watching, in my constituency, the Secretary of State on Channel 4 reality TV. Does her trashing public service broadcasting apply to that channel, too? It is a great Thatcherite innovation.

Ms Dorries: Excellent question. I am not going to conflate Channel 4 with the BBC; I am here to talk about the settlement of the licence fee. The second part of question means that I cannot remember the first part, but the hon. Member made a really important point about the BBC World Service. The BBC, with the billions of pounds of funding—£23 billion—it is receiving, will still be able to meet its core mission and purposes.

Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): My right hon. Friend must be right that the BBC cannot stand still while the rest of the world moves along, but does she accept that, when we think about the future funding of the BBC, we have to consider both the content that is marketable and is going to be commercially successful, and the content that is not, but will act as the beacon she describes—not just to this country, but to the rest of the world—in quality

[Jeremy Wright]

broadcasting and news and current affairs content in particular? Is not that kind of content likely to continue to need subsidy in any future funding model we design?

Ms Dorries: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that contribution and he is absolutely right. One of the things we do not want is for all the TV that is streamed in the UK to come from overseas. The discussion and the debates that we have about the future funding formula are going to have to include how we protect, preserve and create great British content. That has to be part of the debate moving forward. Can I tell him about elements? No, I cannot because we have not even begun the discussions yet. What modelling is there? I have been told already there are a number of ways in which we could look at funding the BBC moving forward.

Lucy Powell: What are they?

Ms Dorries: Well, it is not for me to decide, so we have to—[*Interruption.*] It is not for me to decide until I have all the information and all the evidence.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Could I just say to the Secretary of State that I wish I had the level of broadband coverage that she talks about in my constituency?

When I was a councillor—a member of the Highland Council—I had to be very careful of the BBC, because its reporting of all I said and did was very thorough indeed, and that was good for local democracy. Can I also say to Conservative Members that the coverage of the Scottish Government has been very thorough? At the time of the Scottish independence referendum in 2014, it was so thorough that it reduced the then First Minister to near apoplexy, as Members will recall. A slimmed-down BBC may not be able to deliver the sort of service that is good for local democracy and for Scottish democracy. Could I ask the Secretary of State how she intends to make sure that we do not lose out on that front?

Ms Dorries: Democracy, particularly local democracy, is at the heart of a lot of what the BBC does, and that is why it will be an important element of conversations that we have moving forward—an important contribution. As I have said a number of times, the discussions, the debates that we will have in this place and the evidence that we will take moving forward have not begun. We are seven years—six or seven years—away, and that is the consultation that we will have here, the evidence that we will gather here, and the debates and discussions that we will have. Those discussions will start shortly. We are talking about a new funding model that will start in 2028.

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): My right hon. Friend will be aware that, last year, the number of TV licences purchased fell by 700,000, and that more and more young people are now saying that they do not need to watch the BBC because of the enormous amount of choice through the streaming services. Does she agree that, even despite that increase in content, we will still need public service broadcasting and the BBC, and

therefore it is right to have a debate about the future funding model not to undermine the BBC, but to ensure that it can survive going forward?

Ms Dorries: I thank my right hon. Friend, and that was my response to my early question: how do we keep good content—great British content—made in the UK? The BBC is a national institution—how do we maintain the BBC? The question is not: do we or do we not have a BBC? The question is: how do we fund the BBC moving forward? I know my right hon. Friend has made some interventions of his own and has ideas of his own, and I look forward to his furthering those.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): Many of us find it nauseating that the Secretary of State has come here to talk about hard-pressed families when she supported the £20 cut to universal credit. I am sure she wants to be objective and have the fullest information. So could we test how much she considered some of these factors, perhaps in the style of the broadcast media? How much more money is generated by the investment in the BBC? Is it £1, £2 or £3? She talks about the north. How much of the BBC's economic impact is beyond London? Is it 10%, 20% or 50%? Perhaps she could demonstrate her knowledge at least of the BBC's impact.

Ms Dorries: I will write to the right hon. Gentleman with those specific figures.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): Eleven years ago, the then director-general of the BBC said the corporation would have to do “fewer things better.” The current director-general has challenged the organisation to prioritise how it spends its money and maximises its commercial revenues. Does the Secretary of State agree that reform is necessary for the BBC to thrive in the digital age in both how it works and how it is funded?

Ms Dorries: We cannot ignore the fact that our digital landscape is transforming and advancing at a rapid pace, which has resulted in people, and especially the younger generation, changing their viewing habits. I would be accused of being a dinosaur if I stood here and said we should just let the BBC carry on as it is with this licence fee model. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) highlighted, 700,000 fewer people are paying the licence fee. We have to do something now to sustain the BBC and maintain this British beacon. We have to act now to ensure the BBC remains the BBC and is here for the future.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I welcome that, at long last, we have a Secretary of State who is prepared to grasp this nettle, to tackle the BBC poll tax, to stop enforcing payments against people who are angered by the BBC's bias, to force this organisation to consider its bloated expenditure and, especially as broadcasting is now changing, to allow people greater choice. I hope that, despite the cries of outrage from the BBC's buddies in this House, she will not back down on these issues.

Ms Dorries: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support. It is worth making the point that the BBC will continue to receive billions of pounds of public support and funding between now and 2027.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend decriminalise non-payment of the licence fee to take the pressure off magistrates courts? Should this not be a household bill like any other?

Ms Dorries: That is something we are keeping under review. In today's age, should we really continue with a licence fee paid by individuals with the potential threat of bailiffs or criminal prosecution? That is an important question and it will be part of the discussion.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The establishment of the BBC in Salford, neighbouring my constituency, has created many excellent jobs for my constituents and has been an important economic and cultural driver of success in the north-west, but that is not what I want to ask the Secretary of State about. What guarantees can she give to the BBC's world-class salaried orchestras? I have had the great privilege of attending the BBC Philharmonic's concerts as its guest.

Ms Dorries: The BBC, as I have said, will continue to receive billions of pounds-worth of funding, and it will continue to meet its mission and core purpose, but I cannot dictate how it spends its money and I do not have editorial control. It is up to the BBC to decide how it spends its licence fee settlement.

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and recognise the priority she has given to Welsh language broadcasting and its importance to the Welsh-speaking community in Wales. In supporting her statement and helping the BBC to achieve its objectives under the new settlement, will she call on the BBC to follow other public sector organisations in improving its transparency and to publish every invoice in excess of £500, just like every other organisation does?

Ms Dorries: S4C plays a vital role supporting the Welsh economy, culture and society. The funding will support S4C in reaching more Welsh language speakers, including younger audiences. I am sure S4C heard what my right hon. Friend just said, and I shall certainly take his points back.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Let us talk about value for money. Does the Secretary of State agree that 43p a day is value for money for BBC iPlayer, BBC Sounds and the BBC World Service?

Ms Dorries: It is billions of pounds, and I do not believe that any family receiving repeated letters, or a bailiff knocking on their door, or a request to appear at a magistrates court would think it is value for money, because it is money they cannot afford. The issue is that working families and people who are hard pressed in the current situation of rising inflationary pressures think it is difficult to pay £159 a year out of their income, which is why we are freezing the licence fee for the next two years and not allowing it to rise.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, because household bills are under pressure and it is reasonable to freeze the fee for two years. In the whole discussion outside and inside this place so far, we talk about television and streaming services, but does she agree that, when the conversation takes place, we will have to make sure that

the BBC's important radio programmes across the board are protected and still funded? We cannot compare it to a Netflix or Apple model, because radio is such a key part of the BBC's output.

Ms Dorries: It absolutely is, and I think it will be a key part of the discussion. My right hon. Friend mentions Apple and Netflix, but it is not the BBC's role to be competitive with other providers. Radio will certainly continue to be a huge part of the BBC and will be the subject of a huge part of the discussion.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Over the generations, people all over the world—some in fear of their lives—have huddled around their radio, straining to hear the words, "This is London," because they trust the BBC World Service news. Given that a subscription service will never work for airwave radio, what assurance can the Secretary of State give those listeners and the House that the BBC's service to the world that is the BBC World Service will be able to continue to do its job?

Ms Dorries: The right hon. Gentleman jumps the gun when he talks about a subscription service. I have not mentioned that. I have said that we need to have a debate about how the BBC is funded in the future. I completely understand his point, but how the BBC spends the money it receives via the charter is for the BBC to decide. We do not have any influence over that.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): The Secretary of State is right to say we should be discussing the future of the BBC. In her statement, she mentioned two important elements of the charter—to entertain and to inform—but there is a third: to educate. That is the element of public service media that is the most difficult to commercialise. Will she ensure that that element of the BBC is protected in the future?

Ms Dorries: I hear my hon. Friend's point, and I think a lot of people agree with him. People have talked about the contribution made by BBC Bitesize during the pandemic, which was vital to families home schooling their children. I will bear his comments in mind and take them back.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree with me that, having shown contempt for the British people in the past week, today's announcement on the BBC shows the Government treat British institutions with contempt as well?

Ms Dorries: No.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Last Friday, my private Member's Bill to abolish the BBC was to be read a Second time, but, unfortunately, there was not enough parliamentary time to proceed. I promote quite a lot of private Members' Bills, and sometimes I get some support and sometimes I get some opposition. Tens of thousands of people supported getting rid of the BBC licence fee and very few were against it, so may I thank the Secretary of State for coming to the House today and making a statement? If my Bill is of any use to her, I would be very happy to change in Committee any of the stuff I have there at the moment.

Ms Dorries: Thank you. I look forward to that.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): The Secretary of State has come to the House today to say that the freeze in the licence fee is to help hard-working, struggling families. May I ask her to answer the question put to her by the Father of the House: when was this decided? Did it go through a Cabinet Sub-Committee? Did Cabinet sign this off, or is it that just over the last weekend the Government thought they would come up with something that would take the attention away from the Prime Minister?

Ms Dorries: Cabinet has signed it off. These negotiations have been going on; they did with my predecessor as well as with me. Legally, I had to make my statement in as much time as possible before April, which is why I am making it today.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I often find that those best placed to give their view on whether we need the BBC or not are those who have lived, worked and travelled abroad and have not had access to the BBC. Therefore, I applaud the constituent who has written to me, having done just that, to say that the BBC needs to be celebrated and maintained, because he sees what a future looks like in this country without the BBC. Given that inflation is expected to rise to 6% in the early parts of this year, what conversations has the Secretary of State had about which content will be reduced as a result of the decision she is making today?

Ms Dorries: I ran a school in Africa for a year and I understand the value of the BBC World Service, because I was a listener for a whole 12 months. Having lived in Africa and run a school there for a year, I also know the importance of the BBC. That is why I have said all along that this discussion is not about, “Do we have a BBC or don’t we?” It is about, “How do we maintain the BBC moving forward, in a rapidly changing, modernising landscape? How do we fund the BBC in that event?” That is what the discussion is about, moving forward; it is not about whether or not there is a BBC.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I am no fan of the regressive licence fee, but the Secretary of State saying on Twitter that this will be “the last” licence fee announcement is discourteous to this House, to all the many people who watch and listen to the BBC, and to all of those who are employed by the BBC. How does she believe that the 50 BBC employees based in my constituency are currently feeling because of the announcement she made on Twitter over the weekend?

Ms Dorries: I think that on Instagram I added that it is likely to be the last, because I cannot see a world—and I do not think many people can—in 2028 where individual households are paying an outdated fee which was established in 1922 to fund such an organisation; I do not think anyone could ever have seen what a digital landscape would be like today, what the viewing habits of young people would be like today or what the opportunities will be in 2028.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): In some ways, the BBC is the best of global Britain, but in a globalised media landscape we know that there are people prepared to pay for Netflix, for all those subscription services, and for web services and for all the multitude

of things that the BBC offers. Is it not daft that someone would suggest that the Secretary of State should stand up today and say that even from 2028 to 2038 people will have to pay for the whole lot, whatever they want?

Ms Dorries: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution and for his contribution to the Department when he was there. He is absolutely right: it is not about whether we have our great British institution of the BBC, which is globally recognised—that is not the question. The question is that we live in a different world, people have different and changing viewing habits, and by the time we reach 2027—[*Interruption.*] When I started some of the negotiations—when my predecessor started some of the negotiations—TikTok did not even exist. We are moving rapidly to a different place, which is why we have to have the debate.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): Many of my constituents have written to me in praise of the recent BBC investigative documentary about the cladding scandal. One of my constituents who lives in a dangerously clad house talked about how much she appreciated having an independent state broadcaster to challenge unethical companies. I remind the House that it was the BBC that revealed that warnings about cladding quality issues had been ignored for years. Does the Secretary of State recognise the BBC’s crucial investigative role? In the discussion that she keeps talking about, will she assure the House that her proposals will not cut the budget for the BBC’s investigative programmes?

Ms Dorries: I do not set the budgets for the BBC’s investigative programmes; the BBC does.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Reform is clearly needed. It is absurd in the modern world that people can be criminalised for not paying a licence fee just for an entertainment channel. However, the devil is in the detail. I represent a rural constituency where many smaller villages and hamlets cannot get superfast broadband. If we are to base public policy on the fact that everyone can stream programmes, can we ensure that they actually can stream programmes before any final decisions are made or reforms are implemented?

Ms Dorries: There is no policy; we are just starting a discussion and a debate. This is not based on whether people can achieve streaming or not, but 100% of households achieving superfast broadband or gigabit broadband is the objective.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I heard what the Secretary of State said about S4C, but my constituents would simply not recognise what she says about the rest of the BBC being some sort of London bubble. We have seen a 54% increase in our creative economy locally, with thousands of people employed and the BBC at the heart of that—“Doctor Who”, “Casualty”, “Shreds” and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. Every pound invested in our local economy by the BBC generates almost double that in return. Does the Secretary of State accept that what she has suggested today puts that at risk, along with jobs and opportunities in Cardiff including those in deprived communities?

Ms Dorries: S4C will receive a further £7.5 million per annum from the licence fee to support its digital investment. In total, S4C will be provided with approximately £88 million in licence-fee funding per annum. We are committed to S4C, and we are providing it with additional funding.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): As a former BBC and ITV journalist, I look forward to taking part in discussions about the future of the BBC. I am a big admirer of local and regional BBC journalism, such as the Local Democracy Reporting Service, and its coverage of rugby league and local football, which maybe would not happen on any other platform. However, in terms of Yorkshire and the location of Channel 4's new headquarters, how does today's announcement impact on the timescale for announcements about Channel 4's future?

Ms Dorries: I have made no announcement other than to say that we are starting a discussion about the future funding of the BBC. I am here to make a statement on the licence fee settlement, and I am not conflating that with Channel 4.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): The Secretary of State does not appear to be being straight with the House. Her tweet at the weekend clearly said:

"This licence fee announcement will be the last."

That is why many of my constituents are worried that the BBC's unique range of programming that brings together the UK's nations, regions and diverse communities is not safe in this Government's hands. The BBC's mission to inform, educate and entertain has worked for almost a century, so will the Secretary of State rule it out that she is seeking to undermine and sacrifice this great national institution in order to save the Prime Minister's political skin?

Ms Dorries: I am not.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): At a time when household budgets are under unprecedented pressure, the decision to freeze the licence fee will be universally welcomed in Blackpool. My constituents will also welcome the Secretary of State's comment that it is high time we had a discussion about the very existence of the licence fee. In the meantime, what discussions is she having with the BBC to ensure that the licence fee can achieve value for money?

Ms Dorries: I have regular meetings with the director-general, the chair and other members of the BBC to discuss those very issues.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The Secretary of State says she cannot tell the BBC what to do, but she also says she wants the BBC to play "God Save the Queen" more often, so I wonder whether she thinks today's announcement makes that more or less likely. The BBC has been described as the glue that holds the Union together, so will slashing its funding in the way that she wants make that glue stronger or weaker?

Ms Dorries: I did not hear the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, but what I would say is: what is wrong with playing "God Save the Queen"? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] What is wrong with it? He asked the

question as though that was a dirty word or something that should not be said. What is wrong with playing "God Save the Queen"?

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): Like many of my constituents who are also the parents of young children, I have a daily battle to guide my children away from some of the content on some channels and towards the relative nourishment they will find on the BBC. As we look to the future of the BBC, and in addition to the scrutiny that is rightly placed upon the financing model, what objectives or processes might my right hon. Friend have in mind to ensure that the quality of the output, where the BBC is world-leading in so many areas, is maintained for the long-term?

Ms Dorries: That is the point of discussion. I have said again and again that this is about how we protect the BBC and how we ensure that, under the present agreement and settlement, it can continue to meet its mission and its purpose. How do we protect the BBC going forward? How do we ensure that we have good quality content made in the UK that stays in the UK and that we can sell from the UK? And how do we, in this changing, shifting, rapidly moving landscape, have a BBC that is funded for the future in order to protect it?

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I am glad that the Secretary of State responsible for digital has noticed that business models for content creation have changed in the last 100 years, but the need for a unifying, shared expression of British culture, identity and creativity has not. Is not the real reason for this attack on the BBC that it is a successful British public sector institution, and she just cannot stand that?

Ms Dorries: No.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): I was proud to spend the first seven years of my career at the BBC, but it is worth remembering that back then, in the 1990s, there were only four main terrestrial TV channels. The Secretary of State is absolutely right to say that the whole landscape has changed fundamentally since then, and I tend to agree with her that the licence fee must therefore be on borrowed time, but does she agree that any new long-term model of funding for the BBC will need to take into account the possible implications and repercussions for the commercial public service broadcasters that currently rely on advertising?

Ms Dorries: That is a very important point. Everything needs to be considered in the round: all the elements of the BBC's reach, everything that it does and everything that it achieves. That is why we have to start the debate now, even though the future funding model would not come in until 2028. We need that time to prepare, to ensure that all the elements that are beneficial to the UK, to the BBC and to producing that great British content will remain.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): It was pleasing to hear the Secretary of State claim that she recognised the importance of Welsh language broadcasting, but she then proceeded to announce a real-terms cut to the BBC settlement. That settlement provides around £20 million of S4C programming annually in addition

[Ben Lake]

to the Welsh language services provided by BBC Radio Cymru and Radio Cymru 2 and by BBC Cymru Fyw. Can the Secretary of State therefore explain how a real-terms cut to the BBC settlement will not see a reduction in its important contribution to Welsh language services?

Ms Dorries: S4C's settlement will consolidate S4C's current £74.5 million licence funding with its current £6.8 million annual DCMS grant income. On the real-terms cut to the overall BBC that the hon. Gentleman has talked about, that is a fact because we have frozen the licence fee for two years, but S4C's funding, which has not increased for five years, will now increase. The BBC's funding has always increased every year; it will now freeze for the next two years. S4C's funding has been frozen for the past five years, and it will now increase.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): We have to accept that the media landscape, and importantly its use, has changed beyond recognition over the past few years, so I agree with Lord Grade, the former chair of the BBC, that a universal regressive tax to pay for a BBC that is no longer universally used is no longer defensible. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the BBC, now and in future, has a vital role to play in creating a version of our common truth at home and abroad?

Ms Dorries: That vital role of the BBC moving forward is one of the issues that we have to ensure we protect, along with the British content that we make, as I have said. The fact is that the BBC is a global beacon around the world and people in other countries depend upon it, as hon. Members have mentioned. Maintaining the BBC is something we have to protect, but how it is to be funded is the question. That is what the discussion will be about.

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): I am British and proud of it, and I am proud of the BBC. It reaches 468 million people in 42 languages around the world every week. It is the envy of the world. Cutting funding to the BBC and the World Service already leaves the path clear for Russian and Chinese influence in those countries. Does the Secretary of State agree that only an unpatriotic party would cut the real-terms funding of that national treasure?

Ms Dorries: Unpatriotic? I do not think it was this side of the House that was laughing about the prospect of the national anthem being played on television; I think it was that side of the House. I disagree—I am not unpatriotic; I am very patriotic.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): The people of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke want the licence fee to be scrapped. When I had 3,000 respondents to a survey, 96% of them agreed with that. They feel that the BBC spoke down to them when they voted for Brexit and that it is out of touch with the people and values of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke. It is time for the BBC, like the Labour party, to get out of the metropolitan bubble and spend some time in Stoke-on-Trent in order to understand what people think. It is welcome that my right hon. Friend

has frozen the licence fee and opened the conversation, but does she agree that it is time to scrap the licence fee altogether?

Ms Dorries: We can all see how, once again, my hon. Friend speaks up for his constituents. I am interested in the survey and I would love to see some of the responses. He spoke about scrapping not the BBC but the licence fee, because I am sure that his constituents want to watch and enjoy the BBC. This is about how we fund the BBC in a modern digital landscape at a time when young people consume their television in different ways. How do we fund the BBC to protect and maintain it moving forward, but in a different way?

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I wish the Secretary of State would stop with the crocodile tears about the cost-of-living crisis, because £159 is a lot of money, particularly for my constituents, but it happens to be exactly the same amount, on average, as they will pay in extra national insurance from April this year. If the Government really cared about the cost-of-living crisis, they could do something about that. My real fear is that she simply does not understand how intrinsic to the nature of the BBC and its success around the world the licence fee is. It means that there is something for everybody—for all my constituents—including the poorest constituents, who cannot afford Sky. She says that the BBC gets lots of money, but Sky got five times as much money this year, and its revenues this year increased by 18.9%. Yes, this is an unpatriotic move to dismantle one of the greatest British treasures.

Ms Dorries: The hon. Gentleman talks about £159, but the BBC wanted it to project to £180. This is one of the levers that we have in Government to help hard-working families, given the increasing inflationary pressures. We are here to help and protect the BBC, and the only way we can do that—[*Interruption.*] I ask the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) again: does she support the two-year freeze on the licence fee to help hard-working families? Again, no plan. The hon. Lady dodged that question on media this morning and she is dodging it here in the Chamber.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): I praise the Secretary of State for helping to tackle the rising cost of living for many families at a difficult time. Does she agree that since they are having to tighten their belts, perhaps the BBC should do the same? A good place to start might be with salaries, including that of one of its presenters, who earns £1.36 million a year.

Ms Dorries: Businesses across the UK are having to tighten their belts. Households across the UK are facing inflationary pressures and having to tighten their belts. The two-year freeze on the licence fee means the BBC will be doing the same. I could not agree more with my hon. Friend.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): Last Wednesday, at Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister was challenged about the future of the licence fee. He seemed to caution against this by referring to the BBC as a "great national institution", yet by the weekend the Secretary of State was tweeting that this would be the last licence fee agreement. Will she explain to the House

what on earth has been going on in No. 10 since Wednesday that has led to what appears to be a screeching U-turn?

Ms Dorries: As I have said on a number of occasions, we have been having these discussions for months. In fact, my predecessor had the discussions before me. Legally, I have to make an announcement as far in advance of April as possible. That is why I am here today.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for freezing the licence fee and launching an inquiry into its future. Will she confirm that, first, impartiality and the licence fee are different issues? Secondly, if Netflix can go from one twentieth the size of the BBC to eight times its size in just 20 years, is there not plenty of scope for creative thinking? Thirdly, will she encourage the leadership of the BBC to respond positively, and not with the defeatist and backward-looking attitude of the Labour party?

Ms Dorries: I thank my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for his question. Impartiality and the licence fee are two entirely separate things. The Serota review made its recommendations, and the leadership of the BBC fully agreed with those recommendations and agreed to implement them. We now want transparency, to see what difference those implementations make, but they are a completely different issue from the settlement of the licence fees.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I am very proud of the BBC—it is the best of British, and it is recognised and respected around the world. It is also the best of value. Its fee works out as two thirds of the price of a pint of milk per day—I happen to know the price of a pint of milk. Is the simple truth not that the Prime Minister, unlike previous Prime Ministers such as Margaret Thatcher and many others, is frightened of the BBC and of being scrutinised? Margaret Thatcher actually phoned in to Radio 4's "Today" programme. This Prime Minister would prefer to hide in the fridge.

Ms Dorries: The Prime Minister is a huge fan of the BBC and of "Today". The discussions that we are having are to help protect the BBC, because if anyone sitting here thinks that we could go to households in 2028 and expect them to pay the licence fee—with fear of prosecution if they do not—in order to watch the television that they have bought and put in their house, they are, frankly, a dinosaur. We in this House have a responsibility to protect the BBC. As part of that responsibility, we have to look forward and think how we can change the BBC and fund it in a changing digital landscape.

Craig Williams (Montgomeryshire) (Con): On the Conservative side we have a proud history with S4C. Today is another important step forward. I thank the Secretary of State for putting S4C at the core of her statement, and for the £7.5 million increase per annum. Could I draw her into a meeting with me and likeminded colleagues about the Welsh language, and the fact that core public service broadcasters have nurtured it and helped it grow, such as S4C and BBC Radio Cymru?

Ms Dorries: I thank my hon. Friend and am happy to have such a meeting. For five years S4C had no increase in its funding, and it was high time that it did, given that the BBC has had year-on-year funding increases.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): The family in Cumbria that the Secretary of State talked about, who were streaming five different movies in five different rooms, are probably paying a minimum of £43 a month for Netflix, Sky and broadband. That does not include the social value that the BBC provides, from educating youngsters through CBeebies and CBBC, to the company it provides for those suffering from loneliness, along with the innovation of BBC iPlayer and BBC Sounds. Will she assure me that this freeze will not diminish the vital services that the BBC provides?

Ms Dorries: The licence fee settlement ensures that the BBC can continue to meet its mission and its purposes, and it will continue to receive billions of pounds of funding—£23 billion over the licence fee settlement period.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): When the BBC came before the Public Accounts Committee, it was striking how unambitious its target was for growing commercial revenues, which represent just 6% of its current income. Will this welcome decision, including the increase in the borrowing limit, which the BBC asked for, come with a requirement for the BBC to increase that income rapidly and reduce the burden of the licence tax?

Ms Dorries: Increasing access to private equity was one of the first steps towards doing that.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): We have already seen the loss of hundreds of jobs of BBC journalists involved in the much-valued regional news and current affairs programming, including the excellent "Inside Out" programme. Before making the decision to freeze the fee, what assessment did the Secretary of State make of the impact on local and regional news programming?

Ms Dorries: This is about increasing and reforming services across the BBC, to ensure that the BBC is there in the future and able to service the hon. Gentleman's constituents, by adopting a funding model that means the BBC will be sustainable and will be there for the long term.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): Putting "BBC documentary" into YouTube is one way of obtaining a world-class education, because it is possible to learn about so many different things. However, that sentence also suggests that the world is evolving. Although I am a huge fan of the BBC, I welcome the licence fee review. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that we ensure that this stuff is still there for people like me in future generations?

Ms Dorries: I do agree. My hon. Friend has encapsulated the situation we face, given the fact that BBC documentaries are being watched on YouTube. Young people, I was amazed to learn, consume huge amounts of television via YouTube. This is why we have to review the situation and start discussing what the future of the BBC funding stream will look like.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): Diolch, Mr Speaker. There will be considerable concern in Wales about the post-2020 situation, because the implied subscription-type model will never work for S4C or Radio Cymru, or indeed for the wider BBC in Wales. Will the Secretary of State pledge to ensure that there is a full consultation with Welsh stakeholders so that the Welsh language does not become collateral damage in the British Government's culture war against the BBC?

Ms Dorries: I thought the hon. Gentleman was going to thank me for the additional £7.5 million that we are giving to S4C. I thought he was going to thank us for the fact that S4C's funding, having been frozen for the past five years, is now being increased and we are freezing the BBC's funding. I have never mentioned the word "subscription". As I have said time and again, we need to start a dialogue about how we fund the BBC in the future.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I welcome the freeze in the licence fee and the debate that is to come. Given the millions across the United Kingdom and abroad who do love the BBC, there must be countless options for future funding models for content that can be commercialised, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the most important strand of any reform is de-linking the requirement that in order to watch other content people must pay for the BBC?

Ms Dorries: That is an interesting concept, and I am sure that it will be part of the discussion.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Is one option that the Secretary of State is considering to increase funding by allowing the BBC to carry advertisements? If so, has she considered the risk that that will remove the balanced factual basis of BBC news reporting?

Ms Dorries: As I said when I arrived at the Dispatch Box, we are beginning the discussions about how a future funding model for the BBC will look. We have not gone into that level of discussion yet.

Ukraine

Mr Speaker: I will not run this statement for long, because of the nature of what is coming afterwards, but it is important that it be taken.

5.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Ben Wallace): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will update the House on the situation in Ukraine.

As of today, tens of thousands of Russian troops are positioned close to the Ukrainian border. Their deployment is not routine; they are equipped with tanks, armoured fighting vehicles, rocket artillery and short-range ballistic missiles. We and our allies have legitimate and real cause for concern that the configuration and scale of the force being assembled, supported by Russian air and maritime long-range strike capabilities stationed in the region, could be used for the purpose of conducting a multi-axis invasion of Ukraine, but whatever final decision the Russian Government take on the use of such forces, their presence and levels of readiness are contributing to a destabilising and coercive atmosphere that risks miscalculation at best, and at worst, conflict.

Furthermore, in recent weeks, we have observed hardening Russian rhetoric, heightened cyber-activity and widespread disinformation that could serve to provide a false pretext for a Russian military intervention. False narratives are very much part of the Kremlin's playbook; they were used in 2008 before Russia's invasion of Georgia, and in Ukraine in 2014. False narratives are being peddled again today: Russia has suggested that its military build-up on the border of Ukraine is in response to NATO aggression and an agenda by the west to use Ukraine to divide and rule the Russian nation. It has put forward this outlandish notion that NATO is attempting to encircle Russia.

Let me be clear. No one is trying to rule the Russian nation. Only one sixteenth of Russia shares a border with a NATO ally, and NATO is and always has been a defensive alliance. NATO, at its core, holds a belief that any country in the alliance, no matter how big or small, is by right of membership owed a pledge of mutual defence: if you attack one of us, you attack us all.

From 12 founding countries in 1949, the NATO alliance has grown to a total of 30 today. Those countries have joined the alliance not because NATO is making them do so, but because of the freely expressed will of the Government and people of those countries. Countries choose NATO; NATO does not choose them. If Russia has concerns about the enlargement, it should perhaps ask itself why, when people were free to choose, they chose NATO.

NATO is an alliance of like-minded nations that, as well as sharing a commitment to mutual defence, share a set of common values. The sovereignty of other nations is respected by all. Each nation has a sovereign right to choose its own security arrangements. That is a fundamental principle of European security—one, indeed, to which Russia has subscribed in the past—yet Russia now seeks a veto over who joins NATO.

The United Kingdom will stand up for the right of countries to choose their alliances. More important than the choice they make is the right to have that choice. On my recent visit to Sweden and Finland, two

non-NATO countries, it was clear that Kremlin attempts to dictate what sovereign states can or cannot choose had been rejected across the political spectrum.

I must stress that no one wants conflict. The Ukrainians are not seeking confrontation, despite the illegal annexation of their lands in Crimea and the occupation of Donbass, and I am sure that ordinary Russian people who remember the first Chechnya conflict and other, older conflicts do not want yet another quagmire either. Last week, there were intensive discussions on the international front to achieve a diplomatic solution to the current situation, including at NATO and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Engagement at the NATO-Russia Council made it clear that NATO is open to dialogue with Russia on a range of issues to protect Euro-Atlantic security, including risk reduction, transparency, arms control and lines of communication, but we will not reward aggression.

We are open to dialogue on a bilateral basis. On 23 December, the Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Tony Radakin, spoke with his Russian counterpart, General Gerasimov. In their call, they agreed the vital importance of maintaining communications to understand each other's intentions and to avoid miscalculation.

When the Prime Minister spoke to President Putin on 13 December, he expressed the United Kingdom's deep concern over the build-up of Russian forces on Ukraine's border, and also reiterated the importance of working through diplomatic channels to de-escalate tensions and identify durable solutions. The Foreign Secretary continues to engage with the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, including recently in person at the margins of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Stockholm on 2 December.

Russia has the largest conventional force of any single nation in Europe. It has a proud history. We have fought together. We celebrated the courage of the Arctic convoys at the 80th anniversary last year. Russia is a nuclear power. It does not have anything to fear from NATO or Ukraine or the other countries that strive peacefully on the continent of Europe. Today, I am extending an invitation to my Russian counterpart, Sergei Shoigu, to visit London in the next few weeks. We are ready to discuss issues related to mutual security concerns and engage constructively in good faith.

The UK's position on Ukraine is also clear. We unequivocally support its sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, including Crimea. Ukraine is an independent, sovereign country of proud, independent Ukrainian people. The UK Ministry of Defence already has a long-standing relationship with our Ukrainian counterparts, and we continue to provide support in many areas, including security assistance and defence reform. Since 2015, the UK has helped to build the resilience and capabilities of the Ukrainian armed forces through Operation Orbital, which has trained more than 22,000 Ukrainian troops. We maintain the right to deliver bilateral support to a sovereign nation when requested in areas that will better help them defend themselves.

It is important that Ukraine has the capability to defend itself. After Ukraine lost large parts of its navy to Russia's illegal occupation of Crimea, it became important to help Ukraine build up and sustain a naval capability. We should not forget the thousands of Ukrainians who have lost their lives defending their

country and who, every day, are murdered by snipers from across the divide. That is why, in 2019, I expanded Operation Orbital to include naval co-operation, and that is why, last year, we agreed a range of measures, including supplying Ukraine with two mine counter-measures vessels as well as agreeing the joint production of eight new ships equipped with modern weapons systems—defensive weapon systems.

As I said in the House last week, the framework agreement presented to Parliament in November 2021 affirmed the principles that the UK will provide both training and defensive capabilities to Ukraine to help it best defend itself. Within that same principle, I can today confirm to the House that, in light of the increasingly threatening behaviour from Russia and in addition to our current support, the UK is providing a new security assistance package to increase Ukraine's defensive capabilities. We have taken the decision to supply Ukraine with light, anti-armour defensive weapons systems. A small number of UK personnel will provide early-stage training for a short period of time within the framework of Operation Orbital before returning to the United Kingdom.

This security assistance package complements the training and capabilities that Ukraine already has and those that are also being provided by the UK and other allies in Europe and the United States. Ukraine has every right to defend its borders, and this new package of aid further enhances its ability to do so. Let me be clear, this support is for short-range and clearly defensive weapon capabilities. They are not strategic weapons and pose no threat to Russia. They are to use in self-defence. The UK personnel provided in the early-stage training, as I have said, will return to the United Kingdom after completing it.

The Prime Minister has been clear that any destabilising action by Russia in Ukraine would be a strategic mistake that would have significant consequences. That is why there is a package of international sanctions ready to go that will make sure that Russia and its Government are punished if they cross the line. But the cost of an invasion will not just be felt by the west. I have visited Ukraine five times since 2016, and I know that the Ukrainians are a proud people who will stand and fight for their country, for democracy and for freedom. Any invasion will not be viewed as a "liberation", but as an occupation and I fear that it could lead to huge loss of life on all sides.

The current difficult relationship with the Kremlin is not the one we wish to have in the United Kingdom. It does not have to be this way. The UK respects the people, culture and history of Russia. We have more in common than we may think—culturally, historically and technologically. We wish to be friends with the Russian people, as we have been for hundreds of years. There is a world in which we can establish a mutually beneficial relationship with Russia, working together on shared areas of interest and addressing mutual security concerns. The current gap is wide but it is not unbridgeable. I still remain hopeful that diplomacy will prevail. It is President Putin's choice: whether to choose diplomacy and dialogue or conflict and consequences. But Russia's current behaviour is not only threatening the sovereignty of a proud nation state; it is also destabilising the rules-based international order and challenging the values that underpin it. That is why it is all the more important

[Mr Ben Wallace]

that we stand in solidarity with those who share our values, including our NATO allies and partners like Sweden, Finland and Ukraine.

5.55 pm

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. I welcome its contents and make clear Labour's full backing for the steps the Government have been taking on international diplomatic efforts to de-escalate threats, on defensive support for the Ukraine military, on necessary institutional reforms within the country, and on tough economic and financial sanctions in response to any fresh Russian invasion into Ukraine.

There is unified UK political support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including Crimea, in the face of escalating Russian aggression. This bilateral UK backing is hugely appreciated in Ukraine, as I and the shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), confirmed when we visited Kiev last week. Four things were clear to us from our wide-ranging discussions. First, this crisis is made in the Kremlin. Ukraine's independence and borders were guaranteed by Russia, alongside the US and the UK, in the 1994 Budapest agreement under which Ukraine also decommissioned its nuclear weapons, then making the whole of Europe much safer. What special role and responsibility does the Defence Secretary believe the UK still has as a guarantor of this agreement? Ukrainians warmly received recent visits from Defence Ministers, as well as the Defence Secretary himself, just before Christmas. When will the Foreign Secretary also visit Ukraine to underline the UK's strong continuing support?

Secondly, talking is better than fighting. The international unity last week, especially at the NATO-Russia Council, is very important to Ukraine. NATO, as the Defence Secretary said, has acknowledged Russian security concerns. What are the areas it has offered as open to dialogue, and is any further international diplomacy scheduled with Russia?

Thirdly, Ukraine has faced active Russian aggression for many years. Russia's big military build-up on its borders now is part of the continuous attacks Ukraine has faced, as the highly destructive malware detected by Microsoft at the weekend in many Government networks shows us and reminds us very strongly. What role will the UK play in delivering the new cyber co-operation agreement that NATO and Ukraine have signed today but the Defence Secretary did not mention in his statement?

Fourthly, Ukraine is a different country now than it was in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and Russian proxies seized parts of eastern Ukraine. Some 13,000 Ukrainian lives have been lost in fighting since then. Its military, its sense of identity, its resolve to resist Russia, and its determination to become a good European country—as Prime Minister Yatsenyuk put it to us—have all become much stronger. It is critical that the Kremlin appreciate that any new military attack on Ukraine will be bloody on both sides. What is the Defence Secretary doing to get across to President Putin that important message on miscalculation? When did he last meet his Russian counterpart?

Finally, I turn to military support to Ukraine as a sovereign nation seeking to defend itself. The shadow Foreign Secretary and I were told many times last week how highly Ukraine values UK military training, and how frontline troops bring out their British Operation Orbital certificate when asked about the best help they have had. We welcome the recent expansion of bilateral British support to naval co-operation, and we back the new delivery of defensive weaponry that the Defence Secretary has announced this afternoon, but let us be clear that that will be framed by Russian propagandists as provocation. Will the Defence Secretary spell out clearly that those are defensive anti-tank weapons with a much shorter range than the US Javelin missiles that Ukraine has had for some time, and that they will not be used unless Russia invades?

These are dangerous days for security in Europe—especially for the Ukrainian people. Even at this 11th hour, we across this House hope deeply that diplomacy, sound judgment and respect for international law will prevail with President Putin.

Mr Wallace: I thank the right hon. Gentleman and the Labour Front Bench for their support and for the detailed engagement that they have undertaken with the Ukrainians. I know that it has meant a huge amount to them to see cross-party support for their rights. I thank him personally for the effort that he and the shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), have gone to.

These are difficult and dangerous times, as the right hon. Gentleman said. It is important to navigate the very thin path between provocation and defence of people who are clearly under threat and intimidation, so that whatever we do cannot be exploited by the Kremlin for its own narratives. I have continued to brief the Opposition and other Members of this House to make sure that they are fully informed.

I will try to answer some of the right hon. Gentleman's questions. First, the Budapest memorandum is indeed one of the three main treaties that Russia is in breach of or is not upholding. It was a fair deal done between the Ukrainians and Russia, and it is important that we remind Russia—through diplomatic channels first of all—of those obligations. The situation is a stark reminder that we cannot pick and choose from treaties that have been signed up to.

We believe that the subsequent Minsk protocol is something that we would wish to support and for Russia to engage in. It respects some of the concerns around the Donbass, and I hope that that is one of the best paths towards securing a peaceful resolution. It does not seem at the moment that Russia is engaging enough on that. I think that is definitely the treaty to look at. Of course, it is underwritten by France, Germany and the United States through the Normandy format, and we would support the use of that. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary plans to visit Ukraine soon, which is also important. I have spoken to her about it, and I think her office is just working out dates for her visit.

On cyber, I will write in detail to the right hon. Gentleman about the NATO initiative. We have supported Ukraine for a number of years with cyber-defence to ensure that its resilience is improved, taking the lessons that we have here and sharing and working with them.

That is why it is so useful that the National Cyber Security Centre is not only domestically but internationally recognised. When its experts come to give advice, it certainly helps with resilience.

On what more we can do, one concern that we have to address is Russia's sense of encirclement, as I said at the beginning, and a fear that is untrue and based either on a misconception or, indeed, a falsehood. One way to address that is through better transparency. We have had schemes such as the Open Skies scheme, and we have had a number of treaties, some of which have been broken by Russia, which is unfortunate, but I certainly think that more transparency is needed. We often have Vienna inspections in this country; we had some only the other month by Russian military personnel who visited an RAF base. That is one of the best ways to demonstrate the realities on the ground, and that NATO is not an aggressor and we are not planning some offensive.

More work can definitely be done to deal with that situation, and to give Russia its voice. I was delighted that we had the Russia-NATO Council, the first in two years, only last week, because it is incredibly important that we get to hear and meet Russia face to face. I have not met my counterpart, and obviously since the Salisbury poisonings relationships have been at a low ebb. For many years, the Russian Defence Secretary and the British Defence Secretary have not had periodic or routine meetings, and I think it is important we offer that. Whether Russia will accept it is a different issue, but it is important that we reach out, at the very least, and have a discussion, and give each other the respect that I think sovereign nations deserve.

On weapons systems, I concur with the right hon. Gentleman. Absolutely—these weapons are short-range. They are not strategic; they are tactical. They are the sort of systems you use if someone is attacking you. This is an infantry-level type weapons system, but nevertheless it would make people pause and think about what they are doing. If tanks were to roll into Ukraine and invade, it would be part of the defensive mechanism.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): I thank the Defence Secretary for not only keeping the House informed, but for working tirelessly behind the scenes to push NATO to do as much as it can, given the limits of that alliance. Talks in Brussels, and indeed Geneva, have reached their conclusion, or inconclusion. Cyber-attacks have now commenced, and we now see that Putin clearly intends to invade as part of his wider strategy to expand Moscow's sphere of influence, and indeed help to label and retain NATO as the adversary that Russia must stand up to.

Russia has now amassed the land forces, weapon systems, and even the field hospitals to allow an invasion to take place. Will the Secretary of State say when the anti-armour weapon systems that he is providing will be operational in Ukraine? If Putin gives the green light to invade, what additional military support does the Secretary of State believe NATO could provide or offer to Ukraine to help to thwart Russian aggression east of the Dnipro river?

Mr Wallace: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his comments. There is still a way to go. We still have NATO, we still have our alliances, and we still have the

international community and its efforts to try to find a diplomatic solution. We will carry on doing that until the very last moment. I think that President Putin has still not made a final decision, but I hope that that is enough to ward the Kremlin off. A united front on sanctions, which is what we are developing, is prepared and ready if something were to happen, and the strong resilience in Ukraine should, at the very least, give people pause for thought. On the wider issues about the systems, the first systems were delivered today in country, and the training will take place. As I have said, these are not major strategic weapons systems, so therefore they are fairly simple and the training package will not be drawn out. As I have said, the trainers will then return.

If Russia attacks militarily, the first and foremost response will be, as we have said, in the areas of sanctions and diplomacy, and in the consequences that President Putin would face as a world leader in what could potentially be a very bloody war, triggered by an invasion that is neither within international law nor what anyone wants in this world. First, reputationally, economically, and militarily we would of course explore whatever we could in those areas, but as I have previously made clear, Ukraine is not a member of NATO, and British troops will not be deploying to fight Russians.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. To help everybody, I am expecting the statement to end round about 6.30 pm, so Members should help each other with quick, short questions and answers. First we come to the Scottish National party spokesperson, Dave Doogan.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): Many thanks, Mr Speaker. I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. We remain clear that Russia's actions in recent weeks and months, with the massing of 100,000 combat-ready troops, tanks and heavy military equipment near Ukraine's eastern border, is unacceptable. In that we are in accord with the Government.

The behaviour of Russia in causing the crisis is wholly inconsistent with the norms of state behaviour on matters of sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is therefore incumbent on us all to stand firm in the face of such threats to the international rules-based order and to stand behind our friends in Ukraine in the face of that aggression.

We can see from the tone and content of Russia's preconditions for de-escalation that there remains a major diplomatic challenge in resolving the crisis through dialogue, yet that must remain the Government's principal objective. Russia's demand that NATO withdraws troops and military equipment from countries neighbouring Russia, which of course include not only Ukraine but our NATO allies in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, is clearly designed not to be acceded to. Nevertheless, it would be heartening for the Baltic states to hear the Secretary of State underline what an absurd proposition the demand is on NATO, that it will never happen and that the bedrock of NATO as a defensive alliance remains the solidarity between its member states.

Will the Secretary of State confirm what role the Russian military studies centre at the Defence Academy in Shrivenham has in informing the Government's thinking in this crisis? Can he reassure the House that the work to deliver a peaceful and diplomatic outcome remains this Government's main priority? Within that dynamic, what is the role of negotiations on Nord Stream 2?

Mr Wallace: I thank the hon. Gentleman and his party for supporting our progress so far. His responsible response is very welcome, and I will continue to brief the party spokespersons as information comes to us. First, on solidarity with the Baltic states, I am off to Latvia tomorrow. The Baltic states are among the smallest in NATO, but they are right on the frontline. It is important to get the message across that we are there to defend the countries in NATO, big or small, as they share our values. It is also important to remind neighbouring states such as Finland that the right to choose is more important even than what they choose. I would defend Sweden and Finland's right to choose. If they choose not to join NATO, that is their choice. But we should never take away the choice, which is what is so unreasonable about the Kremlin's demand that, somehow, countries between the United States and Russia do not get to have a say on their own sovereignty. That is incredibly wrong.

We are all working for a peaceful outcome, and no one wants conflict to happen. We think the conflict would be long and bloody. It is also important that we recognise there is other thinking in the Kremlin. We can engage on the NATO debate, but I point hon. and right hon. Members to the article written by President Putin in July. In those 17 pages, NATO appears in one paragraph. This is really about ethnonationalism, a sense of reuniting a mother Russia that did not quite exist and picking dates to fit the narrative. The article written by the President of Russia should concern us all, and I have previously read such articles in other areas, and they usually lead to the most awful bloodshed.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as well as helping Ukraine militarily, we constantly need to make it clear to President Putin that his very concept of a Russian near abroad—a veto on the security and foreign policies of his geographic neighbours—is at odds with international law and completely at odds with the concept of self-determination? Does my right hon. Friend agree that what we are witnessing now is a classic example of the KGB doctrine of reflexive control, which is all too often a precursor to Russian military action?

Mr Wallace: What we are seeing, as the United States said, is the playbook narratives, cyber-attacks, disruption of minorities and division all used to prey on that country. There is also something else. What are the consequences for the rest of Europe of a successful military invasion of Ukraine? I visited Sweden and Finland last week. When such countries—strong European countries that are not members of NATO—are genuinely concerned and worried about their neighbours, all of us in Europe should sit up and listen. If there were a successful invasion of Ukraine, what would it mean for President Putin's other ambitions?

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and commend him for his article in *The Times* this morning, which laid out clearly the false narrative that President Putin is using to justify his actions against Ukraine. What more can be done in the information war? Will he specifically back an initiative by Congressman Gerry Connolly, the president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, who is calling for a centre for democracy within NATO to argue the case for why the freedoms of thought and action are so important?

Mr Wallace: On the latter question, I would definitely support NATO and NATO members going out and about and supporting not only the values we stand for, but my point about the right to choose, even if the choice is not NATO. I think we have forgotten about what we have often argued for. We have taken for granted our values and the cost of freedom around the world. We must never stop arguing for that and making the case. Too often over the decades, it has been too easy to stop making that case, or indeed to trade it off against an economic issue. That is why Nord Stream 2 is important. It is important that we recognise that, if it is a success, it will not be a success for Europe, but it will increase friction and division. We should press our German friends to do more, should Russia invade Ukraine.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the support across the House for the Ukrainian people. It is quite true that a free people choose freedom, and the Ukrainian people are trying to do just that. Would my right hon. Friend care to mention other failures of the Putin strategy, such as turning former friends and allies of Russia against it? Is this not an extraordinarily sad day for the Russian people, who have been so abused by this tyrannical dictatorship under Putin? Even countries that have had such strong relations with them, including the Ukrainian people, are now seeking assistance from us to ensure that their homes are not violated by Russian troops?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend makes an important point. If the aim of President Putin is to de-escalate, or push back NATO from his borders, he should reflect on why so many people have wanted to join NATO. It is predominantly a consequence of his actions, whether that is in Georgia or Crimea, or the sub-threshold actions that are putting real fear into countries such as Sweden and Finland. It is no coincidence that, in the Finnish and Swedish Parliaments, a sense of being closer to NATO than they have been in the past is growing. That is not because of NATO—there is no secret plot—but because of the actions of the President of Russia.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The Defence Secretary is absolutely right. When Putin talks of trying to bring together ethnic Russians into the motherland, it does remind one of the 1930s, when Hitler referred to trying to bring all Germans, including Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia, back into mother Germany. Of course we are right to be very cautious. When the Defence Secretary says he has offered this invitation to his Russian counterpart, I hope that does not mean that we are announcing that we are normalising our political relations with Russia. The all-party parliamentary group on Russia has been keen to ensure, as have the House and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, that we are not normalising our political relationships until such time as Russia is able to hand over the evidence that is clearly needed in relation to Salisbury.

Mr Wallace: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right on his last point. I was the Security Minister when Salisbury happened. This is not about normalising relations, but about opening a line of dialogue so that we can hopefully address a range of issues. The GRU belongs to the Russian Ministry of Defence, and I will not be forgetting that in any way, but I do not fear anything by

engaging with my counterpart. On his point about ethnic nationalism, it is something that in the UK is against our DNA, because of the lessons we have seen over hundreds of years. People would be wise not to believe that that article that the President wrote is the right course of action; the course of action is through dialogue and addressing the here and now, not harking back to snippets of history.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Mr Putin knows that NATO will not start world war three to defend Ukraine, but has he been made aware of precisely what non-military sanctions will follow? For example, are Finland or Sweden likely to proceed with an application to join NATO, as has been suggested?

Mr Wallace: First, there is a basket of sanctions that are prepared both by the United Kingdom and the United States. Indeed, the EU is addressing and formulating a package and, obviously, Sweden and Finland would be part of that. I cannot speak for Sweden and Finland about whether they would join NATO. One of the fundamentals of NATO is the open door policy. We have been clear on that, but, as I have said, I am even more clear that defending a country to choose is actually more important often than what it chooses. We enhance and work our relationship with Finland and Sweden through the joint expeditionary force, which is 11 nations—Scandinavian and Nordic, and Britain—working together and exercising together in the defence world. That is brilliant: it binds together the EU, NATO and other members to make sure that we can deter by being as professional as possible with our armed forces.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): In the recent negotiations, NATO rightly rejected the wholly unreasonable demands of Russia for the reasons that the Secretary of State has so clearly set out to the House, but it did indicate that it would be willing to talk about other matters. Does the Government support, for example, putting arms control and limits to military exercises on the table in any further discussions?

Mr Wallace: Certainly when it comes to arms control, we have always felt that arms controls are good things. I am old enough to remember the 1980s and the work people went into to get those, and it has been sad that Russia has breached a number of those treaties and the United States pulled out of the open skies treaty not so long ago. I think we should try to work towards getting back to a place where we can have more confidence in each other, first and foremost.

On exercising, first, NATO should exercise in order to keep itself at the best it can be for defence. I also think it is the right of a sovereign country to choose to exercise in its land. If Lithuania or Estonia wish to exercise militarily, either bilaterally or multilaterally, that is a choice for that country, and we are always happy to work together. I am not sure I want to give Russia a veto over where we exercise, but I am very supportive of making sure that we are as open as possible, so that people do not miscalculate when we do exercise and they recognise that it is an exercise rather than an operation.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): Like the Defence Secretary, I read President Putin's essay "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" this summer. In it

he clearly does not recognise Ukraine in its current borders, but he also lays out what he thinks are justifiably Russian lands: the oblasts—the counties—that run along the north side of the Black sea linking Rostov with Transnistria and Odessa. Did he get the same thinking from reading the article?

Mr Wallace: My hon. Friend is right. The article even goes further and talks about Carpathian Ruthenia, which is part of the Czech Republic. The other bit that I think was deeply sad was that anyone who disagreed was effectively described as Russia-phobic. I cannot tell you how wrong that is. It is perfectly possible to disagree with the Kremlin and the actions of President Putin without disagreeing with the people of Russia or, indeed, supporting Russia. I am a proud Scot, and the Scots and the Russians spent most of their time in each other's courts—there were admirals, there were generals and there were physicians, and 150 years of Scottish-Russian links helped to build the Russian medical system that we know today. I think the worst part of his article is the part that says that to criticise is to be anti-Russian, which is quite wrong.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The Norwegian Prime Minister has recently spoken about Russia increasing hybrid operations, including cyber-attacks and signal jamming. I compliment the Secretary of State for his visits last week, but clearly one of our great allies is Norway. Can the Secretary of State outline to me what specific steps have been taken during the Ukraine crisis to ensure that in no way is Norway's security compromised?

Mr Wallace: The hon. Gentleman will know that Britain and Norway are really old allies—indeed, we can almost see Norway from his constituency—and I was there as well, after Finland and Sweden, last week. First, we exercise regularly at all levels in all areas. Both our intelligence relationship and our military relationship are strong. The Royal Marines have been present in the high north for decades, and we were planning even more exercising to do together.

Norway also plays a really key role in bringing alongside a NATO country Finland and Sweden, so we exercise in the Arctic and the high north, which is of course a growing domain and, indeed, an area where Russia can use sub-threshold activity—everything from migrant flows. There was a period in its history when it put migrants on bicycles—it gave them free bicycles—to drive them across the border not so long ago. I think it is really important that we work together to have the shared understanding, and to say to Russia that the messaging in that part of the world is, "We are all one people". Our links go across for centuries, but understanding what it is up to is as important.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): I welcome the Defence Secretary's statement today. He will know that, in 2014, Russian aggression severely degraded the Ukrainian navy. Will he update the House on the Ukrainian capabilities enhancement project? What progress has been made since that was signed in June?

Mr Wallace: As my right hon. Friend knows, the Ukrainian navy was snatched, effectively, with the invasion of Crimea, which was one of the main navy bases, and it has been operating predominantly on gifts of patrol

[Mr Wallace]

boats from the United States. That is why last year we entered into an agreement to help Ukraine to build boats to enable it to protect its coastline, and to put infrastructure investment into ports so it could start to rebuild its navy. It is important that Ukraine, the breadbasket of Europe, has the ability to export and free navigation. Russia has already threatened that, and we saw the aggressive action toward HMS Defender earlier in the year, so it is important that we help the Ukrainians to help themselves.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): Although it is important that we take Russian security concerns seriously, we must resist at all costs any attempts by Russia to re-imperialise eastern Europe. May I press the Secretary of State on two dimensions of his twin-track strategy? First, how ready is NATO to accede to requests to join not only from Finland but from countries in the western Balkans and Georgia, so that any tactical advance into Ukraine is a strategic defeat? Secondly, will the Secretary of State say a word about the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty, because it is hard to envisage an arms control framework for Europe without some measure of control over ground-launched cruise missiles—even if they are non-nuclear—on the continent of Europe?

Mr Wallace: On the latter question, may I write to the right hon. Gentleman about where we are with that? Overall, as I said about strategic treaties, better transparency is really important. The last thing any of us wants is a growing arms race, but we want to have confidence that as the technology grows it does not become more dangerous, and the treaties can adapt with technological growth.

What is the narrative that the Kremlin does not want to hear, but is true? The No. 1 point is that it has been shown that a consequence of this aggression is the expansion of NATO, not a contraction, and plenty of other countries are watching. If there is one message I want to get to President Putin it is that others are watching, and the track record shows that they will do the opposite of what he wants when he behaves in this way.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I must urge brevity. I call Alicia Kearns.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): What is my right hon. Friend's assessment of our Ukrainian allies' resolve to not just repel but resist a further invasion, and what further capabilities are required to enhance this? Will he also keep an eye on Bosnia, given that we know Putin is seeking to cause similar issues for our friends there?

Mr Wallace: The other part of the article said that, somehow, the Ukrainian people were just waiting to be liberated. The other message I want to give President Putin is that these people will fight; they are strongly of the view that Ukraine is a sovereign country and they will stand and defend their freedoms. It is not the case that they will welcome with open arms a great liberator and/or rush back into the fold. That is another important lesson.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I commend the Secretary of State for his announcement this afternoon. His realism in December has been repeated today. The factual position of Ukraine not being a NATO member and the restrictions that places on us also add to our vulnerability. Does he envisage circumstances in which the position of no deployment of UK or allied troops might be revised?

Mr Wallace: The United Kingdom will always work with its allies to do what it can for its own and its allies' security. We will always keep all options open, but I have to be honest: Russia has the biggest armed forces in Europe and Ukraine is not a member of NATO. In that environment, it would be holding out false hope to say that British armed forces would unilaterally go to join forces alongside the Ukrainians. That is why we are putting all the effort into helping the Ukrainians to help themselves, the sanctions package and diplomatic efforts.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): How can we reach out to the Russian people and tell them that NATO is a defensive alliance, so they do not have to swallow wholesale the Putin narrative that we are aggressive and trying to take over Russia?

Mr Wallace: First, as the international community we have to be consistent in that messaging. The other message, as my hon. Friend will know, is that Russian mothers and fathers do not want to see their sons and daughters come back as they did in the first Chechnya war. We should remind them that this will not be cost-free on either side, and it is not the way forward. However, we do that multilaterally together, both as NATO and as the international community, and we keep that messaging going all the way through. We do not detract or let them distract with false narratives.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It is mere coincidence that I am wearing the tartan tie of the Republic of Estonia today, Madam Deputy Speaker. Reflecting on that nation's history, will the Secretary of State advise the House? When the Estonian Republic was illegally occupied by the former Soviet Union, the continuity of its Government was assured here in the UK. Will he make that assurance—that continuity of a democratically elected Government, if required, for the Government elected by the people of Ukraine?

Mr Wallace: Not for the first time, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his suggestion. I will happily look at it and discuss it with my colleagues in the Cabinet.

On his point about Estonia, I am going next door to its neighbour Latvia, which of course has a Scottish embassy from the old days; Scotland and England did not trade together, so we went to Riga.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): In the early 1980s, a Soviet refugee from Ukraine called Mr Bailey had the unfortunate task of trying to teach me the cello. He was much more successful at teaching me about the proud history of Ukraine. What does this announcement do to our longstanding friendship with Ukraine more broadly in this context?

Mr Wallace: I hope that it does what it does for all nations in Europe. Britain will always be interested in the security of Europe, whether we are in the EU or not. The security of Europe is important for our security as much as it is for that of others. Britain will mean what it says. Britain will not just say, “Please don’t do this” on behalf of those people; we will help people defend themselves. That is why this announcement today is just one of those steps. That is sometimes the difference between us and others.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): When the Minister meets his Russian counterpart in a few weeks’ time, will he use that opportunity to widen the debate into nuclear disarmament and security measures in general, to build up a dialogue with Russia so that we can deal with all the issues and also de-escalate the dangerous tensions, which are rising? Will he assure the House that no British troops are going to be sent to or stationed in Ukraine?

Mr Wallace: First of all, I am not sure that the right hon. Gentleman will accept my invitation; I have made it, and I hope he does. Of course we will start the process of establishing a dialogue on a whole range of issues, which hopefully will involve security, confidence in each other and transparency, to make sure that there is no miscalculation going forward.

British troops who are orbital have been based in Ukraine for years. They are not NATO bases, as President Putin alleges: no one is setting up NATO bases in Ukraine and no one is positioning strategic weapons in Ukraine. This is unarmed orbital: we train people in all sorts of methods. As I said, the trainers that come over on these systems will leave once the training is done. All I can say is that this is not new—we have had people there for years. But of course we are there at the invitation of the sovereign nation of Ukraine.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. It is hard to fathom the seriousness of the situation as it is developing. Can he shed any light on unconfirmed reports that Russia is now moving armed forces into Belarus—on to the road to Kiev in Belarus, and now threatening from the north of the country? If those reports are confirmed, will the Secretary of State undertake to return to the House to make a further statement?

Mr Wallace: My right hon. Friend makes the point about this very worrying build-up that we have seen and is growing; the latest is that there has been very sizeable movement of aircraft and aviation capabilities in the last few days. Significant numbers have been moving to key areas.

I will go back and look at the details around Belarus as well. I absolutely commit to Members that I will come to the House and keep them updated periodically—not only about the build-up, if that does continue, but about every next step.

Sir Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): I commend the Defence Secretary for his statement. It is clear that President Putin is trying to destabilise a number of countries in eastern Europe: we are seeing things happening not only in Ukraine, but in Bosnia. We are also seeing, to some extent, Belarus and Poland being destabilised by his actions.

In his statement, the Defence Secretary said:

“Each nation has a sovereign right to choose its own security arrangements.”

If Russia does invade Ukraine, as I think likely, it would seem that Ukraine will not have that choice. International sanctions will obviously play a role after that, but are the Defence Secretary and our allies thinking that in the longer term this may mean more than just economic sanctions and military assistance?

Mr Wallace: I think that in the long term, if President Putin does invade Ukraine, there are two worries. The wider worry is what happens in other parts of Europe, but Europe, the United Kingdom and the international community should not let President Putin forget the consequences. I think that one of his calculations is that a number of countries will just forget about it in a few months or years and that he will be able to carry on as normal. If it happens, I think the international community has a duty to remind President Putin that what he has done is unacceptable, that only the return of the sovereign territory to Ukraine is acceptable, and that he faces the consequences of his actions. Until he does so, he may well end up very isolated.

Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con): We know that Russia is the master of misinformation to advance its military ambition. Does my right hon. Friend think that the provision of this defensive security system package will be spun by the Russian media as an act of provocation?

Mr Wallace: I expect all sorts of allegations, but that is why I have come to the House: to be transparent about it, not strategic. Secondly, the United States and other countries have already provided support over months and years to Ukraine. You cannot cry wolf more than once or twice. Indeed, the Russian media themselves approached me at the conference of the parties about our sales of missiles for patrol boats. If it was not provocation a year ago with another nation, I think it would be unreasonable to allow them to peddle that message.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I am afraid that we cannot take any further contributions. It has become normal for every question on a statement to be taken, but that is not actually normal practice. The House must be aware of the next business, which will require some time, so we will have to conclude questions on the statement.

Elections Bill

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

[Relevant documents: *Fifth Report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Legislative Scrutiny: Elections Bill, HC 233 / HL 58; Seventh Special Report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Legislative Scrutiny: Elections Bill: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report, HC 911; Fifth Report of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, The Elections Bill, HC 597; Oral evidence taken before the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee on 7 and 14 September 2021 on the Elections Bill.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): The programme (No. 2) motion has not been moved. We will therefore proceed in accordance with the original programme order of 7 September 2021. Report must be brought to a conclusion no later than 9 pm; any debate on Third Reading must be concluded no later than 10 pm. There will be a single debate on all new clauses, new schedules and selected amendments until 9 pm. Decisions at the end of the debate will be taken no later than 9 pm in the sequence on the revised selection list, which is slightly different from the sequence on the amendment notice paper.

I hope that that is clear; it is because the notice paper was prepared to match the programme (No. 2) motion on the Order Paper, which has not been moved.

New Clause 11

POWER TO MAKE REGULATIONS ABOUT REGISTRATION,
ABSENT VOTING AND OTHER MATTERS

“Schedule (Power to make regulations about registration, absent voting and other matters) contains provision, including provision amending Schedule 2 to RPA 1983, in connection with applications relating to registration, applications to vote by post or proxy, and applications for particular kinds of document.”—(Kemi Badenoch.)

This new clause, to be inserted after clause 1, introduces NS1.

Brought up, and read the First time.

6.38 pm

The Minister for Levelling Up Communities (Kemi Badenoch): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government new clause 12—*Purposes referred to in section 39.*

New clause 1—*Voting from age 16 in parliamentary elections—*

“In section 1(1)(d) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (definition of voting age for parliamentary elections), for ‘18’ substitute ‘16’.”

This new clause would lower the voting age to 16 in UK parliamentary elections.

New clause 2—*Permissible donors—*

“(1) Section 54 (permissible donors) of PPERA is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2)(a), after ‘register’ insert ‘at the time at which the donation is made, but not an individual so registered as an overseas elector’.”

This new clause would prevent overseas electors donating to political parties in the UK.

New clause 3—*Citizens’ assembly on electoral systems—*

“(1) The Secretary of State must establish a citizens’ assembly representative of the population aged 16 and over to consider electoral systems in the United Kingdom.

(2) The Secretary of State must, for each category of election reformed by section 10 (Simple majority system to be used in elections for certain offices), provide to the assembly a report assessing the effects of the reforms on the matters in subsection (3).

(3) The matters are—

- (a) voter engagement and understanding,
- (b) electoral integrity,
- (c) fairness and proportionality.

(4) A report under subsection (2) must be provided to the assembly no later than three months after the first election in each category of election after this section comes into force.

(5) The assembly must—

- (a) consider the reports under subsection (2),
- (b) consider other evidence relating to the matters in subsection (3).

(6) The assembly may make recommendations for legislative or policy change, including for parliamentary elections.”

New clause 4—*Automatic Voter Registration—*

“(1) It is a duty of—

- (a) the Secretary of State; and
- (b) registration officers

to take all reasonable steps to ensure that persons eligible to register to vote in elections in the United Kingdom are so registered.

(2) The Secretary of State must by regulations require public bodies to provide information to registration officers in accordance with the duty under subsection (1).

(3) Regulations under subsection (2) must apply to public bodies including but not limited to—

- (a) HM Revenue and Customs;
- (b) the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency;
- (c) the National Health Service;
- (d) NHS Scotland;
- (e) all types of state funded schools;
- (f) local authorities;
- (g) the Department for Work and Pensions;
- (h) HM Passport Office;
- (i) police forces;
- (j) the TV Licensing Authority.

(4) Registration officers must—

- (a) use the information provided under regulations under subsection (2) to register otherwise unregistered persons on the appropriate electoral register or registers, or
- (b) if the information provided does not contain all information necessary to register a person who may be eligible, contact that person for the purpose of obtaining the required information to establish whether they are eligible to register and, if so, register them on the appropriate electoral register or registers.

(5) If a registration officer has registered a person under subsection (4), the officer must notify that person within 30 days and give that person an opportunity to correct any mistaken information.

(6) The Secretary of State may issue guidance to registration officers on fulfilling their duties under this section.

(7) Where a person is registered under subsection (4), that person shall be omitted from the edited register unless that person notifies the registration officer to the contrary.

(8) Nothing in this section affects entitlement to register to vote anonymously.”

New clause 5—*Voting by convicted persons sentenced to terms of 12 months or less*

“In section 3(1A) (exceptions to the disenfranchisement of prisoners) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, after ‘Scotland’ insert ‘or a parliamentary election’.”

This new clause would allow prisoners serving a sentence of 12 months or less to vote in UK parliamentary elections.

New clause 6—*Voting by qualifying foreign nationals*

“In section 1(1) (entitlement to vote in parliamentary elections) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, for paragraph (c) substitute—

‘(c) is a Commonwealth citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland or a qualifying foreign national; and’.”

This new clause would allow foreign nationals who either do not need leave to remain in the UK or have been granted such leave to vote in UK parliamentary elections.

New clause 7—*Voting by EU nationals*

“In section 1(1) (entitlement to vote in parliamentary elections) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, for paragraph (c) substitute—

‘(c) is a Commonwealth citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland or a relevant citizen of the Union; and’.”

This new clause would allow EU citizens to vote in UK parliamentary elections.

New clause 8—*Fines for electoral offences*

“(1) The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums (Civil Sanctions) Order 2010 is amended as follows.

(2) In Schedule 1, paragraph 5, leave out ‘£20,000’ and insert ‘£500,000, or 5% of the total spend by the organisation or individual being penalised in the election to which the offence relates, whichever is greater.’”

This new clause would allow the Electoral Commission to impose increased fines for electoral offences.

New clause 9—*Permissible donors to be based in the United Kingdom and associated offences*

“(1) Section 54 of PPERA (permissible donors) is amended in accordance with subsections (2) to (5).

(2) At the end of subsection (2)(a), insert ‘ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom, and domiciled in the United Kingdom for purposes of individual taxation.’

(3) After subsection (2)(b)(ii) insert—

‘(iii) employing a majority of its staff at locations within the United Kingdom, and

(iv) employing at least five staff within the United Kingdom’.

(4) At the end of subsection (2)(f), insert ‘has a majority of partners who are on a UK electoral register, are ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom and are domiciled in the United Kingdom for purposes of individual taxation, employs a majority of its staff at locations within the United Kingdom, and employs at least five staff within the United Kingdom.’

(5) At the end of subsection (2)(h), insert ‘has a majority of those persons with significant control who are on a UK electoral register, are ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom and are domiciled in the United Kingdom for purposes of individual taxation, and also either employs no staff at all, or employs a majority of its staff at locations within the United Kingdom.’

(6) Section 61 of PPERA (offences concerned with evasion of restrictions on donations) is amended in accordance with subsection (7).

(7) After subsection (2) insert—

‘(3) A person commits an offence if they are a director of a company, hold a position of significant control in an unincorporated association, or are a partner in a limited liability partnership, and that company, association or partnership—

(a) is not a permissible donor and offers a donation to a political party (whether the donation is accepted or not), or

(b) commits, or otherwise causes to be committed, an act which were the body be a person, would be an offence under subsection (1) or (2).”

This new clause makes requirements for individual and company donors to be based in the United Kingdom and makes persons running companies liable for donation restriction evasion offences committed by those companies.

New clause 10—*Removal of requirement for election agent’s address to be published*

“(1) The Representation of the People Act 1983 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 67 (appointment of election agent), after subsection (6) insert—

‘(6A) Though if the candidate or the person acting on behalf of the candidate under this section provides a statement signed by the candidate that the candidate requires the address of the election agent not to be made public and instead states the relevant area within which that address is situated, the public notice under subsection (6) should state that relevant area rather than the address.

(6B) In this section, “relevant area” means—

(a) for a parliamentary election, the constituency,

(b) for an Authority election, the Assembly constituency,

(c) for any other local election, local government area, or

(d) if the address is outside the United Kingdom, the country within which it is situated.”

This new clause would remove the requirement for public notice of the addresses of election agents (including candidates acting as their own agent) to be given at parliamentary and local elections. The area in which the address is situated could instead be given, as for candidates.

New clause 13—*Proportional representation for elections to the House of Commons*

“(1) The simple majority system must not be used for any Parliamentary general election after the end of the period of six months beginning on the day on which this Act is passed.

(2) The Secretary of State must take all reasonable steps to establish a new proportional representation system of election for Members of the House of Commons that would be expected to result in seats being held by each party roughly reflecting the proportion of votes cast for candidates of that party at the preceding general election.

(3) A system is suitable for the purposes of subsection (2) if it would over the past five Parliamentary general elections have had a mean average Gallagher proportionality index of less than 10.

(4) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision (which may include provision amending any enactment) contingent on the prohibition in subsection (1).”

This new clause would abolish first past the post for UK general elections and require the Government to take all reasonable steps to introduce proportional representation.

New clause 14—*Enfranchisement of certain foreign nationals at parliamentary elections*

“(1) Section 1(1) (entitlement to vote in parliamentary elections) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph (c), after ‘Ireland’ insert—

‘or a foreign national who has—

(i) the right of abode in the United Kingdom;

(ii) settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme;

(iii) indefinite leave to enter the United Kingdom; or

(iv) indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom.”

New clause 15—*Prohibition of double registration*—

“In section 4 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (Entitlement to be registered as parliamentary or local government elector), after subsection (1) insert—

“(1A) A person is only entitled to be registered at one address within the United Kingdom at any one time.”

This new clause seeks to provide an additional check and balance against double voting in UK Parliamentary elections.

New clause 16—*Restrictions on foreign and foreign-influenced donations*—

“(1) PPERA is amended as follows.

(2) In section 54(1) (circumstances in which party may not accept donation), after paragraph (aa) insert—

“(ab) the party has not been given a declaration as required by section 54C; or”.

(3) In section 54(2) (permissible donors), in paragraph (b)(ii), for ‘carries on business in the United Kingdom’ substitute—

‘satisfies the condition set out in subsection (2ZAA)’.

(4) After section 54(2ZA) insert—

“(2ZAA) The condition referred to in subsection (2)(b)(ii) is that the company or limited liability partnership’s profits generated and taxable within the United Kingdom over the previous 12 months are greater than the value of the donation given.”

(5) After section 54B (declaration as to whether residence etc condition satisfied), insert—

“54C Declaration as to whether profit condition is satisfied

(1) A company or limited liability partnership making to a registered party a donation in relation to which the condition set out in section 54(2ZAA) applies must give to the party a written declaration stating whether or not the company or limited liability partnership satisfies that condition.

(2) A declaration under this section must also state the company or limited liability partnership’s full name, address and registration number.

(3) A person who knowingly or recklessly makes a false declaration under this section commits an offence.

(4) The Commission may issue a notice to a person to provide accounts for the purpose of verifying whether a declaration made under this section is accurate.

(5) A person who fails to comply with a notice under subsection (4) commits an offence.

(6) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision requiring a declaration under this section to be retained for a specified period.

(7) The requirement in subsection (1) does not apply where, by reason of section 71B(1)(b), the entity by whom the donation would be made is a permissible donor in relation to the donation at the time of its receipt by the party.

(8) For the purposes of the following provisions, references in this section to receipt by a registered party should be read instead as follows—

(a) for a relevant donation controlled under Schedule 7, receipt by the regulated donee;

(b) for a relevant donation controlled under Schedule 11, receipt by the recognised third party;

(c) for a relevant donation controlled under Schedule 15, receipt by the permitted participant;

(d) for a relevant donation controlled under Schedule 2A of the Representation of the People Act 1983, receipt by the candidate or the candidate’s election agent.”

(6) After section 55 (payments etc. which are (or are not) to be treated as donations by permissible donors), insert—

“55A Donations and national security risk

(1) The Commission may give a notice (“a call-in notice”) if the Commission reasonably suspects that a qualifying donation has given rise to or may give rise to a risk to national security in relation to electoral integrity.

(2) If the Commission decides to give a call-in notice, the notice must be given to—

(a) the person who made the donation,

(b) the party that received the donation,

(c) the Secretary of State, and

(d) such other persons as the Commission considers appropriate.

(3) When assessing whether a donation has given or may give rise to a risk to national security in relation to electoral integrity, Commission must consider the characteristics of the person who made the donation, including—

(a) their sector or sectors of commercial activity or holdings,

(b) their technological capabilities,

(c) any links to entities which may seek to undermine or threaten the interests of the United Kingdom, including the integrity of its elections,

(d) their ultimate controller, or if they can be readily exploited, (e) whether the acquirer they, or their ultimate controller, has committed, or is linked to, criminal or illicit activities that are related to national security, or activities that have given rise to or may give rise to a risk to national security.

(4) In this section, a “qualifying donation” is a donation of an amount exceeding £25,000.

(5) The Commission may, in relation to the Commission’s functions under this section, issue a notice to a person to—

(a) provide information, or

(b) attend, or

(c) give evidence as if such a notice was a notice under section 19 or 20 of the National Security and Investment Act 2021.

(6) A person who fails to comply with a notice under subsection (5) commits an offence.

(7) In this section, “assessment period” in relation to a call-in notice under this section has the same meaning as in section 23 of National Security and Investment Act 2021 in relation to a call-in notice under that Act.

(8) The Commission must, before the end of the assessment period in relation to a call-in notice—

(a) make a final order, or

(b) give a final notification to each person to whom the call-in notice was given.

(9) The Commission may, during the assessment period, make a final order if the Commission—

(a) is satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that the qualifying donation to which the call-in notice applies has given rise to or may give rise to a risk to national security in relation to electoral integrity, and

(b) reasonably considers that the provisions of the order are necessary and proportionate for the purpose of preventing, remedying or mitigating the risk.

(10) During the assessment period, the Commission may make an interim order in relation to a qualifying donation if the Commission reasonably considers that the provisions of the order are necessary and proportionate for the purpose of safeguarding electoral integrity during that period.

(11) An order under subsection (9) or (10) may—

(a) require a donation to be held unspent for a period as may be prescribed in the order,

(b) require a donation to be refused,

- (c) require a donation to be returned, or
- (d) prohibit the acceptance of any donation by any registered party from the person who made the donation to which the call-in notice applies, or from a prescribed person or category of person connected to that person, for a period as may be prescribed in the order.

(12) The Commission must keep each order under review and may vary or revoke it.

(7) In section 156 (orders and regulations)—

(a) in subsection (3), before paragraph (a) insert—

‘(za) any order under section 55A;’;

(b) after subsection (4D) insert—

‘(4E) Subsection (2) does not apply to regulations under section 54C and regulations may not be made under that section unless a draft of the statutory instrument containing the regulations has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.’

(8) In Schedule 20 (penalties), at the appropriate places insert the following entries—

(a) ‘Section 54C (making a false declaration as to whether profit condition is satisfied or failing to provide accounts)’	On summary conviction in England and Wales or Scotland: statutory maximum or 12 months On summary conviction in Northern Ireland: statutory maximum or 6 months On indictment: fine or 1 year’.
(b) ‘Section 55A(6) (failure to comply with a national security call-in notice)’	On summary conviction in England and Wales or Scotland: statutory maximum or 12 months On summary conviction in Northern Ireland: statutory maximum or 6 months On indictment: fine or 1 year’.”

This new clause is intended to provide safeguards against the risks of foreign influence in UK elections flagged by the Intelligence and Security Select Committee in its report on Russia, ordered to be printed on 21 July 2020 (HC 632).

New clause 17—Publication of candidates’ home address information—

“(1) The Representation of the People Act 1983 is amended as follows.

(2) In Schedule 1, paragraph 6(5)(b), after ‘constituency’ insert ‘, or town or village.’”

This new clause would allow candidates who do not wish their full home address to be published the option (as an alternative to giving the constituency of their home address) of providing the town or village within which that address is situated. That information would then be published on the returning officer’s statement of persons nominated by virtue of Rule 14(3A).

New clause 18—Unincorporated associations and permissible donors—

“(1) An unincorporated association required to notify the Electoral Commission of political contributions by paragraph 1 of Schedule 19A to PPERA must make permissibility checks on donations to the unincorporated association in accordance with subsection (2).

(2) An unincorporated association must take all reasonable steps to establish whether the donor of a relevant donation is a permissible donor under section 54 of PPERA.

(3) In this section, a ‘relevant donation’ is any donation which is either intended for political purposes or might reasonably be assumed to be for political purposes.

(4) An unincorporated association must not accept a relevant donation from a person who is not a permissible donor.”

This new clause requires unincorporated associations to establish whether a person making a donation for political purposes is a permissible donor and, if not, reject that donation.

Amendment 1, page 1, line 4, leave out clause 1.

This amendment would remove the Voter ID provisions.

Amendment 126, in clause 3, page 2, line 25, leave out “dishonestly”.

This amendment probes the necessity of adding a further test of dishonesty to the defence in subsection (4) of the inserted provision 112A.

Amendment 2, in clause 8, page 11, leave out lines 20 to 31 and insert—

“(a) in paragraph (3A)(b), for ‘a device’ substitute ‘equipment’;

(b) after paragraph (3A)(b) insert—

“(c) such equipment as it is reasonable to provide for the purposes of enabling, or making it easier for, relevant persons to vote in the manner directed by rule 37.’;

(c) after paragraph (3A) insert—

“(3B) In paragraph (3A)(c), “relevant persons” means persons who find it difficult or impossible to vote in the manner directed by rule 37 because of a disability.”

This amendment would retain the requirement for returning officers to make specific provision at polling stations to enable voters who are blind or partially-sighted to vote without any need for assistance from the presiding officer or any companion and change the nature of that provision from “a device” to “equipment”.

Amendment 9, page 20, line 19, leave out clause 13.

Amendment 4, in clause 13, page 22, line 19, at end insert—

“(4A) The Secretary of State may not designate the statement under section 4A unless the Scottish Parliament has, before the end of the 40-day period, passed a motion of the form ‘That the Parliament approves the draft Electoral Commission strategy and policy statement so far as it relates to the Commission’s devolved Scottish functions’.”

This amendment would require the Scottish Parliament to approve an Electoral Commission strategy and policy statement so far as it relates to the Commission’s devolved Scottish functions before the strategy could have effect.

Amendment 127, page 22, line 19, at end insert—

“(4A) The Secretary of State may not designate the statement under section 4A unless Senedd Cymru has, before the end of the 40-day period, passed a motion of the form ‘That Senedd Cymru approves the draft Electoral Commission strategy and policy statement so far as it relates to the Commission’s devolved Welsh functions’.”

This amendment would require Senedd Cymru to approve an Electoral Commission strategy and policy statement so far as it relates to the Commission’s devolved Welsh functions before the strategy could have effect.

Amendment 10, page 25, line 20, leave out clause 14.

Government amendments 13 to 17.

Amendment 11, page 33, line 2, leave out clause 23.

Amendment 12, page 34, line 19, leave out clause 24,

Amendment 3, page 37, line 5, leave out clause 26.

This amendment would remove the provisions relating to joint campaigning by registered parties and third parties.

Government amendments 18 to 52.

Government new schedule 1—Power to make regulations about registration, absent voting and other matters.

Amendment 5, page 65, line 2, leave out schedule 1.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 1.

Government amendments 53 to 124.

Kemi Badenoch: The Government are committed to increasing participation in our democracy and empowering all those eligible to vote to do so in a secure, efficient and effective way. An important part of that is ensuring that electoral services—be they registering to vote, applying for an absent vote or applying for a voter card—are as convenient and accessible as possible. To that end, we have tabled new clause 11 and new schedule 1 to provide powers to introduce an online absent vote application service and an online voter card application service. These amendments also provide similar powers for such applications in Northern Ireland.

As it stands, it is not possible for electors to apply for an absent vote online. Electors who wish to apply for an absent vote must do so via a paper form that they must submit to their local electoral registration officer via post. New clause 11 and new schedule 1 will enable the identity of applicants using those services to be verified, as well as identity verification for paper absent vote applications, as is already the case for registration applications. That includes powers to enable real-time identity verification—that is, identity verification while an applicant is in the process of completing their application—for voter card applications, absent vote applications and registration applications.

That issue was raised in Committee by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith). The Government agreed in principle with her points and committed to considering an online service for electors to make applications for an absent vote once further work was done to understand how best to implement such a service. That commitment is being honoured here with the tabling of amendments to provide powers to introduce an online absent vote application service.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I thank the Minister for being receptive to the points that were raised in Committee about putting many more of the ways in which we engage with democracy online. I wonder if she has had time to reflect on whether the Government may have gained advantage from pre-legislative scrutiny on the Bill, because it strikes me that not only did the instruction order after Second Reading bring forward parts of the Bill that were not given scrutiny by the full House, but there have also been a huge amount of Government amendments at this late stage. What reflections does she have on the ways in which she might consult the House on constitutional matters before bringing forward Bills in future?

Kemi Badenoch: I have nothing further to add to what we discussed in Committee. I understand the hon. Lady's point—we want our legislation to be as rigorous and robust as possible. I hope that the open relationship that she and I had when she was shadowing me is one that I will be able to continue with her successors. That is how we will get very good legislation on the statute books.

As I was saying, that commitment is being honoured here with the tabling of amendments to provide powers to introduce an online absent vote application service. That will include a process by which the identity of absent vote applicants can be verified. The identity verification process will be made to apply to paper applications as well as to applications made online.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for going through the implications of new clause 11, which I very much welcome. Does it at all

affect the Government's position on the length of election campaigns, which she will be aware has been a point of debate within this Bill and the Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Bill? Will the measure help to shorten election campaigns in the long term?

Kemi Badenoch: I think it is very possible that this measure will assist people in speeding up the process by which they can register, which will of course have a positive impact in terms of the length of time people have to get ready for elections. I know that my right hon. Friend has other concerns about the length of time required to conduct elections, and those matters are separate from what we are discussing today, but I am very happy to continue discussions on that with her.

New clause 11 and new schedule 1 also include powers to enable identity verification of partially completed voter card applications, making the process more efficient and minimising unnecessary delays in processing applications. I am pleased to say that these new clauses will support our aim to ensure that voter identification works for all eligible voters.

I know that the detail of voter identification remains of great interest to hon. Members. The Government have always committed to being open about our plans. I wish to use this opportunity to highlight to the House the policy statement on voter identification published on gov.uk on 6 January that sets out in more detail our implementation plans for the policy.

Today, we are introducing a group of clarificatory amendments on voter identification that support those plans. Amendments 53 to 56 and amendments 62 to 65 will ensure that any elector who does not possess one of the wide range of photographic identification documents accepted under our proposals would be able to apply for a voter card or anonymous elector's document when registering to vote, thus simplifying and making the system more accessible.

For electors who are registered to vote at multiple addresses, such as students, amendments 57 and 66 clarify that it will not be mandatory to make an application to each electoral registration officer with whom they are registered—only one would be needed. It is also important that voter cards and anonymous elector's documents are designed appropriately, and amendments 61 and 70 provide some additional flexibility around how to ensure that.

With respect specifically to anonymous electors and the anonymous elector's documents, amendments 71, 80, 83, 85 and 88 will ensure that an anonymous elector's identity can still be verified effectively at the polling station without risk of their anonymity being compromised, and that they can be provided with an anonymous elector's document in a convenient way.

6.45 pm

Amendments 81 and 86 will support electoral registration officers in producing temporary versions of voter cards and anonymous elector's documents in Great Britain, and will ensure that documents issued for use on a single day will not be valid once expired.

Following feedback in Committee, it was clear that the current draft of the Bill had created some confusion as to which concessionary travel passes would be accepted at polling stations. Amendments 82, 84 and 87 will help ensure clarity—

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I appreciate the amendments that clarify what travel documents are permitted. The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, on which I sit, has passed a report, and when I questioned the hon. Lady's predecessor, it was clear that the list of documents could have been expanded to all photo ID concessionary cards, including the young person's travel card, which requires a photo in all documentation. However, the Government chose to ignore young person passes and only include the older person passes in the main. May I ask why the Minister has done that? Her predecessor did say that she would think again about it. Why have they not done so on this issue?

Kemi Badenoch: I did look into this issue, and the reason why we have not accepted it is that the process for getting travel concessionary passes for older voters is more rigorous and robust than that for young people. The new robust checks that we would have at the threshold for voter ID are met by the older voters' concessionary passes but not by the young voters' passes. That is why this is the case.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Rather than outlining a list, why does the Minister not take the approach of outlining the thresholds that her Department think are required for an ID to be valid? The travel companies might then wish to meet that threshold. In that way, everyone will know what the Minister is talking about, rather than her just producing a random list and then dismissing the other passes.

Kemi Badenoch: That is a good question. It is something that we discussed in Committee and we decided that the best way to do that would be through secondary legislation. We did debate what the thresholds were, but this is something that can be resolved when further detail comes out in secondary legislation. I look forward to hearing the hon. Gentleman's comments at that stage.

As I was saying, amendments 82, 84 and 87 will help ensure clarity to both electors and polling station staff as to which forms of identification will be accepted. In line with other registration decisions, amendment 74 introduces an appeal process against the refusal of an application for a voter card or absent vote.

Finally, on this group of Government amendments, amendments 49 to 50, 76 to 79, 89, 90, 92, 93, 96, 105 and 108 seek to provide the chief electoral officer of Northern Ireland with the ability to provide confidential lists of dates of birth to polling stations at all elections in Northern Ireland, which will facilitate the implementation of existing provisions.

Cat Smith: Before the Minister moves on, I just wonder whether she, since taking up her post, has had a chance to meet the Association of Electoral Administrators, which has raised the concern that it is already quite difficult to recruit volunteers to staff polling stations. Its concern is that being asked to check these forms of ID will be a disincentive for volunteers to come forward because of the potential conflict between a voter whose ID is not valid and the volunteer who is staffing the polling station. Has she discussed that with the Association of Electoral Administrators, and if so, how did that conversation go?

Kemi Badenoch: Yes, I have had a meeting with AEA representatives and we talked about a range of issues. I cannot remember the discussions verbatim and to the letter, but these are matters that we are taking into consideration throughout.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): A Government's role should be to try to encourage more and more people into the democratic process. The introduction of photo ID cards, in my view, will do exactly the opposite. Can the Minister explain to the House how the introduction of photo ID cards will increase participation, particularly for the elderly and those in vulnerable communities?

Kemi Badenoch: We have tested this measure in extensive pilots. Most people have photographic ID, and those who do not will be provided with voter ID free of charge. It is important that we protect the franchise. This regulation has not been updated since 1872. We have debated it extensively—perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not present when we discussed it—and we are confident that it will not have an impact on voting.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): Does the Minister welcome the fact that in Swindon, when we had the voter ID pilots, our turnout went up? When the pilot came to an end, my residents complained that it was not already in place.

Kemi Badenoch: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point and shows that we have carried out thorough investigations into the impact. I am pleased that pilots such as the one in Swindon have been able to prove the Government's case.

Turning to the Government amendments on franchise measures, there are two technical amendments to schedule 7 for the EU citizen voting and candidacy provisions. Amendment 116 seeks to apply provisions in the Bill to amend the voting and candidacy rights of European citizens to the relevant elections in the City of London, which are governed by a unique legislative framework. It was therefore necessary to conduct additional investigations and engagement in order to finalise the provisions for inclusion in the Bill. The effect of the amendment is to bring City of London ward elections into line with those of the rest of England.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The Government themselves say time and again that EU citizens make such a contribution to the UK. Does the Minister agree that it seems a cynical move that EU citizens with settled status will now be disenfranchised?

Kemi Badenoch: We had multiple discussions on EU citizenship when we debated Brexit legislation. These are technical amendments to City of London voting rights, and some relate to the business franchise as well, so the hon. Lady's remarks are not relevant to this piece of legislation.

Amendment 117 is a minor technical amendment that corrects an oversight in the drafting and makes no changes to the effect or scope of the Bill. It reinserts a cross-reference to the definition of "qualifying Commonwealth citizen" in section 79 of the Local Government Act 1972. This will prevent any ambiguity and will ensure a common understanding of the term in this instance.

[Kemi Badenoch]

The technical amendments to the digital imprints provisions will ensure that the new regime clearly delivers the policy intent. On new clause 12 and related consequential amendments, it was always the policy intention for the enforcement of digital imprints to broadly mirror the enforcement of the print regime. Since introduction, we have identified that, although certain types of material were already included in the provisions for unpaid material, it was not sufficiently clear that they were captured in the provisions for paid-for materials and, as drafted, would not fall to be enforced by the Electoral Commission.

The amendments will ensure that the enforcement responsibilities of the police and the Electoral Commission can be correctly assigned and are consistent across all material. That will enable the commission, in practice, to enforce material about registered parties and referendums, as well as material about categories of candidates, future candidates and holders of elected office. That is broadly in line with the existing split of responsibilities between the enforcement authorities in the print regime. There may be a degree of overlap between material about categories of candidates, future candidates and holders of elected office, and material that is about more than one particular candidate, future candidate or holder of elected office. In these instances, it is for the authorities to establish, based on the particular facts, where the enforcement responsibility lies.

These amendments will make the provisions easier for campaigners to understand and for the authorities to enforce, while delivering a regime that provides transparency for voters across a wide range of campaigning material. The amendments will also clarify that no electronic campaigning material, be it paid or unpaid, needs to make express mention of the candidate, party, future candidate, elected office holder or outcome of the referendum it relates to in order to be in scope of the regime. By clarifying that, the amendments will remove any uncertainty.

The remaining Government amendments to the digital imprints clauses are, again, small technical clarifications. Amendment 20 amends the definitions of candidates, future candidates and elected office holders so as to include those of municipal elections in the City of London, ensuring that a consistent approach is applied to the transparency of unpaid electronic and printed campaign material.

Amendment 25 simply clarifies that the imprint rules will apply only to unpaid material wholly or mainly related to referendums when published during the referendum period. That ensures that the regime takes a proportionate approach, providing transparency around material when it is most likely to be shared and therefore influence the outcome of a referendum.

Finally, I will turn to the last set of amendments relating to the measures in the Bill on the Electoral Commission. Amendments 13 to 15 seek to future-proof the appointment mechanism of Ministers to the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission. As currently drafted, clause 15 enables a Minister of the Crown with responsibilities for the constitution appointed by the Prime Minister to deputise for the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, following the Transfer of Functions (Secretary of State for Levelling

Up, Housing and Communities) Order 2021. Several transfer of functions orders have been needed over recent years to ensure appropriate Government membership of the Speaker's committee. It is an unnecessarily burdensome process that could be avoided by future-proofing these provisions against future machinery of government changes or changes in ministerial responsibilities.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): Does this slew of technical amendments relating to machinery of government changes reflect the increasingly kleptocratic and nepotistic nature of this Government? Subject portfolios are handed to Ministers largely on the basis of who they are, rather than on the good functioning of government. Can the Minister give us an example of any other Government anywhere in the world under which elections and the constitution are managed by the same Department as housing policy?

Kemi Badenoch: I think the hon. Gentleman may be confused as to the reasons why we are making this change. We have had several transfer of functions orders to ensure that we minimise disruption due to the wording around the membership of the Speaker's committee.

We propose to amend clause 15 so that the Minister of the Crown appointed to exercise concurrent membership of the Speaker's committee with the Secretary of State does not have to have specific responsibilities in relation to the constitution, or any other portfolio, in order to be appointable. These amendments will not amend the overall Government membership of the committee because, as is currently the case, the Secretary of State and the Minister would not be able to attend committee meetings jointly and deputation would not be available to the other Government member of the Speaker's committee.

Additionally, amendments have been tabled to update the Bill to reflect the recent machinery of government change. On 8 December, elections policy was formally transferred from the Cabinet Office to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Some provisions in parts 5, 6 and 7, and in certain schedules to the Bill, currently refer to "the Minister". That is defined in clause 60 as meaning the Secretary of State or the Minister for the Cabinet Office. In order to bring the Bill into line with the new allocation of responsibilities within Government, these amendments replace those references so that they refer only to the Secretary of State. I urge the House to support these practical amendments.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to speak for the Opposition in these proceedings. I am taking on this role partway through matters, but fortunately I stand on the shoulders of outstanding colleagues, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith), who did a tremendous job and will no doubt continue to do so. Having read the *Official Report* of the Committee stage, I suspect that the Minister is rather relieved to face off with me rather than my hon. Friend—although she is in her place, so perhaps it is a two-for-one proposition.

Although the personnel may have changed, the fundamentals have not. This is a bad Bill. It is full of solutions in search of problems. Rather than opening up our democracy to greater participation, it will do the

opposite, all the while further weakening our democracy to dodgy finance. It is conventional to call it Trumpian, but it is not even that. It is the sort of partial nonsense that can be seen in US statehouses: partisan leaders who just cannot help themselves, gerrymandering and seeking to tilt election outcomes by putting their thumb on the scale. Do not take my word for it, Minister; the Government should have heeded the calls from the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee in its excellent report, when it said that the Bill ought to be paused.

7 pm

The Government say that they are pursuing five goals for our democracy through the Bill—making it secure, fair, modern, inclusive and transparent—and they have failed to deliver that, so we have tabled new clauses and amendments to improve it. Amendments 1 and 5 would remove from the Bill the voter identification provisions, which are said to protect our democracy by requiring people to have photographic identification in order to vote, so as to prevent personation. In 2019, 59 million votes were cast and there was a single conviction for voter personation. Someone is more likely to have been struck by lightning three times than to have voted after a phony voter.

Justin Tomlinson: In that case, why does my local Labour party insist on photo voter ID when it comes to select my opponent in each election?

Alex Norris: I confess that I had hoped the hon. Gentleman would ask me that. I have been a Labour party branch secretary, branch chair, constituency secretary, constituency chair, councillor, Member of Parliament and shadow Minister, and I have never once been asked for voter ID at a meeting. That has only ever happened in cases where certain Labour parties were in special measures and it was seen as a proportionate protection. It is proportion that we are talking about.

The hon. Gentleman said in a previous contribution that there is enthusiasm in Swindon for the measure to tackle that one solitary aspect of personation. In fact, if we were to replicate the findings of the pilots he relies on across the country, 184,000 people who wanted to vote would be turned away and would not return. That makes it 184,000 to one; this is racking up faster than Downing Street parties. The Cabinet Office itself says that that approach will exclude 2% of the electorate without the right form of ID, but according to the Electoral Commission the actual figure of those without the right ID will be between 1 million and 3.5 million.

In addition, the people excluded will not be evenly spread and that goes to the heart of the Government's problems with inclusivity in the Bill. Some 77% of people in the UK hold a full driving licence, whereas the figure for black people is 53% and the one for Asian people is 61%. Similarly, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the poorest are six times more likely than the best-off to miss out under these proposals—the measure is not inclusive.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that the Bill also includes provisions for totally free and suitable photographic ID for anyone who needs it, so the poor are protected?

Alex Norris: The hon. Gentleman reads my mind, because I was about to turn to that issue. I was going to say that the Government will now instead rely on a voter card. First, putting hurdles in the way will take people out and reduce turnout. That alone is a bad thing, but, again, the effect will not be evenly distributed; it will be harder for those in rural communities, who have further to travel, to make good. Indeed, what about those who live with a disability and all the extra burdens in their lives—why on earth would we give them another one, not least when we are not really solving a problem?

The Association of Electoral Administrators has raised serious concerns about the huge burden on overstretched local authorities, which will be supposed to deal with photo ID cards alongside the burden of registering significant numbers of new or overseas electors—I will reference them shortly—ordinary registrations and renewed postal voters. We know that that burden peaks at the same time, approximately six weeks before an election, because, funnily enough, people work in those cycles.

Governments ought to bring people together, and the Government have succeeded with these provisions, as they have united civil society. They have united academia and cross-party Select Committees against them. Why will the Government not listen? If they want that secure, fair, modern, inclusive and transparent Bill, they should accept the amendments. Should they not do so, we will know what they really want from the Bill.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: My hon. Friend is making excellent progress. One point made by Government Members is that people could apply for ID. Even where non-photographic ID was used in the trials and given to everyone, about 1% of people were turned away just because they had forgotten to take it from their house to the polling station. Now in a number of our seats 1% is a margin of error that would have changed the course of an election, and in tight years it could change the course of who is in government. Does he think it is right that the measures could change the course of who governs this country?

Alex Norris: I want the course of elections to be changed by people—by those eligible to vote. Although some of the seats in this place come down to very fine margins, across virtually every council area there are hyper-marginal seats, and indeed hyper-marginal councils, that will swing on this measure. As I have said, the Bill seeks to tackle something that has yet to be proved to be a problem.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech thus far. He has talked about the need for photographic ID. The Equality and Human Rights Commission made it clear that the groups that would be affected included people from different ethnic minority backgrounds, older people and, more important, disabled people. The Bill is doing more to disenfranchise disabled people by depriving them of accessibility.

Alex Norris: My hon. Friend knows that of which she speaks. In this place she is a leading campaigner on such issues, and that is exactly what the campaign groups and the representative groups are saying. The only people who do not seem to understand that point are the Government.

[Alex Norris]

Let me now turn to inclusivity. Our amendment 2 seeks to retain the current requirement for returning officers to make specific provision at polling stations to enable voters who live with blindness or partial-sightedness to vote without any need for assistance from the presiding officer or any companion, and to change the nature of that provision from “a device” to “equipment”. As it stands, the Bill could have the dangerous consequence of removing the fundamental principle that electoral staff must enable voters to vote “without any need for assistance”.

Although we recognise and support the broader duty in the Bill to enable all people living with disabilities to vote, it is wrong not to carry over the previous requirement to enable people to vote “without any need for assistance”.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that that measure will create a postcode lottery for people who are partially sighted or blind, because it will depend on which returning officer will decide what equipment will be provided?

Alex Norris: That is an excellent point. The question of who provides the requisite equipment and who does not will differ greatly between authorities. I cannot believe that that is the Government’s intention, and I hope that in her closing speech the Minister will clarify how the problem is to be resolved.

Let me now deal with new clause 1. If the Government were truly serious about improving democratic engagement and modernising democracy, they would extend the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds who live in this country. Much has already been said on the subject, but I want to add a significant element to the debate. The greatest risk to our democracy, and to democracies globally, is apathy. If people stop valuing it, they will care less when they see it eroded. The best way to build a culture of participation is to start early. We already expect to remain connected to 16 and 17-year-olds through education, employment or training. We should be using that time to teach and develop an interest in citizenship—in our rights and responsibilities. The right to vote is an anchor in that regard. Let us use the time that we have with those young people to talk about voting—about their local councils, and about national Government.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): One issue that I discuss regularly with my constituents, especially young voters, is their wish to participate in our democracy, and when I visit schools, colleges and sixth forms up and down the country, that issue arises time and again. Does my hon. Friend feel that this is a missed opportunity for the Government to include those young people in our democratic process?

Alex Norris: I share my hon. Friend’s view. What I hear during my visits is very much in line what she is hearing. We know that 16 and 17-year-olds, when given the chance, take it very seriously. In Scotland and Wales, they have higher rates of turnout than 18 to 24-year-olds, with 75% voting and 97% saying that they would vote in future elections. They have also accessed more information from a wider variety of sources than any other age group. They have taken it seriously, and we ought to take them seriously.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I am interested to know the hon. Gentleman’s perspective, from a Labour point of view, on Labour Live in 2018. When people signed up for a ticket it said: “All under-18s need to be accompanied by an adult or guardian at Labour Live. That means all youth and child tickets must be bought alongside an adult full price ticket and ID will be checked at the festival gate.” I would be grateful—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. What is all this shouting? The hon. Gentleman will make his point and the Opposition spokesman will undoubtedly be able to answer it without shouting from the background.

Dr Evans: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was simply asking how that fits into the perspective that the hon. Gentleman has just been putting across.

Alex Norris: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I hoped that we were going to talk about his new clause, but instead, as he knows as well as I do, he is creating a false equivalence between a licensed event and going to vote in a polling station, where, as yet, I have not been offered a pint at the ballot box. Maybe that will be in the next elections Bill.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Voting Labour is much more dangerous than having a pint.

Alex Norris: The hon. Gentleman knows that I will always take an intervention from him, so should he wish he will find me in listening mode.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): With regard to voter participation among 16 and 17-year-olds in Scotland, another reason we have such a healthy turnout is that all the elections in which they participate are conducted on a proportional basis. There are amendments tonight that would extend that to elections to this House. Will the hon. Gentleman be supporting them?

Alex Norris: I have significant issues with new clause 13, as drafted, which simply asks to introduce a proportional system. For something as seismic as that, there ought to be greater detail about what is being proposed. I am also a strong believer—this speaks to new clause 5 in the name of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O’Hara)—in the desirability of a citizens convention on our democracy that would look at voting systems but also look a lot more widely. This is a good moment and a good mechanism to reboot our democracy.

On new clause 14, in my name, and new clause 10, having left the European Union, we need new, easy-to-understand arrangements that are fair. People who live in this country ought to have a say in how it is run and the services that affect their lives. It is odd that the Bill does not do more for them, and indeed does more for those who do not live here than those who do. The provisions we seek to implement would address that, and I hope they are looked on favourably.

Turning to new clauses 2 and 9, the Bill creates another odd paradox. It opens the floodgates for a potentially large influx of foreign-based money into our democracy, but at the same time makes it harder for civil society organisations, charities and trade unions to

have their say, despite the massive contribution to British life that they make. What is fair or transparent about that?

Labour Members are on record as thinking that 15 years is a reasonable and proportionate amount of time for someone to retain a vote after leaving the UK and for the arrangements to ensure that they can to remain practical. We fear that the Government have created a system vulnerable to overseas interference. It allows a person to call up any and every local authority to say that they were resident in the area 30 or 40 years ago, provide flimsy proof—it will not be photo identification, that is for sure—and then be able to donate massive sums of money. I would hope to hear from the Minister that that is not the intention, but nevertheless there is a chance to make good on it. New clause 2 would simply prevent anyone registered as such an overseas elector from donating to political parties in the UK, while new clause 9 would require individual and company donors to be based in the UK while making those in charge of companies liable for any offences caused. We also have new clause 16 tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne). So if the Minister really does not want to see that weakness in our democracy, she has a real menu to choose from and she will find us very supportive, because these are proportionate safeguards.

Research from *The Times* shows that the Conservative party was able, through existing methods, to accept about £1 million from UK citizens living in tax havens ahead of the 2017 general election. The Bill takes away the barriers that kept it at £1 million. The strength of feeling on the issue is shown by the variety of other new clauses—2, 8, 16 and 18—that cover that subject. As the Government seek to ensure that those in tax havens have a stronger voice, they are seeking at the same time to undermine the ability of civil society organisations, charities and trade unions to engage in our democracy. Amendment 3 would remove those provisions.

7.15 pm

As currently drafted, the provisions mean that, where a political party is campaigning jointly with one of those organisations, or where those organisations are campaigning together, the total cost of the campaign has to be declared by all participating parties. Making co-campaigners count the same money multiple times simply makes no sense. Why would the same £20,000 spent by one entity also count for the other—unless, of course, we wanted them to do less campaigning?

Do not take this just from me; the Electoral Commission believes that the provisions could make it harder for some campaigners to understand and be confident in following the new law, and could deter or restrict campaigning efforts, leading to less information reaching the electorate and from a narrower range of sources. When I say it like that, it suddenly does not seem at all surprising that the Government are seeking this, because that is what they want and that is what the Bill states.

Wealthy donors who have not lived in the UK for decades will find it easier to contribute. Charities working every day in this country will find it harder. That is because the Government want to silence those who are critical of their record on poverty, child hunger, low pay, climate and the dozens of other issues on which

they have failed for 11 years. Our amendment will reverse that and I encourage colleagues to support it. Similarly, we will support amendments 11 and 12, which delete parts of this provision.

I will finish with just a couple of points on the Government's amendments. Politicians changing their minds is a good thing—we do not see enough of it. We would all be in stronger positions if we recognised that sometimes we get things wrong or that our views change over time. However, the sheer volume of changes and changed directions in the Bill is a sign of how half-baked it started. It is a sign, as the PACAC report stated, that there ought to have been proper pre-legislative scrutiny. There should have been a proper attempt to build consensus across Parliament and civil society.

Instead, we are left in this absurd situation in which, between Second Reading and Report—and indeed, between Committee sittings—the Government shoved in the use of first past the post for mayoral elections. That is bad government and bad leadership, and it is symptomatic of a bad Bill. I hope that the Minister will at least make good on the commitments sought in that report for proper post-legislative scrutiny, because much will have to be put together after this.

I am conscious that time is short and that lots of colleagues wish to contribute, so I shall conclude. This is a bad Bill. The solutions in it are looking for problems to solve. It will make it harder for citizens to vote; it will make it harder for civil society to contribute. The only winners here are those with the deepest pockets. Once again, we see that this is a Government with the wrong priorities, whose every action, at every stage, lays bare dishonesty. We should pass those new clauses and amendments.

Mrs Miller: This debate is about important changes to one of the pillars of our democracy: the way we run free and fair elections. May I commend my hon. Friend the Minister for her diligent work listening to the debate and deliberations, and for making the changes that she has put before us?

I will speak in particular to Government new clause 11 and new schedule 1. In September, in the earlier stages of the Bill, the then Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), stressed the importance of an elections system that works for voters. Making that system work for voters is where I will focus my remarks.

New clause 11 is linked to absent voting and a power to make regulations, and it paves the way for new schedule 1. New schedule 1 includes verification evidence needed to register, but also, importantly, the opportunity to introduce online absent-voting application services. I think that is a really important step forward because those provisions potentially give us an opportunity to absolutely make the system better for voters, particularly those who are absent, who in the past have had to take many days, or even weeks, to make an application to vote. This system of online applications could well improve things significantly.

Ian Lavery: Will the right hon. Lady explain how what she has just said will encourage people from right across the political piece to participate in the democratic process?

Mrs Miller: Because it will enable people to be part of the system, to register online and to have confidence in what is going on in our election process.

I want to probe the Minister on the length of election campaigns, which have, I believe—this is to the hon. Gentleman's point—not served us well in helping to engage people in the election process. Many hon. Members who took part in debates on the Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Bill made the point about the continual lengthening of our election campaigns being not a benign act, but an act that has potential consequences—consequences we are not that aware of. Emerging research suggests that longer election campaigns are potentially disengaging for electors. They mean that the interest of electors wanes over time—perhaps all of us who have knocked on doors have seen that over the last two decades, when election campaigns have increased significantly in length.

Will new schedule 1 and new clause 11, tabled by the Government, provide some sense of opportunity that at least the length of election campaigns will not increase? The former Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North, spoke about her understanding of the importance of potentially shortening election campaigns as well. Hon. Members will remember that in law at the moment election campaigns are currently 25 working days, and amendments that I and my hon. Friends tabled the last time these matters were discussed in this place considered shortening campaigns to 25 days.

Will the Minister update the House on the undertaking to consider research into the length of election campaigns, in conjunction with new clause 11 and new schedule 1? That could provide an opportunity for us to understand better how election campaigns affect voter participation, and how the length of campaigns may be shortened in a realistic and sensible way as a result of her new provisions. Will she help the House to understand how she will take that forward to ensure that our democratic process is as strong as it can be? The lack of consideration about the length of campaigns should be something that is of the past, and the issue should be central to the thoughts of the Government in the future.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I rise to speak in support of new clause 1, as well as new clauses 3 to 8, tabled in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). I welcome the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) to his place. It is a pleasure to see him.

Before addressing the new clauses, I wish to put on record my sincere thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North and the hon. Members for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) and for Putney (Fleur Anderson), who, day after day in Committee, went through the Bill forensically and exposed the fundamental threat to our democracy that is contained in almost every line of it. From restricting the franchise through the introduction of voter ID cards, to giving the Government power to set the strategy and policy of the Electoral Commission, abolishing a progressive, proportional voting system, and constraining how whole sections of civil society are allowed to campaign, this Bill has it all.

This Bill, which—let's be honest—would not be out of place in the hands of Viktor Orbán or Jair Bolsonaro, should not be seen in isolation and has to be viewed in

the wider context, as it includes plans to criminalise peaceful protest and to allow the Home Secretary to strip someone of British citizenship with the stroke of a pen. It places onerous legal constraints on journalists and whistleblowers. Ministers will be allowed to ignore legal rulings made under judicial review and there are plans to abolish the Human Rights Act. It was Peter Geoghegan, writing in *openDemocracy* just before Christmas, who said:

“This is what democracy dying... looks like. And we need to act now before it's too late.”

That is why we opposed the Bill on Second Reading, why we sought to amend it radically in Committee, and why, unless Government Members wake up to what they are about to do and fundamentally amend the Bill today, we will oppose it this evening as well.

We in the SNP fully support new clause 1, which would simply bring the age at which people can vote in Westminster elections into line with what already happens in Scotland and in Wales. The SNP has advocated this for a long time—indeed, the legendary Winnie Ewing, when she made her maiden speech from these Benches 55 years ago during a debate on lowering the voting age from 21 to 18, said:

“There are moral and intellectual reasons why it is good sense to make people responsible at the age of 18 if not sooner... I am absolutely on the side of youth.”—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1967; Vol. 754, c. 980.]

Wera Hobhouse: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the future of this country would look entirely different, particularly when it comes to the climate emergency, if we lowered the voting age?

Brendan O'Hara: The hon. Lady makes an extremely good point, which I will address specifically as I continue my speech.

What is different now from 1967 is that, with two nations of the United Kingdom already having this provision in place, new clause 1 does not ask the UK Government to take a step into the unknown. We can see how well it is working in Scotland and Wales, where the change has been both seamless and uncontroversial. Any concerns that we might have had about 16 and 17-year-olds not being interested in politics or being unable to understand the issues have been shown to be without any foundation.

Jerome Mayhew: I once met Winnie Ewing when I was at school and she came to talk to a politics class I was attending. However, on the new clause, I rise to ask what is the rationale for choosing the age of 16, when people are not considered to be responsible enough to decide whether to buy cigarettes, rather than some other age—say, 15 or 14?

Brendan O'Hara: I think the hon. Gentleman is confusing private rights and public rights. There are public health issues around the consumption of alcohol and the purchase of cigarettes. These are exactly the same debates as we had in 1967, when there were fears about taking a step into the unknown. What is different now, as I said, is that it is not a step into the unknown. It has been proven to work. Why should young people in England and Northern Ireland have different rights from those in Wales and Scotland?

When we had our referendum in 2014, 90% of 16 and 17-year-olds registered to vote and 75% of them turned out to vote on the day. As the hon. Member for Nottingham North said, studies showed that young people had investigated the issues and had multiple sources of information, and many were far better acquainted with the issues than were their parents or grandparents. To go back to the point made by the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), if we look at the age of the people leading the fight against climate change and the demonstrators at COP26, we see that overwhelmingly they were young people making their voices heard above everybody else's. That tells us all we need to know.

Cat Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. It was a pleasure to serve on the Bill Committee with him. He and his colleague the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) did as much as to scrutinise every line of the Bill as I and my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) did.

The hon. Gentleman talks about extending the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds. Much of the case made for the Bill has been about making our democracy more secure. One of the ways we can make our democracy more secure is by encouraging more people to participate in it. The more people are voting, the harder it is to swing an election unfairly. That is what we heard in the evidence given to the Bill Committee. Does he agree, therefore, that extending the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds, who will go on to develop a far stronger commitment to voting, will actually strengthen our democracy against foreign interference in British politics?

Brendan O'Hara: The hon. Lady is absolutely spot-on. As she says, we heard from many witnesses who said that the wider the franchise and the more the people who vote, the less there can be untoward interference.

Why are the UK Government so opposed to giving 16 and 17-year-olds the vote? Unfortunately, the Minister for Levelling Up Communities is no longer in her place. In Committee, I hoped to find out why she thought it was okay for Scotland and Wales, but not for England and Northern Ireland. Her reply to me was:

"There is no need for me to rehash the arguments. I ask him to ask his parliamentary researcher to research *Hansard*."—[*Official Report, Elections Public Bill Committee*, 26 October 2021; c. 371.] That was a Minister's response on this very issue in Committee, and I am sorry she is no longer in her place to correct it.

7.30 pm

It does not have to be this way. One way the Government could gauge public opinion without the rancour and animosity that we sometimes see here would be to embrace the idea of citizens' assemblies, as we propose in new clause 3. I think it is fair to say, and I defy anyone to say otherwise, that we do not have a monopoly on wisdom in this place. There are people outside this Chamber who have good ideas and whose approach to complex decision making we could find useful and helpful.

Bringing together a group of citizens who are representative of the country and allowing them to explore ideas on electoral reform would add value to our deliberations in this place. Again, it would not be a step into the unknown because citizens' assemblies have been shown to work in Scotland. Many democracies

around the world use them, most notably Ireland where, during the complicated and sensitive nationwide discussion on reforming the abortion law, they were shown to be enormously successful. Of course citizens' assemblies cannot change the law, as that is left to this place and other Parliaments, but they can put interesting challenges and ideas before us and give us a genuine sense of what people want and what are their priorities.

We have heard so often that maximising participation is vital for a healthy democracy, and new clause 4 would ensure that all eligible voters automatically appear on the electoral register. Automatic voter registration is not complicated or costly, and it is not particularly administratively challenging. For example, young people could automatically go on to the electoral register when they receive their national insurance number. That is commonplace around the world, and there are a variety of models for the Government to look to for guidance. It would get more people on to the register and it would lead to a higher turnout, greater participation and hopefully, as we have heard, a sense of civic responsibility, particularly among young people and groups that have felt marginalised or on the periphery of society.

Of course there are few groups more marginalised and on the periphery than those in prison. New clause 5 would bring UK election law into line with that of Scotland, where a person sentenced to a term of 12 months or less does not lose their right to participate in elections. In May's Holyrood election, for the first time prisoners serving such sentences were eligible to vote. The Electoral Commission has shown that a very small number exercised that right but, nevertheless, we believe that cutting people off from society while serving prison sentences of less than 12 months is utterly counterproductive and totally unhelpful to their rehabilitation. New clause 5 would also bring the UK into line with the European Court of Human Rights, which has declared that a blanket ban on prisoners' voting is a breach of protocol 1, article 3 of the European convention on human rights.

New clauses 6 and 7 would extend the franchise to all non-UK nationals with leave to remain and all EU nationals domiciled in the UK, which is particularly important. In May 2021, when the SNP won an unprecedented fourth term, it was on the largest and widest franchise ever in a Scottish parliamentary election. That was no accident because, having already added 16 and 17-year-olds and EU nationals, in 2020 the Scottish Parliament further extended the franchise to include all foreign nationals with leave to remain, including refugees. It was done because Scotland wants to be an open, welcoming country that recognises the enormous contribution that EU nationals and others have made to our country by choosing to call it home. We wanted to say it loudly and clearly that they are valued, that they are welcome and that we view them as an important part of our future.

Patrick Grady: Are these new clauses not a challenge to Members from other parties, particularly Scottish Conservative MPs? If they believe in the strength of the Union and in sharing experience across these islands, these new clauses would bring the Westminster franchise into line with the Scottish franchise. If these new clauses were pressed to a Division, I would hope the Scottish Conservatives, wherever they might be, would support them.

Brendan O'Hara: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I am sure that Conservative Members for Welsh constituencies must be having a similar dilemma. If this is good enough for Scotland and Wales, why is it not good enough for the rest of the United Kingdom?

We want to say to EU nationals and those with the right to remain that, as an integral part of Scotland's future, they should have a stake in and a responsibility for how we are governed. That is why Scotland has a thriving, healthy, robust democracy. It is telling that, while Scotland and Wales do everything they can to extend this franchise, those on the Government Benches do the exact opposite.

I will turn now to the last of our new clauses, new clause 8. In Committee, Conservative Members regaled us with tales of widespread personation, voter intimidation, postal fraud and the harvesting of votes—indeed, all manner of fraud, theft and deception—yet when they were asked to give the Electoral Commission the power to tackle those abuses and impose a meaningful fine on those found guilty, they refused to do so. Imposing a paltry £20,000 fine has been shown to be no deterrent whatsoever. It is viewed by the worst offenders almost as a cost of doing business. We believe that our proposal for a maximum fine of £500,000 or 5% of an organisation's or individual's total spend will give the commission far greater power to act as a genuine deterrent to lawbreakers.

As I said at the beginning, these are incredibly dangerous days for our democracy, and this Elections Bill is just the start of a process that, if passed, will take democracy into a very dark place from which it will be difficult for it to return. This is not happening by accident. The architects of this plan understand exactly where it will lead. Just last month, Elizabeth David-Barrett, the professor of governance and integrity at the University of Sussex, used the phrase “state capture” to describe what is happening. She described state capture as

“a type of systematic corruption where narrow interest groups take control of the institutions and processes that make public policy, buying influence not just to disregard the rules but also to rewrite the rules.”

That is where we are currently. It is extremely dangerous, but it can be successful only if there is a compliant legislature and a widespread public attitude that it could never happen here. But it is happening here, and it is happening here right now.

The parliamentary arithmetic means that only Conservative Members can stop this plan in its tracks, and tonight they have a decision to make. As the soon-to-be ex-Prime Minister heads for the exit door, are they really going to acquiesce meekly and allow his final act to be the fatal undermining of our democracy? Are they really content to have history record them as having been party to one of the biggest betrayals of our democracy, and to have done it at the behest of a man whose days are numbered and who will almost certainly go down in history as the worst and most self-serving Prime Minister this country has ever had? That is complete madness. I ask Conservative Members, please, to think long and hard before backing this dreadful Bill; the Prime Minister is on the way out the door, but they should not let him take their reputations with him as he goes.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): It will be obvious that a great many people wish to speak and that we do not have very long. We have to finish this stage of the Bill at 9 o'clock, so I shall immediately impose a time limit of five minutes.

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): I cannot promise to be as succinct as I was in my last speech before you, Madam Deputy Speaker, which clocked in at a loquacious 10 words, but I will do my best.

I rise to support the Bill having been on the Committee; I am confident that we have before us a sensible and necessary package of measures to ensure the continued robustness of our electoral system. Before speaking to the general merits of the Bill, I would like to speak to some of the new clauses and amendments selected for discussion. With a Bill of this size and complexity, Members will have a range of views on these issues, but I am quite disappointed to see that some of the things we voted down in Committee have found their way back for a second go.

I will start with some of the measures proposed by the Scottish National party. As a member of the Electoral Reform Society, I have to say that I have a small amount of sympathy with new clause 3, but I do not think its proposals belong in this Bill. However, I will cheerfully have a conversation with the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) if he wants to bring them forward another time.

Although I understand the motivations behind new clause 4, I cannot be the only one to have baulked at the long list of organisations required to provide our personal data to the state. On the whole, registering to vote should be positive affirmation of someone's intention. Simply adding everyone to the list will not increase participation and make people exercise their franchise. It will just be more names on a list.

New clause 5, I am afraid to say, is completely beyond the pale. When we deprive somebody of their liberty as a result of their criminal acts, we deprive them of their most fundamental freedoms, including the right to exercise their franchise.

New clauses 6 and 7 and, by extension, new clause 14, are opportunistic and completely unprecedented. No EU state allows British citizens to vote in its parliamentary elections. That we should extend the franchise to EU members when, even as a member of the European Union, we could not, is completely and utterly inconceivable. The UK already has one of the widest franchises in the world, allowing Commonwealth and Irish citizens to participate in our general elections. If someone is that committed to participating in our democracy but they cannot because of their nationality, they are more than welcome to apply for citizenship.

As I mentioned earlier in respect of new clause 3, I have some sympathy with the provisions of new clause 13 in the name of the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), but something of that magnitude should be done not as an amendment to a Bill but as a separate debate.

I am concerned by new clause 15, because I disagree not with the general intention but with its prescriptive nature. There are any number of legitimate reasons why

somebody might want to be registered in more than one area, but I accept the principle that we must do more to tackle multiple voting.

I particularly like new clause 17. I represent a borough named after its principal town—I see the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) in his place. I represent two towns in that borough that have no particular affinity for the main town and have a strong sense of their own identity; in fact, in the hon. Gentleman's constituency there will be areas such as Littleborough and Wardle that would like to be identified as such rather than as Rochdale. I have some sympathy with the idea of allowing people to describe more accurately on the ballot paper where they live. If we are not going forward with the new clause tonight, I would be pleased to see it come back at a later date.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): As someone who was responsible for bringing in the original provision that people could just say the constituency where they live, the only word of caution I suggest is that we do not want to get into a competing war between candidates about who was more or less precise about where they live. It is really a security matter.

Chris Clarkson: I completely understand my right hon. Friend's point. There could be a ridiculous situation of "I live at No. 1 Acacia Drive" and, "I live at No. 3 Acacia Drive". As I understand it, the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland will not press the new clause to a vote, but I would still welcome a discussion on how we could make that work.

In the interests of time, I will move on to new clauses 2, 8, 16 and 18. I was going to make a brief comment on them, but given recent revelations in the press, I might say that they are the height of hypocrisy, especially new clause 16. The Bill will make it legal for overseas voters to participate in polls. It is perfectly reasonable for them to be able to contribute to a party or candidate of their choosing. The Opposition like to kid themselves that all overseas voters are fat cats and tax exiles sunning themselves on the costas, but many are ordinary people who have worked hard, saved and decided to enjoy their retirement overseas. Allowing them to donate would not particularly favour one party over another. I am quite sure Labour Members would do quite well out of the villas of Tuscany.

It is entirely possible that hon. Members had the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) in mind when they drafted the new clauses, but perhaps it would be easier just to send him on a training course. The deliberate conflation of foreign interests with ordinary British citizens wanting to contribute to an election in which they are legally entitled to participate is wearing in the extreme. Notwithstanding that, I welcome the comments of the Home Secretary at the Dispatch Box earlier; I have no doubt she will work constructively with all parties to tackle the thorny issue of interference in our democratic system.

The Bill is necessary and timely. Whether or not we acknowledge it, our elections have been open to abuse in the past. If they are entirely honest, activists and politicians across the spectrum will have seen some questionable events.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise the evidence base from Northern Ireland? The introduction of voter ID in 2002 has

proven instrumental in an increase in voter turnout, reassuring people that a proper process was being followed and that the likelihood of fraud was minimised. Voter ID is quite simple: it is to confirm that people are who they say they are. It worked in Northern Ireland, and it can work here.

Chris Clarkson: I absolutely agree. In my own borough, a senior Labour councillor who was a member of council cabinet at the time accepted a caution for voting twice—he was able to do so. We hear this repeated refrain from Labour Members that this is a rare instance and that it hardly ever happens, but I shall pose the same questions that I posed in Committee: what is an acceptable level of fraud? How many votes is it okay for somebody to steal? Surely one instance of fraud is too many.

There is something quite telling and quite worrying about just how strenuously some Members oppose the Bill. We are not asking people to go to any great lengths or take on huge expense. ID will be freely available to people with one of the many qualifying documents. I looked in my wallet before I took my place in the Chamber. I have at least two permissible forms that I habitually carry with me, as do the vast majority of people. It is already the case that most people take their polling card to the polling booth, because they think they have to give it to the teller to prove who they are.

7.45 pm

We should be keen to show the world how secure our democracy is and, as part of that, how all our citizens are able to participate, which is why I also strongly support removing the prohibition on overseas voters who have lived outside the UK for more than 15 years. The rights and responsibilities of British citizenship should not be arbitrarily time limited based on a person's address. By passing the Bill, we are bringing our elections in line with those in countries such as France and Canada, which we would want to be compared with as modern, mature democracies.

I am proud of the work that we have done as a Government to ensure the legitimacy and integrity of our elections process, and I look forward to voting for the Bill later this evening.

Mr Carmichael: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to take part in this important debate. Let me say briefly at the outset that the fact that the House has less than two and a half hours in which to debate such a Bill on Report is nothing short of an outrage. When the Government brought forward their motion of instruction, they should have recognised at that stage that they had turned this into a constitutional Bill, and the Committee stage, never mind the Report stage, should have been on the Floor of the House. This is an unacceptable and contemptible way for the Government to be treating Parliament.

I rise to speak to new clause 13, which stands in my name, and the names of my hon. and right hon. Friends, and a number of others, including Members of the Labour party, the Green party and the Alliance party. I would very much like to test the opinion of the House in relation to this new clause.

We have seen just this weekend, with the Government's announcements in relation to the BBC, the dangers and just what is possible when we have an electoral system

[*Mr Carmichael*]

that puts total power into the hands of a party on a minority vote at a general election. These are the arguments that we often rehearse in relation to proportional representation. I will not rehearse them tonight because time is short, but I want to talk a little bit about what proportional representation would mean for Parliament and for this House and how it could lead to a restoration of the standing of the House in public life.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I think you know how I feel about being a Member here. It has been the privilege of my life to be a Member of Parliament and to have the opportunity to do things for my community and for the individuals who live there. To have a role at the heart of the nation's politics is the greatest privilege that any of us can hope for.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I am sympathetic to electoral reform. He makes the point about being privileged to represent his constituency, as indeed I am and all of us in this House are. I wonder whether he can reassure me on one concern. I would like to support his new clause this evening, but it breaks the constituency link, or at least an element of local representation, as part of a more proportional system. Can he reassure me that if I were to vote for his new clause this evening, some level of local representation would be maintained?

Mr Carmichael: I can give the hon. Gentleman that reassurance. I can assure him that, if anything, the link would be strengthened. I live in a local authority ward that is elected by single transferable vote. I elect four councillors. Each of them has a link to the constituents and, between them, they are able to represent the views of just about everybody in their community, not just those who have voted for them and those who agree with them. In that way, using the single transferable vote, the link between the elected and the elector is, in fact, strengthened.

I was just saying that it has been the privilege of my life to be a Member of Parliament, but, believe me, I am by no means blind to the multiple faults of this House. It would not take an awful lot to make it so much better. We have heard an awful lot of talk in the last week or two about cultures, and about the culture at the heart of this Government in No. 10 Downing Street, but let us also accept that the culture of Parliament has to change.

Time and again over the years, the culture of deference and entitlement has led us into difficulty, as in 2009 with the scandal over MPs' expenses. I thought that perhaps we would have learned our lesson after that, but last year, with the Owen Paterson affair and all the stories about MPs with second, third and fourth jobs—and the amount of time they gave to them and the amount of money they earned—it became perfectly apparent that the sense of entitlement continues. Unless we can change that sense of entitlement—the culture in this House—we will not change the standing in which we are held by the public.

Why do we find ourselves in this situation? Why do we keep coming back to this place, time and again, where we become our own worst enemies? I can answer that question in two words: safe seats. The existence of

areas where parties can depend on the return of a Member of Parliament with a majority of tens of thousands without making any real effort creates that sense of entitlement.

Someone offering themselves for re-election should never be a formality, but for many people elected to this House it is exactly that. Follow the money and look at the expenses returns: in marginal seats the expenses are right up to the limit, and in the so-called safe seats the party makes the smallest possible expenditure. We talk about having a national election, but in truth we campaign only in an ever-reducing base of marginal constituencies.

Wera Hobhouse: My right hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. For a long time people have complained that our country and our political culture are divided and polarised. Does he agree that a proportional system would go a long way towards bringing people together and stopping divisive politics?

Mr Carmichael: I believe it could do. I think we have to be careful not to oversell it, because the electoral system is only part of the story. The principles of those who are elected and their willingness to adhere to those principles when they are here also matter. In referendums in 2014 in Scotland and in 2016 in relation to the departure from the European Union, however, everybody suddenly realised that their vote mattered and that it did make a difference to take part. As a consequence, turnout went through the roof.

The standing of this House in the eyes of our fellow citizens has never been lower. It is now urgent that we address that. We will not address it just through changes to standards, privileges and Committees in this place; we have to change the way in which we are sent here by the electors. We must have a system that gets rid of safe seats so that everybody's vote, no matter where they live, is of equal value. That is why, Madam Deputy Speaker, I very much hope that you might allow me the chance to test the opinion of the House on new clause 13. It matters to us all and it is now urgent.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): I welcome some of what the Government have announced today, particularly the safeguards around postal voting. I could not agree more with the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who already indicated that the Labour party was in office when voter ID checks were introduced in Northern Ireland, and there we have not seen the impact that the Opposition are suggesting.

I start by opposing new clause 1. For me, the question is about who is actually doing the voting and who is making the decision. I just sat on a private Member's Bill Committee on increasing the age at which people can get married from 16 to 18 in England. Who is making that decision? The argument was made, and basically accepted by the Opposition, that 16 and 17-year-olds are not making it themselves. That is quite an important point. Also, why are we not talking about 13, 14 or 15-year-olds? I cannot understand why 16 is being particularly aimed for, especially when other things—*[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members wish to intervene, they can stand up.

We have already made big changes over the past few years to raise thresholds to 18, including for cigarettes, as my hon. Friend the Member for Broadland (Jerome

Mayhew) mentioned, and for active service overseas in the armed forces. I think that with 18 we have hit a new level that we agree on, so I do not understand why we would want to open that up again.

Brendan O'Hara: If the 75% of 16 and 17-year-olds who voted in the Scottish independence referendum did not make their own choice, who voted for them? If the research that says that they looked for and discovered the facts and made their own choice is not true, who does the hon. Member think voted for them?

Mr Holden: The hon. Member raises a very important point. A far higher proportion voted in that group than in the 18-to-24 age group. I ask again: will he not reflect on who was actually influencing those people voting?

Brendan O'Hara: I was asking you.

Mr Holden: Wait a second—the hon. Member can intervene again if he wishes. I know that he and the Scottish National party do not want to raise the age of marriage to 18; the Scottish Executive have not made it clear so far, but I think they should. Article 1 in part 1 of the UN convention on the rights of the child says that a child is a child until 18 years of age, so I do not understand why the SNP is still backing child marriage.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Does the hon. Member not recognise that the same treaty says that under-18s should have a say in the future of their life and have democratic participation in the countries they live in?

Mr Holden: I do not think it says that they should have the vote in those countries, actually.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: It is a broad treaty.

Mr Holden: Indeed.

With respect to the Liberal Democrats' new clause 13, the single transferable vote system is not a proportional vote system, as the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) knows; it is a preferential vote system, so he is arguing in this Chamber for something different from his new clause. That is a particularly important point, because it relates to safe seats.

Let me give an example. Just under 31% of people voted Conservative in 1997, and 43% voted Conservative in 2019. If we look at how those seats have changed between the 1992 Parliament and this Parliament, we can see that there are far fewer safe seats than under either a proportional system or a preferential system. There have been no studies to show that real preferential systems would make seats less safe. In fact, they could even reinforce them and make them even safer. Much more thought is needed before we engage in anything that the right hon. Member is proposing.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) will speak in support of his new clause 17. I support the new clause, which I think is a very sensible move. I hope that it can be looked at, either now or at a later stage. My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) spoke better than I

can about new clause 5, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) about new clause 11 and new schedule 11.

I want to speak briefly to new clause 15, which stands in my name. It is a probing amendment, but I really want those on the Government Front Bench to think about ensuring that people can be registered only in one area. It is unacceptable that if someone is wealthy enough to own multiple properties, they can be registered in different places and can potentially vote in multiple local elections. I think that they should have to choose where to vote in local elections and where their primary residence is. That would also have huge benefits for the tax system, because we would know where someone's primary residence was and they could not flip-flop around.

I do not think that owning or renting more property should mean having multiple votes. It is just not defensible that people should be able to vote in more than one place in the same year, at the same time, in the same elections. Why should some people be able to vote more than others? It just does not sit right with me that I could potentially vote hundreds of times if I had hundreds of properties across the country.

New clause 15 is a probing amendment, because we need to look at the issue of double voting. It is not acceptable that people should be able to do it, so I really think we need to look at ways of properly clamping down on it. I am glad to have had the support of so many Conservative colleagues in tabling the new clause. I will not press it today, but I hope that in her comments the Minister will reflect on my suggestions.

8 pm

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Over 180 years ago, starting in Blaenau Gwent, thousands of Chartists marched on Newport. From across south Wales, they demanded reforms to elections so that common people could have their voices heard in Parliament. Since then, elections in our country have got more transparent, fair and open, but I am worried about voter suppression, and at stake is the very integrity of our elections.

We all know what is going on in America. Despite the highest election turnout in 120 years, the big lie has been amplified that Trump actually won in 2020. Since then, ordinary Americans are facing higher hurdles to vote in too many states. Raising the bar to lower voter turnout is what the Republican right is up to, and similar tactics here trouble me.

I am particularly concerned about the introduction of voter ID, so I am supporting amendment 1 tonight. Asking for voter ID seems reasonable: someone shows who they are to get a ballot paper. However, it is an old cynical trick: insert an administrative hurdle, dress it up as improving security, watch voter turnout go down—job done, the fix is in. Of course, voter fraud should be stopped, but impersonation is hardly an issue in the UK, and our independent Electoral Commission says the same.

Jerome Mayhew: The hon. Member makes the point that if we put an administrative hurdle, by which he means photographic ID, in the way of the voters the turnout would go down, but that specifically is not the evidence we have seen from Northern Ireland, where

[Jerome Mayhew]

the Labour Government put in the requirement for photo ID, and it has been widely accepted and is a general part of voting there.

Nick Smith: I thank the hon. Member for intervening, but those were exceptional times, and I will answer his case in my speech.

Jim Shannon: On that point, the evidential base that the hon. Member for Broadland (Jerome Mayhew) referred to is very clear. There has been success in Northern Ireland and voting turnout has increased, but the statistics also show that 98% of voters already have sufficient ID in place for voting, and we are almost there. All we need is for the other 2% to be done, and Northern Ireland will achieve that goal of having everybody with an ID. If we can do it in Northern Ireland, honestly, we could do it here as well.

Nick Smith: I will answer those remarks in my contribution.

I sat on the Bill Committee, and I heard a High Court judge tell us that voter ID was not the solution. He said, and this is a judge who has done many electoral law cases, that asking for

“ID at polling stations, frankly, is neither here nor there.”—[*Official Report, Elections Public Bill Committee*, 15 September 2021; c. 15, Q13.]

The data shows that there were just three convictions for personations since 2016. The proposals really are a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

Chris Clarkson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Nick Smith: I am going to carry on.

We heard about terrible cases of fraud in Tower Hamlets, Peterborough and Birmingham, and of course they must be addressed. The key is for the Electoral Commission and the police to receive the resources needed to enforce our laws, because they do not have them at the moment. Again, the Government’s main witness felt there should be a hit squad at the Electoral Commission. That would make far better use of the millions that voter ID will cost.

We know that about 2 million people do not have the right ID, many of whom are from our most marginalised groups—older people, disabled people, minorities. The nub is that making it harder to gain their ballot paper means that fewer people vote. Reducing turnout undermines confidence in our elections and sows the seeds of doubt in our democracy. I am proud that British democracy was championed from Blaenau Gwent, but the Bill sets backwards the Chartist cause from nearly two centuries ago. I urge all Members who value our democracy to support amendment 1.

Mr Steve Baker: I am delighted to speak in this debate. The first thing I should say is in response to the Scottish National party Front Bencher, the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O’Hara): the betrayal would be not passing the Bill. I refer everyone who is concerned about it to my speech in the first Adjournment debate of this Parliament, where I set out in 15 minutes—I will not be able to shoehorn it into this speech—what

has been happening in Wycombe. The idea that personation is not a problem certainly does not accord with my experience in Wycombe. [*Interruption.*] I am grateful that I have been asked how many have been prosecuted, as that is precisely the problem: it is not being prosecuted.

In that speech, which I hope Members will read, I set out time and again the problems we face, with offences not being prosecuted, sometimes even when we present the evidence meticulously. I will not refer to a court case in detail, but I am pleased that a prosecution is in progress before the courts and I say only that I hope it reaches a speedy conclusion. Once it is concluded, I may have more to say about it—it relates to postal votes. Some Members are kidding themselves, and if their elections are in the kind of condition that they say they are, I very much wish that Wycombe reflected their experience. However, I have to say that elections in Wycombe in some quarters need cleaning up, so I welcome the Bill.

I particularly want to speak to new clauses 15 and 1, amendment 1 and new schedule 1. New clause 15 was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden), who is not in his place. I am grateful that it is a probing amendment, because it might be a problem if people could not register twice in two different council elections, but I am grateful he has put that point on the record, because there is more the Government could do on the integrity of the electoral roll. As I said in my Adjournment debate, at the last election I saw a WhatsApp message from someone I could name saying, “Right, I have voted in Birmingham. I am now coming to vote against Baker in Wycombe.” You could not make it up: an open admission of a fraud—[*Interruption.*] Indeed, we put these things forward.

I support the basis of new clause 15. In practice, the electoral roll does not always correctly list voters who are entitled to vote at a particular address, as the entry can often be out of date or we might find that an elector has registered fraudulently. If people are incorrectly listed on the register, that increases the potential for criminality, especially through absent voting. Not all EU nationals are correctly identified with a “G” marker, and we do know that foreign nationals sometimes vote in UK general elections, although they may not know that they are not entitled to do so.

On new clause 1 and 18-year-olds, I am clear that many of the 16 and 17-year-olds I meet in my constituency are thoroughly politically engaged and ready to vote, but we have to take a decision about when somebody is an adult. We heard some of the examples given in the debate. I would far rather we converged consistently on the age of 18, rather than talking about 16 and 17-year-olds.

I said in an intervention earlier, which the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) kindly acknowledged, that it is far more dangerous to vote Labour than to have a pint, and I would certainly stand by that, although I would be grateful for the opportunity to buy him a pint to discuss it. Amendment 1, from the Opposition Front Bench team, deals with removing the voter ID provisions, and I have touched on that already. We have already heard from Members that people will be able to get their ID, but some of the accounts of personation in Wycombe that I have heard are so egregious and yet somehow the officers on duty in polling stations have not felt able to report it and stop it. I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to do much more to

equip officers in polling stations to do their duty to uphold the law and make sure that personation is prosecuted. I would certainly be grateful if every instance of it was brought before the courts.

Finally, on new schedule 1, which is about making regulations on registration, absent voting and other matters, of course I support the Government, but I say as briefly as I can that they could have gone further. In the limited time available I simply say two things. The first is that voters need explicit information about their rights in election law, so that when they vote postally at home they know what constitutes an offence that infringes their rights. The other issue is that when a person wishes to challenge an entry on the electoral roll, although it is important that an accused person knows who is accusing them, let us make sure that that name emerges late in the process of a charge, so that we do not deter people from making inquiries.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker). My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) did a fabulous job of setting out our opposition to the Bill. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) for all her work and for her discussions on electoral reform—that is a private joke between us.

Election law is complex. That is why there is a big book on it called “Schofield’s Election Law”, as anyone who has worked in local government will know. The Bill adds to that complexity. The Electoral Reform Society said that it has been rushed through Parliament without any formal consultation or any pre-legislative scrutiny, and two Committees of the House have said that the Government have not provided enough evidence for the changes.

I will touch on three points, the first of which is voter ID. Since when in a democratic society do we need a certificate to say we are eligible to vote? Does the Minister in this Chamber, where women had to watch from behind a grille and then had to fight to get a vote, believe that we should return to something similar? That is happening despite the continuing hurt of the Windrush generation having to prove they live here after their parents contributed to this country. That is happening despite the evidence that during the Government’s trial people were turned away from voting in numbers larger than some hon. Members’ majorities.

The second point is interfering with the Electoral Commission, an independent body. The provisions of part 3 of the Bill are not consistent with the Electoral Commission operating as an independent regulator. Why should Ministers issue operational guidance over how the commission fulfils its functions? What is the mischief the Government are trying to stop? The Electoral Commission is responsible for and acts on everyone’s behalf, not just that of the main political parties. It is the guardian and custodian of free and fair elections. A report from the cross-party Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee made it clear that the Government did not provide evidence to justify why the measures that interfere with the Electorate Commission are necessary and proportionate. I hope that the Scottish Parliament and Senedd Cymru do not approve the strategy that this Government are trying to put through

without considering it carefully. Our fellow citizens must have confidence in the system. Why should an independent regulator need guidance on what it should have regard to when carrying out enforcement work?

The third issue is the regulation of expenditure. It is right that the electorate can see who is spending money, but the Bill does not allow transparency. It penalises smaller organisations for joint campaigning. It penalises the Labour party, Her Majesty’s official Opposition, for having affiliated organisations. Will the Minister confirm whether third parties such as Operation Black Vote, which is non-party political and just asks people to vote, will be caught up in the Bill? Easing the regulations for overseas voters, saying to them, “You can vote and you can donate,” while someone living here must have voter ID, is bizarre and illogical. Someone can bid at a fundraiser to win a tennis match with a Minister but not get caught by this legislation, and yet a joint campaign on people’s rights at work becomes illegal.

Finally, the Bill adds to the complexity rather than making things more transparent. There is no confidence in any legislation passed by this Government because they have lost the authority to tell us what to do when they do not do it themselves. If the Government care about the democratic process, the Bill should be paused. Anyone who cares about democracy should vote against it.

Dr Luke Evans: It is a pleasure to be called to speak and to inform the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) about my amendment; he will have been waiting with bated breath because he did not get to address it in his speech. My amendment about the publication of a candidate’s home address is short and sweet. Simply, after constituency, I suggest we insert “or town or village”.

When all of us stood as candidates, we faced the choice of what to put on the ballot paper. Do we simply put the constituency but then have the problem, if we live just outside it, of being perceived as residing in an area that we do not represent? Or do we disclose our full address on the ballot paper for all to see and to remain on some websites for evermore? We know that that puts off candidates. We know that it makes everyone think twice. Unfortunately, we have seen in recent times what this can do, with the sad and most harrowing death of one of our colleagues, Sir David Amess. Safety is really important, so I tabled the amendment with a simple idea. Rather than having someone’s full address or the constituency in which they live, there might be a halfway house that allows candidates to show that they have identity in the area while at the same time preserving their safety.

8.15 pm

I am hugely grateful for the cross-party support I have gained in the short period of time since I tabled the amendment. More than 40 signatories, many of whom are in this Chamber, have agreed to support it. Many have already spoken to say that they feel it is the right thing to do. It is a probing amendment, because I concede that there could be some legal wrangling about the definition of a village or a town, but fundamentally it seems that in no other job would someone put their address out there for all to see, especially with the high level of tension we see in our politics and our society

these days. Why should it be incumbent on candidates to do so, especially if it disenfranchises people wanting to take the opportunity to stand for their community?

A boundary review is coming. Let's face it: the public do not know very well what a constituency boundary means. I can demonstrate that perfectly in my constituency. Just on the bottom corner is Atherstone. While not in my constituency, everyone locally knows exactly where it is. Although it is thought of as part of where I represent in Bosworth, Leicestershire, were I to live there, my address would come up as North Warwickshire. That creates confusion when it comes to the people we are trying to represent. I simply urge the Government to consider the amendment, to bring something forward and to find a set of words that could easily allow us all to have that choice of representing in safety.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I rise to speak to new clause 16, in my name and that of Members from four of the parties represented here in Westminster. We tabled the new clause because the Bill has many flaws, but among the worst is the lack of any attempt to clean up the laundromat of British politics, which is now awash with dark money from dubious sources. We cannot in good conscience now pretend we are unaware. The Government can no longer plead ignorance or innocence: they are either careless or culpable and we in this House cannot tolerate the situation for a moment longer. That is why the amendments we are moving are so important.

Our Pandora amendments are simple. They would insist that party donations must come from profits made here in the UK, and they would establish a new regime that would allow the Electoral Commission to call in donations for an assessment on national security grounds. As it happens, the Government have just introduced precisely that regime for investments in critical national infrastructure. What infrastructure in this country could be more important than the essence of our democracy itself? We have heard warnings from Chatham House, the Intelligence and Security Committee and from Lord Evans this weekend that our system of party funding is now wide open.

We have heard and debated in this House the example of Mr Banks, Leave.EU and the mysterious source of his gigantic loans from Rock Services—or was it Rock Holdings? Thanks to evidence given to Carole Cadwalladr and the heroic reporting of *The Guardian*, we know that there are all kinds of interesting and no doubt innocent connections, such as the fact that Mr Banks's wife, Katya Banks, was given entry into the country on a passport serially numbered to a passport given to someone who MI5 reported as a Russian spy. That is no doubt completely innocent, but the fact is that, when the National Crime Agency dropped its investigation into the source of the money, it left the source of the money shrouded in mystery. The Electoral Commission was so alarmed that it issued a warning that it could open the floodgates to donations from offshore.

Let me underline why the national security assessment is important to those on the Opposition Benches, but should be of importance to the Conservative party, too. Let us take another honourable donor, Mr Mohamed Amersi, a man who together with his partner has given

nearly £800,000 to good causes and who, it would seem, might qualify for a walk-on part in John le Carré's "The Night Manager", but not as Jonathan Pine.

Information I have seen from well-placed sources in the Kremlin shows that Mr Amersi is an associate and business partner of people with all sorts of friends, including some with close connections to the SVR and FSB. They include Yuri Lopatinsky, Ernst Stauffer, and Aleksandr Barunin, with whom Mr Amersi worked on several telecom deals, including the takeover of Megafon, the firm later accused by the Georgians of

"illegal business operations and participation in the military and economic annexation of Georgia".

Mr Amersi made a fortune helping to sell PeterStar to a Luxembourg-based company, which—surprise, surprise—turned out to be controlled by Leonid Rieman, who was none other than President Putin's former telecoms Minister. Coincidence? You be the judge, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): My right hon. Friend has made some excellent points. The chair of the Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation, Mick Whelan, has said that trade union money is the cleanest money in British politics, and, listening to my right hon. Friend's speech, I think I can agree with him. Given that the Bill will make that more difficult, do we not begin to see a pattern forming?

Liam Byrne: My hon. Friend is right and he will be horrified to hear that there is more.

Perhaps the most concerning of Mr Amersi's connections is Leonard Bogdan, a man with very interesting friends in the FSB and the SVR. Mr Bogdan was a minor partner in Tempbank, which held Soviet Union Communist party assets and then specialised in covert foreign transfers. The bank was associated with several Syrian citizens supplying arms to Syria and Iran and was sanctioned by the US Treasury in 2014. But Tempbank also helped to facilitate another sanctioned firm, Hudsotrade, which dealt with Russian arms and ammunition suppliers. Sources inside the Russian Government say that Mr Amersi was involved in these deals, providing finance from Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, along with private clients from Syria and Iran, to help exports into the middle east. Mr Amersi, it is said, dealt directly with Hudsotrade and two of the shareholders, who were later sanctioned.

Despite those connections, however, correspondence that I have seen shows that Mr Amersi was asked to chair COMENA—Conservative Friends of Middle East and North Africa—a new political interface between the Conservative party and the middle east established "on the authorisation of CCHQ".

Mr Amersi says that he had a half-hour chat with officials from the Conservative party before writing his cheques, but on the basis of the evidence to which I have drawn attention today, I think we would all benefit from the Electoral Commission's being empowered to call in donations for a national security audit. We have allowed this regime for donations and investments in critical national infrastructure; we now need to bring in that regime to clean up the laundromat of British political funding.

Time does not allow me to highlight further coincidences—

Cat Smith: Has my right hon. Friend read the transcript of our Committee hearings? I hope that the Minister has had a chance to read the Russia report, because it is imperative for all of us to be well aware of the security threats that face our democracy.

Liam Byrne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The point is that I can raise questions here that warrant further investigation—questions about, for example, Lubov Chernukhin, the model of generosity who has given the Conservatives £2.1 million, £1.9 million of it after her husband Vladimir—the same Vladimir who was appointed by Mr Putin’s deputy chairman of Vnesheconombank—received money from Suleiman Kerimov. This was a man who was later sanctioned by the United States Treasury, and not only for being a Russian Government official: he was arrested in France for smuggling in hundreds of millions of euros in suitcases.

Then there is Mr Temerko, another honourable man, who has donated £1.2 million to the Conservative party. I am told that the Prime Minister’s whiff-whaff bats are on the wall of his reception room. The only slight issue is that Mr Temerko is the man who used to operate at the very top of the Russian arms industry, with connections high up in the Kremlin—but, of course, Mr Temerko is an honourable man. He works with another honourable man, Mr Fedotov, who is a key shareholder in Aquind Ltd, which, *The Guardian* reports, has donated £700,000 to the Conservative party, along with another firm. This is, unfortunately, the same Mr Fedotov who, according to the Pandora papers, has revealed that his fortune was made through an offshore financial structure in the mid-2000s, at about the time when it was alleged to have been siphoning funds from the Russian state pipeline company Transneft. But, of course, Mr Fedotov is an honourable man.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I am sorry, but the right hon. Gentleman has taken his two interventions, and his time is now up.

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson), I served on the Bill Committee. It was my first time on a Bill Committee on a major piece of legislation. I do not know how often there is a change in Minister, PPS and Whip during a Bill Committee, but I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister, and my hon. Friends the Members for Devizes (Danny Kruger) and for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), on getting up to speed on the Bill so quickly and taking us through the Committee.

Bill Committees can sometimes be sleepy affairs, but that one, like this debate, certainly was not. We had vigorous debates on various parts of the Bill, including the measure on voter ID, which I fully support, as it closes a vulnerability in our electoral system. We discussed a number of points surrounding voter ID, including many examples from abroad—countries such as Ireland and the Netherlands. We are now, through this Bill, introducing a form of legislation that will make us more European, in many ways, than we were. It is interesting that the Opposition parties that would have had us remain members of the European Union are so resistant

to a system that is more in line with our continental friends than what we have at the moment. It will be a more secure system. I accept that there is a lot of work for Government to do in order to popularise and inform voters of these measures, and also to roll out the electoral ID card that will be introduced, but if the measures are introduced properly, there is no reason why anybody should be left out.

It is said that these are solutions in search of problems, but problems have been identified in places such as Tower Hamlets, Slough, Wycombe and Birmingham, among others, and this Bill will finally address them.

Jerome Mayhew: In an earlier speech, reference was made to an electoral judge suggesting that personation was neither here nor there, but does my hon. Friend recall the evidence to the Bill Committee where that electoral judge, in a judgment during the Labour Administration of 2005, said, “If you don’t look for fraud you won’t find it”, and described the Government as “having its head in the sand” on this issue?

Tom Randall: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the key problems is not only not looking for it—it is a matter of training. There is a big problem that needs to be addressed in terms of making sure that the police are aware of electoral law issues and getting them out there to go and investigate. He is completely right that a lot of this goes undetected.

I am pleased to see that the clauses on undue influence remain. I spoke on Second Reading about having to run the gauntlet of people trying to use intimidating behaviour on election day by thrusting leaflets into people’s faces. The central thrust of many of these measures is to protect the security of the ballot. I appreciate that I may be slightly testing the limits of what I am allowed to say on Report, but I have seen today an email from Scotland Yard to somebody I know who has reported an alleged breach of the secret ballot, but advice from the Electoral Commission and the local authority concerned is that the onus is on the individual who cast their vote to claim that secrecy has been breached. I would suggest that that is contrary to section 66 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, which says that every returning officer, presiding officer, clerk, candidate, election agent and polling agent

“shall maintain and aid in maintaining the secrecy of”

the vote. So if this legislation is to be reformed further in the other place, it should not be by removing the parts that we have introduced, but by giving some consideration as to whether the need to maintain a secret ballot is restated in primary legislation.

We have heard the argument for votes at 16, which I will not support. We have raised the age of marriage to 18, we have raised the age at which people have to be in education or training from 16 to 18, and the age at which you can smoke was raised by the Labour Government to 18. We have raised the age at which people can buy a lottery ticket from 16 to 18, I am sure with the Opposition’s support, as well as the age at which people can buy alcohol. Voting is an adult activity; it is something that adults do—if we want to encourage younger people to vote, I see no reason why we cannot introduce votes at 12. I think all the arguments advanced by Opposition Front Benchers could also apply to 12-year-olds.

[Tom Randall]

I support the measures in this Bill. I look forward to its going on to Third Reading and the other place, and to seeing those measures come on to the statute book as soon as possible.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. We will now go to four minutes.

8.30 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I rise to speak to my new clause 18, and I declare an interest as a member of the all-party parliamentary group on electoral campaigning transparency.

The Bill has almost nothing to say about the acute issue of secretive campaign finance filtering into British politics. The use of unincorporated associations reveals loopholes that are being used to funnel dirty and dark money into the UK electoral system. As the Committee on Standards in Public Life has warned, these groups can offer a route for foreign money to influence UK elections.

The purpose of the new clause is explicit in not placing an extra burden on the many thousands of small UAs such as sports clubs, which for various reasons want to maintain structures that have no legal existence separate from their members. Equally, I am not arguing that UAs should be banned altogether from donating to political parties; rather, the issue is about addressing the loophole that allows UAs registered with the Electoral Commission to make political donations without conducting adequate permissibility checks on their original donors.

Unincorporated associations are associations of two or more people that do not fall into any of the other categories for permissible donors; the two or more people do not necessarily need to be resident in the UK, only on the electoral roll. The Electoral Commission identified two key vulnerabilities in its submission to the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The first was that although UAs are included in the list of permissible donors, as long as they are UK-based and carry on business or other activities in the UK, those who give money to them are not required to be permissible donors. A UA could, in fact, legitimately receive money from overseas sources and donate it to political parties. If a donation is over the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 threshold of £25,000 in a calendar year, the UA will have to disclose whatever details it knows of the name and address of the person who made the gift, but it would not be prevented from receiving and then donating that gift. Secondly, no transparency is required from UAs when they provide donations to candidates rather than to parties.

The UK Government insist that the current checks are comprehensive and offer sufficient transparency, but the entire public register of donations to UAs amounts to just half a dozen gifts. All were made to the same Conservative association, the Trevelyan Campaign Fund, with the most recent gift recorded in November 2014. That means that it is more than seven years since a donation to an unincorporated association was registered.

To provide greater confidence in the original sources of donations, the permissibility requirements for UAs need to be strengthened. As investigative journalists such as Peter Geoghegan have helped uncover, UAs can be set up with the sole purpose of siphoning money to political campaigns. Perhaps the most infamous example is the Democratic Unionist party's £435,000 donation to Vote Leave, which was channelled via a UA, the Constitutional Research Council. It was consequently fined just £6,000—a penalty totalling little more than 1% of its donations, which could well simply be seen as the cost of doing business. We still do not know who provided that money originally.

It is clear that such punishment offers little deterrent. The Association of Conservative Clubs, which connects affiliated private clubs around the country, explicitly advises members to set up as UAs rather than limited companies. Those clubs have given well over £1 million to the Conservatives. New clause 18 would quite simply require unincorporated associations that meet the threshold for registration with the Electoral Commission to conduct checks to establish whether a person donating for political purposes is a permissible donor and, if not, to reject that donation as the Committee on Standards in Public Life has recommended. I will have to leave it there.

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak on this Bill as it continues to progress through this place. I welcome the actions that the Government are taking to make our elections fairer. Changes to the electoral process have been due for some time, and I was proud to stand on a manifesto in 2019 that promised finally to do something about the situation.

The issue of postal vote misuse is particularly important for my constituents when it comes to elections. With that in mind, I put particular focus on new clause 11 and new schedule 1, which have been put forward by the Government. The new clause gives attention to postal votes regarding how applications are made and the verifications needed to make them. As I have previously said in this place, postal voting is an undeniable problem in Keighley and Ilkley. My constituents have expressed their anger and confusion at how it is so easy for people to get away with distorting our electoral process. In fact, my constituency is deemed to be at high risk of such fraud, with one in five reports of electoral fraud coming from the West Yorkshire area. This includes cases of bribery, false statements and exerting undue influence on voters. In Keighley it is well known that postal votes are manipulated during general and local elections and other votes.

Mr Holden: Does my hon. Friend agree that, across the country, people are concerned about postal voting? I am sure hon. Members have heard this whenever they campaign in elections. I stood in council elections in Tower Hamlets back in the mid-2000s, I stood in Preston in 2015 and I have stood in North West Durham. Wherever I have gone, I have seen concern about postal voting. I was delighted to take my constituency from a Labour Front Bench who stood at the last election, but there is widespread concern, so these amendments are incredibly important.

Robbie Moore: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and I am delighted he is here, having taken the constituency from a former shadow Minister.

The manipulation of postal votes during elections comes in several forms. The head of a household might guarantee multiple postal votes for a candidate, with other family members not even having a say in using their basic right to vote. There is also false registration, individuals being put under undue pressure to give away their postal vote and individuals being registered to vote in multiple households where it is clear they do not reside.

New clause 11 will help, but I would be grateful for further assurances from the Government that it will help to address all these problems. I feel the Government could go further by shortening the amount of time someone can vote by post before having to renew their registration and prove their identity, perhaps to one electoral cycle. New clause 11 contains flexibility, and I therefore urge the Government to explore this issue further. Likewise, further information is needed on how plans to stop political campaigners handling postal votes in public will prevent mishandling from happening behind closed doors.

New clause 15, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden), is a probing amendment that I wholeheartedly support. A person should be entitled to register at only one address in the United Kingdom at any one time. I also welcome new clause 17, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans). Although I appreciate it is also a probing amendment, candidates should be able to ensure their security while comforting the electorate by identifying where they reside, which is vital.

I welcome this Bill, which is definitely a step in the right direction, but I ask my hon. Friend the Minister for further assurance that it will be robust enough to tackle postal vote fraud and the other issues I have outlined.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Although I do not wish to repeat in detail the excellent points made by so many colleagues, I want to put on record my unequivocal opposition to the Bill in its current form.

On the issues that this Bill does not cover, last week I tabled new clause 10 that would amend the Representation of the People Act 1983 by removing the current requirement for public notice of the address of election agents, including where candidates are acting as their own election agent. Instead, it would allow for the general area in which the address is situated to be published, and would apply to parliamentary and local elections across the UK. Why is that important? Where a candidate is a lone election agent, the law could very well lead to their home address entering the public sphere.

Politics, by its very nature, can be divisive—look at the anger that this Bill alone has triggered. When we stand for election, we know that that comes with associated risks. Sadly, it becomes essential for us to be hyper-vigilant about our personal safety. Those who are privileged enough to win a seat are afforded some support in that respect, but those who do not win do not get the same support, despite the increased profile that even standing for elections will bring in the local community in many cases.

For me, there is an even more vital consideration. Many of us do not live alone, so we are not taking a solely personal risk. If a successful candidate acted as a

lone election agent and were suddenly thrust into a very bright national spotlight, their home address would be out there for anyone to find. Our families do not sign up for the personal safety risk that our jobs bring them—we do. Our husbands and wives, children and, in some cases, parents and siblings, could be at risk, too. That is not acceptable.

I hope that the Minister and the Government see the value in new clause 10 and will consider including it in the Bill. I thank the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) for tabling amendment 2 to strengthen the accessibility requirements for blind and partially sighted voters.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the Ballot Act 1872, which gave citizens the right to vote independently and in secret. It is absolutely essential that any new legislation does not limit that right, even unintentionally.

Jerome Mayhew: The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) said that there was too little time for this debate, but those of us who sat on the Bill Committee will not recognise that feeling, because we had days of seemingly interminable debate, much of which has been repeated this evening.

Patrick Grady: I am afraid that I completely disagree. I sat on the Bill Committee, which the Government rushed through with two days left. As none of the Back Benchers participated, the entire Committee collapsed. I entirely agree with the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael): the way the Bill has been rammed through this House is a complete and utter disgrace.

Jerome Mayhew: We will have to agree to disagree on that because there was very lively debate in Committee.

I have made a number of interventions, so I will keep my comments short and on only two points. First, on new clause 1 and voter ID, others have spoken movingly—both in evidence to the Bill Committee and this evening—about the impact of voter fraud and the need to take reasonable steps to minimise it. The first step is voter ID, and I fully support what the Government suggest on photographic ID, but for that to be effective, the second step is to have prosecution where evidence is established that a crime has been committed. Much of the evidence that the Committee heard was frustration that the police or the Electoral Commission did not take allegations of fraud sufficiently seriously and bring them before a tribunal.

That brings me to clause 13, which deals with the Electoral Commission's assumed power to become a prosecution body in its own right. I am very glad that the Government have taken this opportunity to re-establish the status quo, which should be that the police and the CPS are the relevant prosecuting authorities, in part because of the obvious conflict of interest. The Electoral Commission is the body that provides advice and guidance on electoral law. If it then takes off its regulatory hat and puts on its prosecuting hat, it is marking its own homework, which is a clear conflict of interest.

A wider point about the prosecution of crimes in this country, and one that was picked up by the Law Commission recently, is about a move away from what are described as “private prosecutions”, including by the Post Office—we need only mention the Horizon scandal to see why it is clearly wrong for the Post Office

[Jerome Mayhew]

to be its own prosecuting authority—and, in my submission, the Care Quality Commission, which I know the Law Commission is looking at. We should move the power of prosecution and responsibility of prosecution away from those private prosecuting bodies and to the CPS and the police.

There is one message that I would like the Minister to take away and think seriously about. It is all fine and well for us to make the laws in this place, but if they are not taken seriously and investigated seriously by the police, leading to prosecutions where the evidence passes the evidential test, we are on a hiding to nothing.

In much of the evidence that came out in the evidence sessions in Committee, and in the experiences of hon. Members on both sides of the House, there was a huge degree of frustration that allegations of electoral fraud were not taken seriously by the police, who seemed embarrassed and unwilling to get into what was seemingly a political area. Instead, the police should realise that the full implementation of our electoral rules is incredibly important and that the defence of our democracy requires them to take those rules seriously.

8.45 pm

The only other point that I have time to mention relates to new clause 17, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans), and to which I was proud to put my name. It is only a probing amendment, but it is very sensible and I support the intention behind it. The personal security of electoral candidates, no matter their political colour, is all too relevant in the modern era.

We always talk about electoral participation, but we also want to encourage participation among candidates. We should take steps to remove any barrier to people saying, “Yeah, I’m going to get involved. I’m going to be a candidate.” The proposal would still demonstrate locality but would protect candidates from the Hobson’s choice of being outside the constituency, albeit by 100 yards, or having to display their full postal address. I would be grateful if the Government took away that point and thought about it. This is a strong Bill that deals with thorny and important issues head-on and I fully support it.

Cat Smith: I begin by disagreeing with the hon. Member for Broadland (Jerome Mayhew). I do not feel that the Bill has had sufficient time to be properly scrutinised by the House. This is the first time that we have had the opportunity to discuss the legislation since the publication of the PACAC report. There are members of that Committee who have yet to speak and the time is now 8.45 pm. I flag to the Minister that if that is her approach to constitutional Bills, she will not bring the whole House with her, which is a dangerous precedent to set.

On amendment 1, which would remove the voter ID clause in the Bill, many Opposition Members have clearly set out the case. Ultimately, it comes down to what is proportionate. Obviously, cases of voter fraud should be pursued by the police and the Electoral Commission, and our police forces should have the resources to be able to pursue those people to get justice, but is the requirement to show photo ID proportionate to the scale of the crimes that are happening?

In 2019 there were only 34 allegations of impersonation, which is probably the widest way that we can look at it, which works out as 0.000058% of all the votes cast. As was pointed out by the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris), who made such a good first appearance at the Dispatch Box on this topic, someone is more likely to be struck by lightning three times.

I flag that while Neil Coughlan is waiting to have his case heard by the Supreme Court, there is a question mark over the way in which the pilot trials were conducted. I urge the Minister to take a closer look at that case and assess whether this is the right time. The PACAC report was clear that the measures are being rushed through and that, with cases still before the courts, it is not a sound way to legislate.

If the Government want to fulfil their manifesto commitment to ensure votes for overseas electors, they can do so by decoupling the permission to donate, because that seems to be where the tension is in the House. If the Minister is seeking to bring about compromise on this important Bill, she could do that by accepting new clause 2.

On the Electoral Commission, it is right that it is accountable to us in this House. Throughout the proceedings on the Bill, Ministers have stood up and said that Ministers can make strategic statements for other bodies, but this is a body that regulates political parties, and the party of Government gets to decide the strategic direction for the Electoral Commission, which would then be challengeable in the courts.

There is nowhere else globally—I have tried to find an example—where that happens. Our democracy most closely mirrors New Zealand, Australia and Canada, whose electoral commissions are independent. It is important that the voters have confidence in an independent Electoral Commission. This Bill will throw that into doubt, and by throwing that into doubt we are throwing the confidence in our democracy into doubt.

I wish that I had longer to speak, because there is an awful lot that I would like to say about a pattern of behaviour that has been emerging over the last decade from this Conservative Government, including the introduction of individual electoral registration. We lose 2 million voters and that is the snapshot they use to propose a boundary change to reduce the number of MPs to 600. Then a general election throws up some different results and suddenly we are back up to 650 MPs. We look at the Owen Paterson affair, which involved changing the rules to protect their mates. Democracy in this country is a precious thing. It is under threat globally.

Ian Lavery: Does my hon. Friend agree that this Bill is not really about updating electoral law? It is about driving a bulldozer through the electoral processes of this country, demolishing our democracy, disenfranchising 6 million trade unionists, disenfranchising charities and vulnerable people, and moving them away from voting in this country, rather than towards democratic process.

Cat Smith: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. This should have been a Bill to solidify and make our electoral laws more simple and straightforward, but it actually adds an extra layer of complexity.

Criminalising political protest through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, removing the 15-year rule, which opens our democracy to foreign money, and gagging unions and charities from campaigning in elections while making it easier for foreign money to flood our political systems demonstrate a pattern of behaviour from this Government that is undermining democracy in this country.

I believe that the Minister is a good person, and that the previous Minister is a good person. When the previous Minister gave evidence to PACAC, she made it clear that she would not give political direction to the Electoral Commission, but she was not the Minister forever, and the Minister who sits here today will not be the Minister forever. The Conservatives will not be in government forever. We need to ensure that when we in this House legislate, we prepare for the worst-case scenario. If a fascist or far-right party got control, and we had set up structures that allowed it to ride roughshod over our democracy, could we honestly say that we had done a good job? I do not think so.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call John McDonnell. There will be no time limit, but he must resume his seat no later than 8.55.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) on the work she has done, and also my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Alex Norris) on his eloquent presentation. I serve on the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, and we have urged the House to pause the Bill and not go forward. I too am offended by the limited amount of time that we have been given this evening. The reason we said that is that with constitutional changes such as these, we need to build confidence. The way to do that in the parliamentary process is to have a draft Bill, a Joint Committee and adequate debate before bringing the legislation back here. We took evidence from a whole range of people, and we found no one who supported the Bill being developed at this pace. Helen Mountfield QC said that we risked the allegation that this was being done for political advantage. I regret that.

I want to deal briefly with the voter ID issue. Personation was the issue that was presented to us, but we found limited evidence of that. Also, the pilots were limited. We had one big pilot, though, and it was in Northern Ireland, where 2.3% of the electorate dropped out. If we extrapolate that to our electorate here, that would mean over 1 million people dropping out. Who would that be, most of all? It would be elderly and disabled people, those in residential homes, and members of the BAME and LGBTQ communities.

The reality is that this Bill is being pushed through. Unfortunately, I believe that it is part of a process of voter suppression and that the Conservatives are learning lessons from America. What I fear most of all is the interference in the Electoral Commission, because that presages the Government coming back with more that will undermine our democracy. I believe that would be a stain on this House.

Kemi Badenoch: With the leave of the House, I would like to address some of the points that were raised during the debate. I am afraid that I will not be able to

speak to all the amendments. I have to say that I am disappointed, but not surprised, that the Opposition remain unable to see the necessity of this simple and proportionate protection for the integrity of our ballot. The fact is that voter ID is supported by the Electoral Commission. It is backed by international election observers who have repeatedly called for the introduction, saying that its absence is a security risk. It is long-established in liberal democracies across the world and is already in place in Northern Ireland.

The Opposition have suggested that specific groups, such as young people or ethnic minorities, would automatically be unwilling or unable to access the freely available voter card. These suggestions are based solely on assumptions about implementation—assumptions that are incorrect and harmful. I will be unambiguous in setting this out. Anyone who is eligible to vote will continue to have the opportunity to do so. The voter identification policy proposals have been informed by a significant amount of research. I reject the points made by the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). That is not the research that has been carried out by the Cabinet Office, which is quite robust. A significant amount of work has been done with civil society organisations and other key stakeholders.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for her point about the length of election campaigns. She will know that I have looked into this issue, but I am afraid that I have not been able to find the perfect solution for her within the Bill. I acknowledge many of the points that she has made about lengthy campaigns, but I draw her attention to the argument made by the Association of Electoral Administrators in its written evidence to the Joint Committee about the risk of disenfranchising potential electors were the period to be shortened.

I shall also respond to some of the questions from the right hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) on joint campaigning. The measures are simply intended to strengthen the principle of spending limits already in law. They protect the level playing field by ensuring that groups cannot unfairly expand their spending limits when they are conducting a joint campaign. It is logical to extend this principle to political parties and third-party campaigners who work together. All registered political parties and third-party campaigners will be able to continue to campaign as they do now, but they will have to account for any spending that is part of a joint campaign in which they are involved. She also asked specifically about groups such as Operation Black Vote, which is simply campaigning to encourage people to vote. It will not be caught by those new rules as it would not qualify as regulated election campaign expenditure.

There were several issues raised by hon. Members on candidates' home addresses. I have noted the concerns that my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) raised about the current provisions. However, any further amendments in this space, although they may seem straightforward at first sight, would entail challenges for consistency in the rules that need to apply equally across differing areas of the country and that require careful and comprehensive consideration. The drafting of the proposed amendment, if accepted, would work well for candidates in rural areas, but it may lead to a less consistent approach for those in cities or remote locations. However, I am grateful that he says this is a

[Kemi Badenoch]

probing amendment. I will ask my officials to explore these important issues and remain open to further conversations about how we can improve the current system.

I turn now to new clause 15, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden), which deals with dual registration. I thank him very much for the points that he raised. He is right that voting twice in an election to the same body is a violation of the principle of one person, one vote. It is an offence that already carries a considerable penalty. I share the desire to take action to reduce the risk of this happening, but I do not think that the new clause would achieve that aim. It would be costly and impractical to implement at this time. I am sympathetic to the broad intention of the new clause, which is in line with the Government's commitment to strengthening security and reducing the opportunity for fraud. This is also similar to new clause 10, tabled by the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier). I understand the points that she raised. We do not think that the amendment is appropriate, for similar reasons, but I am open to further conversations.

I recognise many good points raised by my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker), saying that we could have gone further. I am sure that this is not the end of looking at electoral integrity. We will continue to see how the franchise can be strengthened. I urge Members not to support the Opposition amendments. I hope the Government amendments will be supported.

Question put and agreed to.

New clause 11 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 12

PURPOSES REFERRED TO IN SECTION 39

“(1) This section sets out the purposes referred to in section 39.

(2) The first purpose is influencing the public, or any section of the public, to give support to or withhold support from—

- (a) a registered party,
- (b) registered parties who advocate (or do not advocate) particular policies or who otherwise fall within a particular category of such parties, or
- (c) candidates or future candidates who hold (or do not hold) particular opinions or who advocate (or do not advocate) particular policies or who otherwise fall within a particular category of candidates or future candidates.

(3) For the purposes of determining whether electronic material can reasonably be regarded as intended to achieve the purpose mentioned in subsection (2), it is immaterial that it does not expressly mention the name of any party, candidate or future candidate.

(4) The second purpose is influencing the public, or any section of the public, to give support to or withhold support from a particular candidate or particular future candidate.

(5) For the purposes of determining whether electronic material can reasonably be regarded as intended to achieve the purpose mentioned in subsection (4), it is immaterial that it does not expressly mention the name of any candidate or future candidate.

(6) The third purpose is influencing the public, or any section of the public, to give support to or withhold support from an elected office-holder.

(7) The fourth purpose is influencing the public, or any section of the public, to give support to or withhold support from elected office-holders who hold (or do not hold) particular opinions or who advocate (or do not advocate) particular policies or who otherwise fall within a particular category of elected office-holders.

(8) For the purposes of determining whether electronic material can reasonably be regarded as intended to achieve the purpose mentioned in subsection (6) or (7), it is immaterial that it does not expressly mention the name of any elected office-holder.

(9) The fifth purpose is influencing the public, or any section of the public, to give support to or withhold support from—

- (a) the holding of a referendum in the United Kingdom or any area in the United Kingdom, or
- (b) a particular outcome of such a referendum.

(10) For the purposes of determining whether electronic material can reasonably be regarded as intended to achieve the purpose mentioned in subsection (9)(b), it is immaterial that it does not expressly mention a particular outcome of a referendum.

(11) In this section “referendum” does not include a poll held under section 64 of the Government of Wales Act 2006.”—
(Kemi Badenoch.)

This new clause and Amendments 22 and 23 replace the purposes set out in clause 39(3) as the purposes intended to be achieved by paid-for electronic material in order for Part 6 to apply to the material. In particular the New Clause makes it clear that this covers material in support of categories of parties, candidates and elected office-holders and applies whether or not the material expressly names the party etc.

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

9 pm

Proceedings interrupted (Programme Order, 7 September 2021).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

New Clause 1

VOTING FROM AGE 16 IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

“In section 1(1)(d) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (definition of voting age for parliamentary elections), for “18” substitute “16”.—(Alex Norris.)

This new clause would lower the voting age to 16 in UK parliamentary elections.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 236, Noes 327.

Division No. 160]

[9.1 pm

AYES

Ali, Tahir	Barker, Paula
Amesbury, Mike	Beckett, rh Margaret
Anderson, Fleur	Begum, Apsana
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Benn, rh Hilary
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Betts, Mr Clive
Bardell, Hannah	Black, Mhairi

Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote cast by Owen Thompson*)
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 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
 Debonnaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 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
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 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 (*Proxy vote cast by Pat McFadden*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne

McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 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
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 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
 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
 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
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Navendu Mishra and
Mary Glindon

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 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
 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
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun

Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 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, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 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
 Foster, Kevin
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 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 Sir Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 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
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil (*Proxy
 vote cast by Stuart Andrew*)
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Largan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon

Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Mercer, Johnny
 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, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Morrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Purslove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas

Rowley, Lee
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 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 (*Proxy
 vote cast by Greg Smith*)
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Scott Mann and
Gareth Johnson

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 2

PERMISSIBLE DONORS

(1) Section 54 (permissible donors) of PPERA is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2)(a), after “register” insert

“at the time at which the donation is made, but not an individual so registered as an overseas elector;”—(*Alex Norris.*)
This new clause would prevent overseas electors donating to political parties in the UK.

Brought up.

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.

The House divided: Ayes 237, Noes 322.

Division No. 161]

[9.14 pm

AYES

Ali, Tahir
 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
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 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, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote cast by Owen Thompson*)
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 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
 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
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma

Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 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 (*Proxy vote cast by Pat McFadden*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 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
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughtier, 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
 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
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Mary Glindon and
 Navendu Mishra

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 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
 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
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir 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
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 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
 Dineneage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 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
 Foster, Kevin
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 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 Sir Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca

Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 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
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil (*Proxy vote cast by Stuart Andrew*)
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 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
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cheryl
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 Mercer, Johnny
 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, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 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
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 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 (*Proxy vote cast by Greg Smith*)
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel

Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie

Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Noes:
Gareth Johnson and
Scott Mann

Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 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 (*Proxy vote cast by Pat McFadden*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Maskell, Rachael

Mc Nally, John
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 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
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 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

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 1

VOTER IDENTIFICATION

Amendment proposed: 1, page 1, line 4, leave out clause 1.—(*Alex Norris.*)

This amendment would remove the Voter ID provisions.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 234, Noes 327.

Division No. 162]

[9.26 pm

AYES

Ali, Tahir
 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
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna

Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote cast by Owen Thompson*)
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive

Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 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
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Wragg, Mr William
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mary Glindon and
Navendu Mishra

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 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
 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
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam

Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 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
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 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
 Foster, Kevin
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 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
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil (*Proxy
 vote cast by Stuart Andrew*)
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 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
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Mercer, Johnny
 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, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 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
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John

Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Shannon, Jim
 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 (*Proxy
 vote cast by Greg Smith*)
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian

Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Scott Mann and
Gareth Johnson

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 15

MEMBERSHIP OF THE SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE

Amendments made: 13, page 26, line 29, leave out “Minister for the Cabinet Office” and insert “Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities”.

This amendment takes account of a change to the membership of the Speaker's Committee made by the Transfer of Functions (Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) Order 2021.

Amendment 14, page 26, line 32, leave out “with responsibilities in relation to the constitution”.

This amendment gives greater flexibility regarding which Minister of the Crown may be appointed to exercise, concurrently with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, that Secretary of State's functions as a member of the Speaker's Committee.

Amendment 15, page 26, line 36, leave out “Minister for the Cabinet Office” and insert “Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 13.

Amendment 16, page 27, line 4, leave out “Minister for the Cabinet Office” and insert “Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 13.

Amendment 17, page 27, line 6, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

“(3) The following are revoked—

- (a) the Transfer of Functions (Speaker's Committee) Order 2021 (S.I. 2021/310);
- (b) in article 7(1) of the Transfer of Functions (Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) Order 2021 (S.I. 2021/1265), sub-paragraphs (b) and (c).”—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

This amendment provides for the revocation of provisions of the Transfer of Functions (Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) Order 2021 that are superseded by clause 15 (as amended by Amendments 13 to 16).

Clause 26

JOINT CAMPAIGNING BY REGISTERED PARTIES AND THIRD PARTIES

Amendment proposed: 3, page 37, line 5, leave out Clause 26.—(*Alex Norris.*)

This amendment would remove the provisions relating to joint campaigning by registered parties and third parties.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 234, Noes 328.

Division No. 163]

[9.40 pm

AYES

Ali, Tahir
 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
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote
 cast by Owen Thompson*)
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote
 cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Cruddas, Jon

Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 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
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 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 (*Proxy vote cast
 by Pat McFadden*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame

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
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 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
 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
 Winter, Beth

Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Navendu Mishra and
 Mary Glindon

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 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
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 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
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 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, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 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
 Foster, Kevin
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 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 Sir Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris

Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 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
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil (*Proxy*
vote cast by Stuart Andrew)
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 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
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cheryl
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan

Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Mercer, Johnny
 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, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 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
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Shannon, Jim
 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 (*Proxy*
vote cast by Greg Smith)
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura

Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:

**Scott Mann and
 Gareth Johnson**

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 33

POWER TO AMEND SCHEDULE 8

Amendment made: 18, page 45, line 29, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

Since the Bill was introduced, responsibility for elections has moved from the Minister for the Cabinet Office to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This amendment brings Ministerial functions under the Bill into line with the current allocation of Ministerial responsibilities.

Clause 36

DEFINITIONS RELATING TO ELECTRONIC MATERIAL AND PUBLICATION

Amendment made: 19, page 47, line 6, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Clause 37

DEFINITIONS RELATING TO PARTIES ETC

Amendment made: 20, page 47, line 27, at end insert—

“(10) Part 5 has effect for the purposes of subsections (4) to (6) as if the definition of “relevant elective office” in section 34(1) included an office to which a person may be elected by a municipal election in the City, as defined by section 191(1) of RPA 1983 (municipal elections in the City of London).”—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

This amendment has the effect that references in Part 6 to a candidate, future candidate or elected office-holder apply to a candidate or future candidate at, or a person elected at, a municipal election in the City of London.

Clause 38

REQUIREMENT TO INCLUDE INFORMATION WITH
ELECTRONIC MATERIAL

Amendment made: 21, page 48, line 8, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Clause 39

ELECTRONIC MATERIAL TO WHICH SECTION 37 APPLIES:
PAID-FOR MATERIAL

Amendments made: 22, page 48, line 37, leave out “subsection (3)” and insert “section (Purposes referred to in section 39)”.

See the explanatory statement for NC12.

Amendment 23, page 48, line 39, leave out subsection (3).

See the explanatory statement for NC12.

Amendment 24, page 49, line 12, leave out subsection (6).—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

This amendment is consequential on NC12.

Clause 40

ELECTRONIC MATERIAL TO WHICH SECTION 37 APPLIES:
OTHER ELECTRONIC MATERIAL

Amendment made: 25, page 49, line 21, at end insert “and is published during the referendum period (within the meaning of that Part) for that referendum”.—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

This amendment clarifies that in order for electronic material to meet the condition in clause 40(2)(b) in relation to a referendum, the material must be published during the referendum period for that referendum.

Clause 41

PURPOSES REFERRED TO IN SECTION 39

Amendments made: 26, page 49, line 34, leave out paragraph (a) and insert—

“(a) a registered party.”.

This amendment and Amendment 27 bring the drafting of clause 41(2) into line with that of subsection (2) in NC12.

Amendment 27, page 49, line 35, leave out “one or more”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 28, page 50, line 15, leave out from “candidates” to end of line 18.

This amendment and Amendment 29 replace subsection (2)(c) of clause 41 with a new subsection which matches subsection (3) in NC12 and subsections (5) and (7) of clause 41. All make it clear that electronic material need not expressly mention a particular name.

Amendment 29, page 50, line 18, at end insert—

“(3A) For the purposes of determining whether electronic material can reasonably be regarded as intended to achieve the purpose mentioned in subsection (2), it is immaterial that it does not expressly mention the name of any party, candidate or future candidate.”

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 28.

Amendment 30, page 50, line 20, leave out “a particular election” and insert

“one or more particular elections”.

This amendment makes the drafting of subsection (4) of clause 41 consistent with the drafting of subsection (2) of that clause, so that both make it clear that electronic material may relate to more than one particular election.

Amendment 31, page 50, line 23, after “not” insert “expressly”.—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

This amendment makes the drafting of subsection (5) of clause 41 consistent with the drafting of subsection (7) of that clause, so that both make it clear that electronic material need not expressly mention a particular name.

Clause 42

ELECTRONIC MATERIAL RELATING TO MORE THAN ONE
CANDIDATE OR FUTURE CANDIDATE

Amendment made: 32, page 51, line 3, leave out “section 39” and insert

“sections 39 and (Purposes referred to in section 39)”.—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

This amendment is consequential on NC12.

Clause 43

EXCEPTIONS TO SECTION 37

Amendment made: 33, page 52, line 20, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Clause 46

ENFORCEMENT BY THE COMMISSION

Amendment made: 34, page 54, line 4, leave out sub-paragraphs (i) and (ii) and insert—

- “(i) section (Purposes referred to in section 39)(2) (registered parties etc),
- (ii) section (Purposes referred to in section 39)(7) (categories of elected office-holders), or
- (iii) section (Purposes referred to in section 39)(9) (referendums), or”.—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

This amendment is consequential on NC12.

Clause 50

GUIDANCE

Amendments made: 35, page 56, line 21, leave out “Minister for approval by the Minister” and insert

“Secretary of State for approval by the Secretary of State”

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 36, page 56, line 22, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 37, page 56, line 23, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 38, page 56, line 24, leave out “Minister has approved draft guidance, the Minister”

and insert

“Secretary of State has approved draft guidance, the Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 39, page 56, line 29, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 40, page 56, line 30, leave out “Minister’s” and insert “Secretary of State’s”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 41, page 56, line 33, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 42, page 57, line 3, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 43, page 57, line 7, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 44, page 57, line 12, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.—(*Kemi Badenoch*)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Clause 56

REGULATIONS UNDER THIS PART

Amendment made: 45, page 61, line 28, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.—(*Kemi Badenoch*.)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Clause 58

POWER TO AMEND REFERENCES TO SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION ETC

Amendment made: 46, page 62, line 6, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.—(*Kemi Badenoch*.)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Clause 60

INTERPRETATION ETC

Amendments made: 47, page 62, leave out lines 33 and 34.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 48, page 63, line 1, leave out subsection (2).—(*Kemi Badenoch*.)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Clause 61

EXTENT

Amendments made: 49, page 63, line 21, after “3,” insert “8A,”.

This amendment provides for the new paragraph 8A for Schedule 1 to the Bill (inserted by Amendment 76) to extend to Northern Ireland.

Amendment 50, page 63, line 21, after “14,” insert “22A,”.—(*Kemi Badenoch*.)

This amendment provides for the new paragraph 22A for Schedule 1 to the Bill (inserted by Amendment 90) to extend to Northern Ireland.

Clause 62

COMMENCEMENT

Amendments made: 51, page 64, line 7, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 52, page 64, line 11, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.—(*Kemi Badenoch*.)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

New Schedule 1

POWER TO MAKE REGULATIONS ABOUT REGISTRATION, ABSENT VOTING AND OTHER MATTERS

Amendments to the Representation of the People Act 1983

1 In section 53 of RPA 1983 (power to make regulations as to registration etc), in subsection (1)—

- (a) omit the “and” at the end of paragraph (b);
- (b) after paragraph (b) insert—

“(ba) with respect to applications under sections 13BD, 13BE and 13C and documents or cards issued under any of those sections; and”.

2 Schedule 2 to RPA 1983 (provision which may be contained in regulations as to registration etc) is amended in accordance with paragraphs 3 to 11.

3 (1) Paragraph 1 is amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraph (2A)—

- (a) omit “in Great Britain”;
- (b) in paragraph (a), for “or 10ZD” substitute “, 10ZD, 13BD, 13BE or 13C”;
- (c) in the closing words, for “paragraph 3ZA(5)” substitute “paragraphs 3ZA(5) and 3A(6)”.

(3) After sub-paragraph (5) insert—

“(5A) References in this paragraph to a registration officer’s registration duties include references to—

- (a) in the case of a registration officer in Great Britain, the officer’s functions—
 - (i) under sections 13BD and 13BE, and
 - (ii) in relation to applications under paragraph 3, 4 or 6 of Schedule 4 to the Representation of the People Act 2000, other than applications in relation to a local government election, or local government elections, in Scotland or Wales;
- (b) in the case of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland, the Chief Electoral Officer’s functions—
 - (i) under section 13C, and
 - (ii) in relation to applications under section 6, 7 or 8 of the Representation of the People Act 1985.”

4 (1) Paragraph 1A is amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraph (1)(a), for the words from the first “who is” to the end substitute “within sub-paragraph (1A),”.

(3) After sub-paragraph (1) insert—

“(1A) The following persons are within this sub-paragraph—

- (a) a person who is registered in a register maintained by the registration officer;
- (b) a person who is named in—
 - (i) an application for registration in, or alteration of, a register;
 - (ii) an application (including a partially completed application) under section 13BD, 13BE or 13C, or
 - (iii) a relevant absent voting application.

(1B) In sub-paragraph (1A)(b)(i), the reference to an application for registration in, or alteration of, a register includes a reference to a partially completed application submitted through the UK digital service.”

(4) After sub-paragraph (5) insert—

“(6) In sub-paragraph (1), the reference to disclosing information includes, in relation to verifying information relating to a person who is named in a relevant registration application or a relevant absent voting application, references to disclosing evidence provided by a person in connection with the application.

(7) In this paragraph—

(a) “relevant absent voting application” means—

(i) an application (including a partially completed application) under paragraph 3, 4 or 6 of Schedule 4 to the Representation of the People Act 2000, other than an application in relation to a local government election, or local government elections, in Scotland or Wales, or

(ii) an application (including a partially completed application) under section 6, 7 or 8 of the Representation of the People Act 1985;

(b) “relevant registration application” means an application (including a partially completed application) for registration in, or alteration of—

(i) a register of parliamentary electors, or

(ii) a register of local government electors in England, and includes a form (or partially completed form) in connection with a canvass under section 10;

(c) “the UK digital service” means a digital service provided by a Minister of the Crown for the registration of electors, and the reference in sub-paragraph (1B) to an application submitted through the UK digital service is a reference to an application submitted using that service as an intermediary.

(8) A notice, including a partially completed notice, under section 8(9) of the Representation of the People Act 1985 (cancellation of proxy appointment) is to be treated as a relevant absent voting application for the purposes of this paragraph.”

5 (1) Paragraph 3ZA is amended as follows.

(2) In sub-paragraph (1)—

(a) for “or 10ZD” substitute “, 10ZD, 13BD or 13BE”;

(b) in paragraph (b), after “applications” insert “and any such declarations”.

(3) After sub-paragraph (2) insert—

“(2A) Provision made under sub-paragraph (1) in relation to applications within sub-paragraph (2B) may include provision—

(a) conferring functions on the Secretary of State to enable applications to be made in a particular manner;

(b) authorising the Secretary of State, in prescribed circumstances, to complete applications in part for people.

(2B) The following applications are within this sub-paragraph—

(a) an application for registration in, or alteration of—

(i) a register of parliamentary electors,

(ii) a register of local government electors in England, or

(iii) a register of local government electors in Scotland or Wales, where the application is submitted through the UK digital service;

(b) an application under section 13BD or 13BE.”

(4) After sub-paragraph (3) insert—

“(3A) Provision requiring a person making an application under section 13BD or 13BE to provide evidence that the person is the person named in the application.”

(5) In sub-paragraph (4), after “(3)” insert “or (3A)”.

(6) In sub-paragraph (6), after “(3)” insert “or (3A)”.

(7) After sub-paragraph (6) insert—

“(7) In sub-paragraph (2B)(a)(iii), “the UK digital service” means a digital service provided by a Minister of the Crown for the registration of electors, and the reference to an application submitted through the UK digital service is a reference to an application submitted using that service as an intermediary.”

6 For paragraph 3A substitute—

3A (1) Provision about—

(a) applications for registration in Northern Ireland and applications under section 13C, including in particular provision about—

(i) the form and contents of applications and of any declarations to be made in connection with them;

(ii) the manner in which applications and any such declarations are to be made;

(b) the manner in which forms in connection with a canvass under section 10 are to be submitted.

(2) Provision made under sub-paragraph (1) may include provision—

(a) conferring functions on the Secretary of State or the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland to enable applications to be made, or forms to be submitted, in a particular manner;

(b) conferring other functions on the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland;

(c) conferring functions on the Electoral Commission;

(d) authorising the Secretary of State or the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland, in prescribed circumstances, to complete applications or forms in part for people.

(3) Provision requiring a person making an application for registration in Northern Ireland—

(a) to provide evidence that the person is the person named in the application;

(b) to provide evidence of entitlement to be registered.

(4) Provision requiring a person making an application under section 13C to provide evidence that the person is the person named in the application.

(5) Provision made under sub-paragraph (3) or (4) must specify the kind of evidence that a person is required to provide.

(6) Examples of the evidence that may be specified include a person's date of birth or national insurance number.

(7) Provision made under sub-paragraph (3) or (4) may require a person to provide the evidence to the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland or to some other prescribed person (or person of a prescribed description).

(8) Provision about how any requirement for an applicant to provide a signature in connection with—

(a) an application for registration in Northern Ireland, or

(b) a form submitted in connection with a canvass under section 10,

may be satisfied.”

7 After paragraph 5 insert—

5ZA (1) Provision about the manner in which relevant absent voting applications are to be made.

(2) Provision made under sub-paragraph (1) may include provision—

(a) conferring functions on the Secretary of State, registration officers, or local or public authorities in Great Britain, to enable applications to be made in a particular manner;

(b) conferring other functions on registration officers;

(c) conferring functions on the Electoral Commission;

(d) authorising the Secretary of State or the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland, in prescribed circumstances, to complete applications in part for people.

(3) Provision imposing requirements to be met in relation to a relevant absent voting application.

(4) Provision about how any requirement for an applicant to provide a signature in connection with a relevant absent voting application may be satisfied.

(5) In this paragraph “relevant absent voting application” has the same meaning as in paragraph 1A.

(6) A notice under section 8(9) of the Representation of the People Act 1985 (cancellation of proxy appointment) is to be treated as a relevant absent voting application for the purposes of this paragraph.”

8 In paragraph 8B(1), for “or 10ZD” substitute “, 10ZD, 13BD, 13BE or 13C”.

9 After paragraph 8B insert—

8BA (1) Provision requiring a registration officer in Great Britain to keep records of—

(a) applications made to the officer under sections 13BD and 13BE;

(b) documents issued by the officer under those sections.

(2) Provision requiring the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland to keep records of—

(a) applications made to the Chief Electoral Officer under section 13C;

(b) electoral identity cards issued under that section.

(3) Provision made under sub-paragraph (1) or (2) may include provision about information to be shown in a record.

(4) Provision authorising or requiring a relevant registration officer—

(a) to supply a copy of a record kept by the officer by virtue of provision made under sub-paragraph (1) or (2), or

(b) to disclose information contained in such a record, to such persons and for such purposes as may be prescribed.

(5) In sub-paragraph (4), “relevant registration officer” means—

(a) in relation to a record referred to in sub-paragraph (1), a registration officer in Great Britain;

(b) in relation to a record referred to in sub-paragraph (2), the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland.”

10 In paragraph 8C(1)—

(a) in paragraph (a), for “or 10A” substitute “, 10A, 13BD, 13BE or 13C”;

(b) in paragraph (c), after “3ZA” insert “, 3A or 8BA”.

11 In paragraph 13, after sub-paragraph (1) insert—

“(1ZZA) References in sub-paragraph (1)(b) to a registration officer’s registration duties include references to—

(a) in the case of a registration officer in Great Britain, the officer’s functions—

(i) under sections 13BD and 13BE, and

(ii) in relation to applications under paragraph 3, 4 or 6 of Schedule 4 to the Representation of the People Act 2000, other than applications in relation to a local government election, or local government elections, in Scotland or Wales;

(b) in the case of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland, the Chief Electoral Officer’s functions—

(i) under section 13C, and

(ii) in relation to applications under section 6, 7 or 8 of the Representation of the People Act 1985.”

Power to remove signature requirements

12 (1) The Secretary of State may by regulations—

(a) amend Schedule 4 to the Representation of the People Act 2000 (absent voting in Great Britain) by removing any requirement for an application under paragraph 3, 4 or 7 of that Schedule, other than an excluded application, to contain the applicant’s signature;

(b) amend section 6 or 7 of the Representation of the People Act 1985 (absent voting at parliamentary elections in Northern Ireland) by removing any requirement for an application under either of those sections to contain the applicant’s signature.

(2) In sub-paragraph (1), “excluded application” means an application in relation to a local government election, or local government elections, in Scotland or Wales.

(3) Regulations under sub-paragraph (1) may make—

(a) different provision for different purposes;

(b) consequential, supplementary, incidental, transitional, transitory or saving provision.

(4) The consequential provision that may be made by virtue of sub-paragraph (3)(b) includes provision amending any provision made by the Representation of the People Acts.

(5) Regulations under sub-paragraph (1) are to be made by statutory instrument.

(6) A statutory instrument containing regulations under sub-paragraph (1) may not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

Power to make provision about unique reference numbers: elections in Northern Ireland

13 (1) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision about the issuing or use of unique reference numbers in connection with—

(a) applications for registration in a register of parliamentary electors, or a register of local electors, in Northern Ireland;

(b) applications to vote by post or proxy at parliamentary or local elections in Northern Ireland;

(c) a canvass under section 10 of RPA 1983 (maintenance of registers: duty to conduct canvass in Northern Ireland).

(2) Regulations under sub-paragraph (1) may in particular make provision—

(a) amending or repealing section 10B of RPA 1983 or any other provision made by the Representation of the People Acts about unique reference numbers allocated under that section;

(b) amending or repealing any provision made by the Elected Authorities (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 about such unique reference numbers;

(c) changing how unique reference numbers are referred to in any provision made by the Representation of the People Acts or the Elected Authorities (Northern Ireland) Act 1989.

(3) Regulations under sub-paragraph (1) may make—

(a) different provision for different purposes;

(b) consequential, supplementary, incidental, transitional, transitory or saving provision.

(4) The consequential provision that may be made by virtue of sub-paragraph (3)(b) includes provision amending any provision made by the Representation of the People Acts or the Elected Authorities (Northern Ireland) Act 1989.

(5) Regulations under sub-paragraph (1) are to be made by statutory instrument.

(6) A statutory instrument containing regulations under sub-paragraph (1) may not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

Consequential repeals

14 The following are repealed—

(a) section 2(2) of the Elections (Northern Ireland) Act 1985;

(b) paragraph 24(5) of Schedule 1 to the Representation of the People Act 2000;

(c) paragraph 20(4) of Schedule 4 to the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.”—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

This new schedule contains provision about registration, absent voting and some other applications, including provision about how applications are made and about the verification of information or evidence provided in connection with such applications.

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

Schedule 1

VOTER IDENTIFICATION

Amendments made: 53, page 65, line 10, after “is” insert

“or has applied to be”.

This amendment and Amendments 54 to 56 enable an application for an electoral identity document to be made by a person at the same time as the person applies to be registered in a register of electors.

Amendment 54, page 65, line 13, after “is” insert
“or has applied to be”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 53.

Amendment 55, page 65, line 15, after “vote” insert
“or, as the case may be, will on being registered be entitled to vote”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 53.

Amendment 56, page 65, line 19, after “vote” insert
“or, as the case may be, will on being registered be entitled to vote”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 53.

Amendment 57, page 65, line 21, leave out from “to” to “registered” in line 22 and insert

“a registration officer who maintains a register referred to in subsection (1) in which the applicant is or has applied to be”.

This amendment enables an applicant for an electoral identity document to apply to any electoral registration officer who maintains a register in which the applicant is, or has applied to be, registered.

Amendment 58, page 65, leave out lines 23 to 28.

This amendment leaves out provision that is no longer needed as a result of NS1.

Amendment 59, page 65, leave out lines 34 to 37.

This amendment leaves out provision that is no longer needed as a result of NS1.

Amendment 60, page 66, leave out lines 3 to 5.

This amendment leaves out provision that is no longer needed as a result of NS1.

Amendment 61, page 66, line 27, at end insert—

“(12) Regulations under subsection (10) or (11)(a) may confer functions on the Electoral Commission (for example, the Commission may be required to design an electoral identity document).”.

This amendment enables functions relating to the content or form of an electoral identity document to be conferred on the Electoral Commission.

Amendment 62, page 66, line 31, after “has” insert
“or has applied for”.

This amendment and Amendments 63 to 65 enable an application for an anonymous elector’s document to be made by a person at the same time as the person applies to be registered in a register of electors.

Amendment 63, page 66, line 34, after “has” insert
“or has applied for”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 62.

Amendment 64, page 66, line 36, after “vote” insert
“or, as the case may be, will on having an anonymous entry in the register be entitled to vote”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 62.

Amendment 65, page 66, line 40, after “vote” insert
“or, as the case may be, will on having an anonymous entry in the register be entitled to vote”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 62.

Amendment 66, page 67, line 1, leave out from “to” to “an” in line 2 and insert

“a registration officer who maintains a register referred to in subsection (1) in which the applicant has or has applied for”.

This amendment enables an applicant for an anonymous elector’s document to apply to any electoral registration officer who maintains a register in which the applicant is, or has applied to be, registered.

Amendment 67, page 67, leave out lines 4 to 9.

This amendment leaves out provision that is no longer needed as a result of NS1.

Amendment 68, page 67, leave out lines 15 to 18.

This amendment leaves out provision that is no longer needed as a result of NS1.

Amendment 69, page 67, leave out lines 21 to 23.

This amendment leaves out provision that is no longer needed as a result of NS1.

Amendment 70, page 68, line 5, at end insert—

“(12) Regulations under subsection (10) or (11)(a) may confer functions on the Electoral Commission (for example, the Commission may be required to design an anonymous elector’s document).”

This amendment enables functions relating to the content or form of an anonymous elector’s document to be conferred on the Electoral Commission.

Amendment 71, page 68, line 5, at end insert—

“(13) Regulations—

- (a) may authorise or require a registration officer to remind a person who has an anonymous entry in a register maintained by the officer of the need to obtain an anonymous elector’s document in order to be able to vote in person;
- (b) may require a registration officer, in prescribed circumstances, to replace an anonymous elector’s document issued to a person with a new anonymous elector’s document issued by the officer.”

This amendment provides for the making of regulations authorising or requiring a reminder to be sent to an anonymous elector about the need for an anonymous elector’s document for voting in person, and requiring a registration officer to issue the holder of an anonymous elector’s document with a new document in prescribed circumstances.

Amendment 72, page 68, line 6, at end insert—

“(1A) In subsection (2)—

- (a) omit the “and” after paragraph (a);
- (b) omit paragraph (b).”

This amendment omits from section 13C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 provision that is no longer needed as a result of NS1.

Amendment 73, page 68, leave out lines 9 to 12.

This amendment leaves out provision that is no longer needed as a result of NS1.

Amendment 74, page 69, line 15, at end insert—

“4A In section 56 (registration appeals: England and Wales), in subsection (1), after paragraph (ab) insert—

- “(ac) from a determination of a registration officer not to issue—
- (i) an electoral identity document following an application under section 13BD, or
- (ii) an anonymous elector’s document following an application under section 13BE.”.

4B In section 58 (registration appeals: Northern Ireland), in subsection (1), after paragraph (ba) insert—

“(bb) from a determination of the Chief Electoral Officer not to issue an electoral identity card following an application under section 13C;”.

This amendment enables an appeal to be made against the refusal of an application for an electoral identity document, an anonymous elector's document or an electoral identity card.

Amendment 75, page 70, line 28, leave out “56A” and insert “19B, 56A”.

This amendment makes it an offence to fail to comply with a condition imposed by regulations under rule 19B of Schedule 1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983 (inserted by Amendment 76).

Amendment 76, page 70, line 30, at end insert—

“8A After rule 19A insert—

“Date of birth lists for polling stations in Northern Ireland

19B (1) The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland must prepare the following lists for each polling station—

- (a) a list setting out, in relation to each elector allotted to the polling station, the elector's date of birth as supplied pursuant to section 10(4A)(b), 10A(1A)(b) or 13A(2A)(b);
- (b) a list setting out, in relation to each person appointed to vote as proxy for an elector allotted to the polling station, the person's date of birth as supplied pursuant to—
 - (i) section 10(4A)(b), 10A(1A)(b) or 13A(2A)(b), where the person is or will be registered in a register of parliamentary electors in Northern Ireland, or
 - (ii) section 8(7A) of the Representation of the People Act 1985, where the person is or will be registered in a register of parliamentary electors in Great Britain.

(2) A list prepared under paragraph (1) must include sufficient information for the purposes of enabling the presiding officer or a clerk at the polling station to make a decision under rule 37(1B)(a)(ii) (decision whether specified document raises doubt as to voter's apparent age).

(3) A person to whom paragraph (4) applies must not, otherwise than in accordance with these rules (including regulations under paragraph (5))—

- (a) permit a list prepared under paragraph (1) for a polling station to be inspected;
- (b) supply to any person a copy of a list prepared under paragraph (1) for a polling station or information contained in such a list;
- (c) make use of information contained in a list prepared under paragraph (1).

(4) This paragraph applies to—

- (a) the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland;
- (b) a person to whom functions are delegated by the Chief Electoral Officer;
- (c) the presiding officer of the polling station;
- (d) a clerk or other officer appointed to work at the polling station.

(5) Regulations may make provision—

- (a) enabling the inspection of a list prepared under paragraph (1) by prescribed persons;
- (b) authorising or requiring prescribed persons to supply a copy of a list prepared under paragraph (1) to such persons as may be prescribed;
- (c) for the payment of a fee in respect of the inspection of a list or the supply of a copy of a list.

(6) Regulations under paragraph (5)(a) or (b) may impose conditions in relation to—

- (a) the inspection of a list;
- (b) the supply of a copy of a list;

(c) the purposes for which information contained in a list that is inspected or supplied in pursuance of the regulations may be used.

(7) The conditions that may be imposed by virtue of paragraph (6)(b) include conditions relating to the extent to which a person to whom a copy of a list has been supplied may—

- (a) supply the copy to any other person,
- (b) disclose to any other person information contained in the copy, or
- (c) use any such information for a purpose other than that for which the copy was supplied to the person.

(8) Regulations under paragraph (5) may also impose, in respect of persons to whom a copy of a list has been supplied or information has been disclosed by virtue of paragraph (7), conditions corresponding to those mentioned in paragraph (7).”

This amendment requires the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland to prepare lists containing the dates of births of electors at polling stations in Northern Ireland and of proxies appointed to vote for such electors, and makes provision about disclosure of such lists.

Amendment 77, page 71, line 30, at end insert—

“(1A) In paragraph (3), after sub-paragraph (e) insert—

(f) in the case of an election held in Northern Ireland, the lists prepared for the polling station under rule 19B.”

This amendment requires the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland to provide to a polling station the date of birth lists prepared under rule 19B (inserted by Amendment 76).

Amendment 78, page 73, line 34, leave out

“section 10(4A)(b), 10A(1A)(b) or 13A(2A)(b) of this Act”

and insert

“a relevant provision (see paragraph (1DC)).”

This amendment and Amendment 79 enable a date of birth check to be made where a person who is registered in a register of parliamentary electors in Great Britain is voting as proxy for an elector at a parliamentary election in Northern Ireland.

Amendment 79, page 74, line 17, at end insert—

“(1DC) For the purposes of paragraph (1B)(a)(ii), “relevant provision” means—

- (a) where the voter is registered in a register of parliamentary electors in Northern Ireland, section 10(4A)(b), 10A(1A)(b) or 13A(2A)(b) of this Act, and
- (b) where the voter is registered in a register of parliamentary electors in Great Britain, section 8(7A) of the Representation of the People Act 1985.”

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 78.

Amendment 80, page 76, line 8, after “document” insert

“, except in the case of a voter with an anonymous entry in the register of electors (as to which see paragraph 11B),”.

This amendment, together with Amendments 83 and 85, clarify that the only form of photo identification that may be used by a voter who has an anonymous entry in the register is a current anonymous elector's document issued under section 13BE of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

Amendment 81, page 76, line 9, leave out

“and regardless of any expiry date”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 86.

Amendment 82, page 76, leave out lines 26 to 40 and insert—

“(h) a relevant concessionary travel pass (see paragraph (11A)).”.

This amendment and Amendment 84 set out the full list of concessionary travel passes that may be used for the purposes of obtaining a ballot paper at a polling station.

Amendment 83, page 77, leave out lines 3 to 6.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 80.

Amendment 84, page 77, line 15, at end insert—

“(11A) In paragraph (1H)(h), “relevant concessionary travel pass” means a concessionary travel pass listed in the second column of the following table—

passes funded by the Government of the United Kingdom	an Older Person's Bus Pass a Disabled Person's Bus Pass an Oyster 60+ card a Freedom Pass
passes funded by the Scottish Government	the National Entitlement Card
passes funded by the Welsh Government	a 60 and Over Welsh Concessionary Travel Card a Disabled Person's Welsh Concessionary Travel Card
passes issued under the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme	a Senior SmartPass a Registered Blind SmartPass or Blind Person's SmartPass a War Disablement SmartPass or War Disabled SmartPass a 60+ SmartPass a Half Fare SmartPass.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 82.

Amendment 85, page 77, line 15, at end insert—

“(11B) In this rule a “specified document”, in the case of a voter who has an anonymous entry in the register of electors, means an anonymous elector's document issued to the voter under section 13BE which—

- (a) was issued by an appropriate registration officer, and
- (b) contains the voter's current electoral number.

(11C) For the purposes of paragraph (11B)—

“appropriate registration officer” means—

- (a) the registration officer for the constituency in which the election is being held, or
- (b) where the election is being held in a constituency for which there is more than one registration officer, any of those officers;

a voter's “electoral number” is the number—

- (a) allocated to the voter as stated in the copy of the register of electors, or
- (b) where an entry relating to the voter is added to the register in pursuance of a notice issued under section 13B(3B) or (3D), as stated in the copy of that notice.”

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 80. This new paragraph for rule 37 of Schedule 1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983 would be inserted immediately after paragraph (11A) inserted into that rule by Amendment 84.

Amendment 86, page 77, line 15, at end insert—

“(11D) A reference in this rule to a document that is a specified document is a reference to the document regardless of any expiry date relating to it (subject to paragraph (11E)).

(11E) Paragraph (11D) does not apply to a document which—

- (a) is referred to in paragraph (1H)(k) or (11B), and
- (b) in accordance with regulations made by virtue of section 13BD or 13BE (as the case may be), is issued for use only at a particular poll or at particular polls being held on the same day.”

This amendment provides that while most documents listed in rule 37(1H) (inserted by the Bill) may be used regardless of any expiry date, that does not apply to certain documents that have been issued for a limited period. These new paragraphs would be inserted immediately after paragraph (11C) inserted by Amendment 85.

Amendment 87, page 77, leave out lines 18 to 23 and insert—

“(1K) Regulations may make provision varying paragraph (1H), (1I) or (11A) by—

- (a) adding a reference to a document to any of those paragraphs,
- (b) removing a reference to a document from any of those paragraphs (other than the document referred to in paragraph (1H)(k)), or
- (c) varying any description of document referred to in any of those paragraphs.”

This amendment clarifies that the power to vary the list of acceptable forms of photo identification extends to varying the lists in rule 37(1I) (inserted by the Bill) and the list in paragraph (11A) (inserted by Amendment 84).

Amendment 88, page 77, line 32, leave out sub-paragraph (5) and insert—

“(5) In paragraph (2), omit the words from “and only” to the end.”

This amendment corrects an error relating to the Amendment of rule 37(2) of Schedule 1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983.

Amendment 89, page 82, line 16, at end insert—

“(dc) in the case of an election held in Northern Ireland, the lists provided to the polling station under rule 29(3)(f).”.

This amendment requires the date of birth lists provided to a polling station in Northern Ireland under rule 29(3)(f) (inserted by Amendment 77) to be sealed and delivered to the returning officer after the close of the poll for a parliamentary election in Northern Ireland.

Amendment 90, page 82, line 16, at end insert—

“22A After rule 53A insert—

“Destruction of date of birth lists: Northern Ireland

53B The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland must destroy the lists provided to the polling station under rule 29(3)(f)—

- (a) on the next working day following the 21st day after the Chief Electoral Officer has returned the name of the member elected, or
- (b) if an election petition questioning the election or return is presented before that day, on the next working day following the conclusion of proceedings on the petition or on appeal from such proceedings.”—(Kemi Badenoch.)

This amendment requires the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland to destroy the date of birth lists provided to a polling station under rule 29(3)(f) (inserted by Amendment 77) within a particular period after the close of the poll for a parliamentary election in Northern Ireland.

Schedule 2

RESTRICTION OF PERIOD FOR WHICH PERSON CAN APPLY FOR POSTAL VOTE

Amendment made: 91, page 88, line 30, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.—(Kemi Badenoch.)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Schedule 3

PROXY VOTING: LIMITS AND TRANSITIONAL PROVISION

Amendments made: 92, page 92, line 2, at end insert—

“(g) At an election held in Northern Ireland, “What is your date of birth?”.”

This amendment enables a person voting as proxy to be asked for their date of birth when applying for a ballot paper at a parliamentary election in Northern Ireland.

Amendment 93, page 93, line 24, at end insert—

“(5) After subsection (7) insert—

“(7A) The requirements prescribed under subsections (6) and (7) must include a requirement for an application to contain the proxy’s date of birth.””

This amendment provides that an application under section 8(6) or (7) of the Representation of the People Act 1985 to appoint a proxy to vote at a parliamentary election in Northern Ireland must include the proxy’s date of birth.

Amendment 94, page 95, line 34, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 95, page 96, line 28, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Schedule 5

LOCAL ELECTIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND ELECTIONS TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Amendments made: 96, page 104, line 17, at end insert—

“6A After rule 16A insert—

“Date of birth lists

16B (1) The returning officer must prepare the following lists for each polling station—

- (a) a list setting out, in relation to each elector allotted to the polling station, the elector’s date of birth as supplied pursuant to section 10(4A)(b), 10A(1A)(b) or 13A(2A)(b) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as applied by Schedule 1 to the Elected Authorities (Northern Ireland) Act 1989);
- (b) a list setting out, in relation to each person appointed to vote as proxy for an elector allotted to the polling station, the person’s date of birth as supplied pursuant to—
 - (i) section 10(4A)(b), 10A(1A)(b) or 13A(2A)(b) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as applied by Schedule 1 to the Elected Authorities (Northern Ireland) Act 1989), where the person is or will be registered in a register of local electors in Northern Ireland, or
 - (ii) paragraph 9(1) of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the Local Elections (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, where the person is or will be registered in a register of local government electors in Great Britain.

(2) A list prepared under paragraph (1) must include sufficient information for the purposes of enabling the presiding officer or a clerk at each polling station to make a decision under rule 34(3)(a)(ii) (decision whether specified document raises doubt as to voter’s apparent age).

(3) A person to whom paragraph (4) applies must not, otherwise than in accordance with these rules or provision made by or under any other enactment—

- (a) permit a list prepared under paragraph (1) for a polling station to be inspected;
 - (b) supply to any person a copy of a list prepared under paragraph (1) for a polling station or information contained in such a list;
 - (c) make use of information contained in a list prepared under paragraph (1).
- (4) This paragraph applies to—
- (a) the returning officer;
 - (b) a person to whom functions are delegated by the returning officer;
 - (c) the presiding officer of the polling station;
 - (d) a clerk or other officer appointed to work at the polling station.””

This amendment requires the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland to prepare lists containing the dates of births of electors at polling stations in Northern Ireland and of proxies appointed to vote for such electors and makes provision about disclosure of such lists.

Amendment 97, page 104, line 31, at end insert—

“(1A) In paragraph (3), after sub-paragraph (e) insert—

- (f) the lists prepared for the polling station under rule 16B.”

This amendment requires the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland to provide to a polling station the date of birth lists prepared under rule 16B (inserted by Amendment 96).

Amendment 98, page 105, line 3, at end insert—

“(1A) In paragraph (1A), after “elector” insert “or as proxy””.

This amendment enables a person voting as proxy to be asked for their date of birth when applying for a ballot paper at a local election in Northern Ireland.

Amendment 99, page 106, line 21, leave out from “to” to “raises” in line 25 and insert

“a relevant provision (see paragraph (5C)).”.

This amendment and Amendment 100 make provision, for local elections in Northern Ireland, corresponding to the provision made in relation to parliamentary elections by Amendments 78 and 79.

Amendment 100, page 107, line 7, at end insert—

“(5C) For the purposes of paragraph (3)(a)(ii), “relevant provision” means—

- (a) where the voter is registered in a register of local electors in Northern Ireland, section 10(4A)(b), 10A(1A)(b) or 13A(2A)(b) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as applied by Schedule 1 to the Elected Authorities (Northern Ireland) Act 1989), and
- (b) where the voter is registered in a register of local government electors in Great Britain, paragraph 9(1) of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the Local Elections (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.”

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 99.

Amendment 101, page 108, line 15, at end insert—

“15A In rule 41(1) (sealing and delivery of documents etc), after sub-paragraph (da) insert—

- (db) the lists provided to the polling station under rule 26(3)(f).”.

15B (1) Rule 56A (destruction of home address forms) is amended as follows.

(2) For “each candidate’s home address form” substitute “the documents mentioned in paragraph (1A)”.

(3) After paragraph (1) insert—

“(1A) The documents referred to in paragraph (1) are—

- (a) each candidate’s home address form;
- (b) the lists provided to the polling station under rule 26(3)(f).”

(4) In the heading, after “forms” insert “and date of birth lists”.

This amendment makes provision, for local elections in Northern Ireland, corresponding to that made by Amendments 89 and 90.

Amendment 102, page 114, line 18, at end insert—

“22A In paragraph 9(1) of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the Local Elections (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (additional requirements for applications for appointment of a proxy), after “name” insert “, date of birth”.”

This amendment provides that an application under paragraph 3(5) or (6) of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the Local Elections (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 to appoint a proxy to vote at a local election in Northern Ireland must include the proxy’s date of birth.

Amendment 103, page 114, line 18, at end insert—

“Elected Authorities (Northern Ireland) Act 1989

22A (1) Part 2 of Schedule 1 to the Elected Authorities (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 (application and modification of RPA 1983 in relation to local elections in Northern Ireland) is amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph 14, after sub-paragraph (b) insert—

(ba) subsection (1)(ba) is omitted;”.

“(3) In paragraph 16, for “subsection (1)(c)” substitute “subsection (1)(bb) and (c)”.

(4) For paragraph 18 substitute—

18A In Schedule 2, references to applications under sections 13BD, 13BE and 13C and documents or cards issued under any of those sections are to be disregarded, and the following are omitted—

(a) in paragraph 1A—

(i) sub-paragraph (1A)(b)(iii);

(ii) in sub-paragraph (6), “or a relevant absent voting application”;

(iii) sub-paragraphs (7)(a) and (8);

(b) in paragraph 5(2), “or with his appointment as a proxy”;

(c) paragraphs 5ZA and 5A;

(d) in paragraph 13(1)(a), “or paragraph 2”.

This amendment makes amendments relating to the application of provisions of the Representation of the People Act 1983 in relation to local elections in Northern Ireland.

Amendment 104, page 115, line 35, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 105, page 116, line 37, at end insert—

“29A In the table, after the entry for rule 19A of Schedule 1 to RPA 1983 insert—

“Rule 19B (preparation of date of birth lists)

In paragraph (1)(b)(ii), for the words “register of parliamentary electors in Great Britain” substitute “register of local government electors in Great Britain”.

This amendment and Amendment 108 apply to elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly requirements relating to date of birth lists for polling stations.

Amendment 106, page 117, line 3, leave out “and” and insert “to”.

This amendment and Amendment 107 provide for a modification in the way in which rule 37 of Schedule 1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983 applies for the purposes of elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Amendment 107, page 117, line 5, at end insert—

“31A In the entry for rule 37 (voting procedure), before the paragraph beginning “In paragraph (1E)(b)” insert—

“In paragraph (1DC), for sub-paragraph (b) substitute—“(b) where the voter is registered in a register of local government electors in Great Britain, paragraph 9(1) of Part 1 of Schedule 2 to the Local Elections (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.””

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 106.

Amendment 108, page 117, line 9, at end insert—

“32A In the table, after the entry for rule 53A of Schedule 1 to RPA 1983 insert—

“Rule 53B (destruction of date of birth lists)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 105.

Amendment 109, page 117, line 9, at end insert—

“32B In the entry for section 8 of the Representation of the People Act 1985 (proxies at elections), in the right-hand column—

(a) before the entry relating to subsection (3)(b) of that section insert—

“In subsection (2A), for “register of parliamentary electors in Great Britain or Northern Ireland” substitute “register of local government electors in Great Britain or a register of local electors in Northern Ireland”;

(b) after the entry relating to subsection (6) of that section insert—

“In subsection (7A), for “subsections (6) and” substitute “subsection”.

This amendment provides for modifications in how section 8 of the Representation of the People Act 1985 is applied in relation to elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Amendment 110, page 118, line 14, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Schedule 6

OVERSEAS ELECTORS

Amendments made: 111, page 122, line 2, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 112, page 123, line 10, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 113, page 123, line 19, leave out “Minister may take whatever steps the Minister” and insert “Secretary of State may take whatever steps the Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 114, page 123, line 30, leave out “Minister for the purpose of enabling the Minister” and insert

“Secretary of State for the purpose of enabling the Secretary of State”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Amendment 115, page 123, leave out line 32 and insert

“The Secretary of State may use information held by, or provided to, the Secretary of State”.—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Schedule 7

VOTING AND CANDIDACY RIGHTS OF EU CITIZENS

Amendments made: 116, page 130, line 9, at end insert—

“City of London (Various Powers) Act 1957

1A (1) The City of London (Various Powers) Act 1957 is amended as follows—

(2) In section 4(1) (interpretation of Part 2)—

(a) omit the definitions of “citizen of the Union” and “relevant citizen of the Union”;

(b) at the appropriate places insert—

““EU citizen with retained rights” has the same meaning as in the Act of 1983 (see section 203B of that Act);”;

““qualifying EU citizen” has the same meaning as in the Act of 1983 (see section 203A of that Act);”.

(3) In section 5 (qualification of candidate for election to common council), in subsection (1), for “or a relevant citizen of the Union” substitute “or a qualifying EU citizen or an EU citizen with retained rights”.

(4) In section 6 (qualification of voters at ward elections), in subsection (1), for “relevant citizens of the Union” substitute “qualifying EU citizens or EU citizens with retained rights”.

This amendment provides for amendments to the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1957 in relation to the voting and candidacy rights of EU citizens in elections to the Common Council of the City of London.

Amendment 117, page 131, line 6, after “citizen” insert

“(within the meaning given by section 79 of the Local Government Act 1972)”.

This amendment ensures that the expression “qualifying Commonwealth citizen” in paragraph 8 of Schedule 5B to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 has the meaning given by section 79 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Amendment 118, page 135, line 33, leave out “Minister” and insert “Secretary of State”.—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 18.

Schedule 10

ILLEGAL PRACTICES

Amendments made: 119, page 149, line 35, leave out “39(3)(b)” and insert

“(Purposes referred to in section 39)(4)”.

This amendment is consequential on NC12.

Amendment 120, page 150, line 28, leave out “39(3)(b)” and insert

“(Purposes referred to in section 39)(4)”.

This amendment is consequential on NC12.

Amendment 121, page 151, line 8, leave out “39(3)(b)” and insert

“(Purposes referred to in section 39)(4)”.

This amendment is consequential on NC12.

Amendment 122, page 151, line 29, leave out “39(3)(b)” and insert

“(Purposes referred to in section 39)(4)”.

This amendment is consequential on NC12.

Amendment 123, page 152, line 7, leave out “39(3)(b)” and insert

“(Purposes referred to in section 39)(4)”.

This amendment is consequential on NC12.

Amendment 124, page 152, line 22, leave out “39(3)(b)” and insert

“(Purposes referred to in section 39)(4)”.—(*Kemi Badenoch.*)

This amendment is consequential on NC12.

Third Reading

9.53 pm

Kemi Badenoch: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I thank all Members across the House who have engaged in debating the substance of the Bill on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report today. I also thank my officials for their hard work in getting me up to speed so quickly on the policy, after I took over from my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith). I wish to thank my Conservative colleagues for their thoughtful, informed contributions and support for these important measures—in particular, the members of the Bill Committee, and my hon. Friends the Members for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson), for Gedling (Tom Randall) and for Broadland (Jerome Mayhew) for their careful consideration of so many Report stage amendments.

I also want to acknowledge the work of the former shadow Secretary of State for young people and democracy, the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith), together with the hon. Members for Putney (Fleur Anderson), for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O’Hara) and for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). While we may not always have agreed on the policy, I welcome their engagement and indeed the challenge on a number of the provisions. Scrutiny in this place is designed to enhance the quality of our legislation, and indeed on a number of points I did ask my team to consider where we might want to think further on the details.

As always, it is a pleasure to engage in reasoned and informed debate on all matters relating to the integrity of our elections. I know that all of us on both sides of the House share the common desire to keep our elections secure, fair, transparent and up to date so that our democracy can continue to thrive. Fundamentally, that is what the Bill is about. It delivers on the Government’s manifesto commitment to ensure the integrity of our elections and it will protect the right of all citizens to participate in our elections while feeling confident that their vote is theirs and theirs alone. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.54 pm

Alex Norris: There are many difficult decisions to make in this place—matters of fine balance, of public policy or of genuine disagreement—that are hard for all right hon. and hon. Members, but this is not one of those. This is a bad Bill brought forward by a bad Government in the pursuit of bad intentions. They have pushed it through without pre-legislative scrutiny, avoided the Committee of the whole House and changed the electoral system for duly elected posts in this country between Second Reading and Committee and during Committee stage.

The Bill has been rushed. It has been debated today on tiny margins—Third Reading will last for seven minutes. The Government could have sought to build consensus, if they had really wanted to tackle the problems that they said they did, but they have not.

What is the sum total of the Bill, when we take account of what the Government have proposed? If someone lives in this country, it will be harder for them to vote. If they live in a tax haven, it will be easier for them to take part. If they work for a poverty charity, it will be harder for them to express their views, but if they have deep pockets, it will never have been easier—[*Interruption.*] Government Members have had their opportunity; now I will have mine.

[Alex Norris]

The Electoral Commission—an anchor institution in protecting politics from itself—is again to be fettered. That is what the Government want. They want silenced opposition and weaker rules on big money.

As the Minister said in her summing up and in previous stages of the Bill, I know that she has not liked the Opposition, the issues that we have raised or how we have raised them. All I would say is, if she does not like what we have raised, she should wait for the public conversation on the Bill and the conversation in the other place. People will see through it.

I will finish by saying to hon. Members, as they make their decision on the Bill, that there are important questions coming up in the coming days that will define their time and this period in Parliament. This is one of those, because it is indelible. It will be on the statute book and they will be tied to it. We as custodians of this democracy should not be making such changes that weaken it in this way.

9.57 pm

Brendan O'Hara: There is no doubt that this is a dreadful Bill designed to undermine democracy, but I put on record my thanks to everyone involved in its passage, particularly all those Members who saw the dangers that it poses to our democracy and sought to oppose it every step of the way. I also thank the staff of the Public Bill Office for, again, the remarkable level of professionalism and assistance they provided throughout the passage of the Bill through the House.

The Bill could have not passed without the support and help of the Committee Chairs, so the steady hand and experience of the right hon. Members for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) and for The Wrekin (Mark Pritchard) and the hon. Members for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) and for Neath (Christina Rees) were much appreciated. I put on record my personal thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) for his advice and support in the last few months and to Mr Josh Simmonds-Upton for all his work in preparing us for Second Reading, Committee and the debates tonight.

To my deep, deep regret, the Bill has passed. The irony that it has passed to the unelected second Chamber to try to salvage an element of democracy should be lost on nobody in this House. What has the United Kingdom become? Hopefully our soon-to-be independent Scottish Parliament will look at the Bill as a perfect example of how not to organise an electoral system.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The House divided: Ayes 325, Noes 234.

Division No. 164]

[9.58 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel	Andrew, rh Stuart
Afolami, Bim	Ansell, Caroline
Afriyie, Adam	Argar, Edward
Aiken, Nickie	Atherton, Sarah
Aldous, Peter	Atkins, Victoria
Allan, Lucy	Bacon, Gareth
Anderson, Lee	Bacon, Mr Richard
Anderson, Stuart	Badenoch, Kemi

Bailey, Shaun	Dowden, rh Oliver
Baillie, Siobhan	Doyle-Price, Jackie
Baker, Duncan	Drax, Richard
Baker, Mr Steve	Drummond, Mrs Flick
Baldwin, Harriett	Duguid, David
Barclay, rh Steve	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Baynes, Simon	Dunne, rh Philip
Bell, Aaron	Eastwood, Mark
Benton, Scott	Edwards, Ruth
Beresford, Sir Paul	Ellis, rh Michael
Berry, rh Jake	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Bhatti, Saqib	Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Blackman, Bob	Eustice, rh George
Blunt, Crispin	Evans, Dr Luke
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Evennett, rh Sir David
Bowie, Andrew	Everitt, Ben
Bradley, Ben	Fabricant, Michael
Bradley, rh Karen	Farris, Laura
Brady, Sir Graham	Fell, Simon
Braverman, rh Suella	Fletcher, Katherine
Brereton, Jack	Fletcher, Mark
Bridgen, Andrew	Fletcher, Nick
Brine, Steve	Foster, Kevin
Bristow, Paul	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Britcliffe, Sara	Frazer, rh Lucy
Browne, Anthony	Freeman, George
Bruce, Fiona	Freer, Mike
Buchan, Felicity	French, Mr Louie
Buckland, rh Sir Robert	Fuller, Richard
Burghart, Alex	Fysh, Mr Marcus
Burns, rh Conor	Gale, rh Sir Roger
Butler, Rob	Garnier, Mark
Cairns, rh Alun	Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Gibb, rh Nick
Carter, Andy	Gibson, Peter
Cartlidge, James	Gideon, Jo
Cash, Sir William	Glen, John
Cates, Miriam	Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Caulfield, Maria	Graham, Richard
Chalk, Alex	Grant, Mrs Helen
Churchill, Jo	Gray, James
Clark, rh Greg	Grayling, rh Chris
Clarke, rh Mr Simon	Green, Chris
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Green, rh Damian
Clarkson, Chris	Griffith, Andrew
Cleverly, rh James	Griffiths, Kate
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Grundy, James
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Gullis, Jonathan
Colburn, Elliot	Hall, Luke
Collins, Damian	Hammond, Stephen
Costa, Alberto	Hancock, rh Matt
Courts, Robert	Hands, rh Greg
Coutinho, Claire	Harper, rh Mr Mark
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Harris, Rebecca
Crabb, rh Stephen	Harrison, Trudy
Crosbie, Virginia	Hart, Sally-Ann
Crouch, Tracey	Hart, rh Simon
Daly, James	Hayes, rh Sir John
Davies, David T. C.	Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Davies, Gareth	Heaton-Harris, Chris
Davies, Dr James	Henderson, Gordon
Davies, Mims	Henry, Darren
Davies, Philip	Higginbotham, Antony
Davis, rh Mr David	Hinds, rh Damian
Davison, Dehenna	Hoare, Simon
Dinenage, Dame Caroline	Holden, Mr Richard
Dines, Miss Sarah	Hollinrake, Kevin
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Hollobone, Mr Philip
Docherty, Leo	Holloway, Adam
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Holmes, Paul
Donelan, rh Michelle	Howell, John
Double, Steve	Huddleston, Nigel

Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil (*Proxy vote cast by Stuart Andrew*)
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Largan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Mercer, Johnny
 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, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David

Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 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 (*Proxy vote cast by Greg Smith*)
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura

Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather

Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wigg, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Scott Mann and
 Gareth Johnson

NOES

Ali, Tahir
 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
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote cast by Owen Thompson*)
 Creasy, Stella (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 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

Debonnaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Harvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 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 (*Proxy vote cast by Pat McFadden*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 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
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 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
 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
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad

Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Navendu Mishra and
 Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time and passed.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

CIVIL AVIATION

That the draft Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Act 2021 (Airspace Change Directions) (Determination of Turnover for Penalties) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 15 November 2021, be approved.—(*Amanda Solloway.*) *Question agreed to.*

PETITION

Breast cancer screening in Fleetwood

10.11 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Nearly 2,000 of my constituents in Fleetwood have joined a Facebook group highlighting the fact that the mobile breast cancer screening van is no longer located in Fleetwood, having relocated to Lytham. Given that breast cancer screening saves lives and that women from less affluent areas are less likely to take it up, my constituents are concerned that it now takes three buses and more than an hour to travel to access breast cancer screening. I would encourage all women to come forward for breast cancer screening:

“The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge the Department for Health and Social Care to work with the local health providers to enable fairer access to the service for all women. And the petitioners remain, etc.”

Following is the full text of the Petition:

[The petition of the residents of the constituency of Lancaster and Fleetwood in Lancashire, Declares that the mobile breast cancer screening unit in Fleetwood should be reinstated because access to breast screening is life-saving and the loss of the mobile screening van in Fleetwood makes accessing this service more difficult, more expensive and more time consuming for residents. The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to urge the Department for Health and Social Care to work with the local health providers to enable fairer access to the service for all women. And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002705]

Midwives in the NHS

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

10.13 pm

Siobhan Baillie (Stroud) (Con): In late November, midwives, doulas, families and healthcare professionals across the country marched in their thousands. They powerfully set out their concerns about the issues they face, and 100,000 people signed a petition to ensure their voices are heard. It is both a privilege and a daunting prospect to be standing here to try to represent their views.

Before I continue, I declare an interest. I am pregnant and, although I was hoping people would think I had eaten too much Christmas trifle, I realise I am now struggling to hide the bump. God willing, there will be a summer bundle of joy to give me additional sleepless nights over and above the ones that are normal for an MP. This makes me a current case study for maternity services, with literal skin, blood and placenta in the game.

So far, I am one of the lucky ones. The service I received from the Stroud and Gloucestershire midwifery teams during my first pregnancy was world class. It is testament to Gloucestershire's commitment to local expectant mothers that I not only received consistent care during my first pregnancy but I have the same midwife again. I thank them all, and Jan Partridge in particular. Her name should be enshrined in *Hansard*, as she is a legend not only in my household but in many others around my community. I know parents across the country feel the same about their own midwifery teams for their help during one of the most frightening, painful but special moments of life.

I stood on a manifesto promising to make the UK the best place in the world to give birth, with personal, high-quality support. I sincerely hope that we can make that a reality. The March with Midwives manifesto sets out demands, which include: listen—they seek an urgent consultation to understand the steps required to address the immediate crisis; fund—an immediate appropriate restorative pay rise for midwives and financial support for student midwives; enable—to make it possible for self-employed midwives to work, thus putting 250 experienced midwives immediately back into the workforce and providing flexibility; and reduce—provide a £5 million crisis fund to charitable organisations for the provision of breastfeeding support and antenatal education, to reduce the pressure on midwifery staff.

The manifesto is wide-ranging, but it does highlight a number of important concerns. All the briefings that I have been sent and everything I have read indicate that many things lead back to staffing levels.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for securing this debate; the number of MPs here is an indication of its importance.

In the Royal College of Midwives annual survey, over half the midwives surveyed said they were considering leaving their jobs. Fifty per cent. said they would leave the NHS next year. Of those who were leaving, eight out of 10 said that they were concerned about staffing

levels—the very thing that the hon. Lady has referred to—and that they were not satisfied with the quality of care that they were delivering.

Does the hon. Lady agree that urgent action must be taken today to support those midwives considering leaving the NHS, so that they feel able to do their jobs to the best of their ability?

Siobhan Baillie: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Staffing issues are absolutely crucial and I want to pose a number of questions about them.

Jeremy Hunt (South West Surrey) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and on the forthcoming addition to her family.

On the point made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) about staffing levels, does she agree that one of the most important reasons why we need to fill the staffing shortfalls—the 2,000 extra midwives needed immediately—is that we need to be better at identifying higher-risk pregnancies? Continuity of care, so that people are looked after by the same midwife throughout the pre-natal, birthing and post-natal periods, is an incredibly effective way to do that.

Siobhan Baillie: I could not agree more with both interventions. I think we are going to hear more from other Members about continuity of care, which is the way to manage pregnancy and how most midwives want to work. But that can be achieved in many hospitals and many midwife teams only if we have the staffing. Given the numbers at the moment, this is a key issue.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the hon. Member for securing today's debate and also wish her well with her pregnancy.

I have spoken to midwives in York and visited maternity services. Many women find that they are diverted from York to other maternity services at the time of delivery—clearly, very stressful for them—because we just do not have adequate staffing. Does the hon. Member not agree that we need a proper workforce plan to ensure that women have the safety that they require through their pregnancy and particularly at the time of birth?

Siobhan Baillie: I think what we will hear from the Government is that there is a plan for recruitment, but we need more details. The Royal College of Midwives is certainly asking questions. My right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt) knows from the work of the Health and Social Care Committee that when the current Culture Secretary was maternity services Minister last year, she was incredibly passionate about this issue. She accepted that the NHS was short of the equivalent of 1,932 full-time midwives—but since then, sadly, the number has fallen by a further 222, leaving the shortage at over 2,000. Since records began in 2009, the number of NHS midwives has fallen in England year on year. We are in a really difficult situation at the moment.

To put this into perspective, there were more than 613,000 births in England and Wales in 2020. At the last count of midwives in 2021, there were 26,901 in England, but that drops to 22,301 if we look at part-time figures. By looking at the birth rate and the number of midwives, we can see just how stretched midwives are.

[Siobhan Baillie]

The Association for Improvements in Maternity Services says that

“urgent action is certainly needed to shore up what seems to be a maternity service that is losing staff at a catastrophic rate.”

Over half of midwives surveyed by the Royal College of Midwives say they are considering leaving their job. I know personally a wonderful midwife, Stevie, who has chosen to retire this year, and I wonder how many midwives are making the same choice. My mother, who is a nurse, not a midwife, is choosing to retire as well. They have had a pretty tough two years in the NHS, as we know, but the most worrying feature of the RCM survey, which the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned, is that the highest levels of dissatisfaction are among newer midwives—those who have spent five years or less working in the NHS. So we have a pipeline problem, a new intake problem and a problem with retention of experienced staff.

Dame Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on getting this important debate, and on the part she has played in looking at the best start in life for every baby, which we worked on together over many months. Does she agree that the problems not only for midwives but for the whole early years workforce have been exacerbated by the covid lockdown, with far too many families unable to see their health workers face to face and partners often excluded from important events such as scans and the birth itself?

Siobhan Baillie: I could not agree more, and I thank my right hon. Friend for everything she has done for early years provision. When we think about the early years and the importance of giving children the best start in life, we remember that midwives have children in their hands at year zero; it could not be any earlier than that. I will give more details of the reality of the pandemic world and what midwives and NHS staff have faced, but the effect on the beginning of the relationships and the fear when you do not have your partner with you in the ward has been absolutely awful. I appeal to all Ministers to think extremely carefully about further covid restrictions, if they ever again become necessary.

We know that the staffing shortage does not affect only midwives and hospital staff, but it has a real impact on families trying to bring new life into the world. As the hon. Member for Strangford alluded to, 87% of RCM members say that they delay using the toilet due to lack of time, more than 75% skip meals, and over half say they feel dehydrated most or all of the time at work—no doubt telling women to hydrate while unable to do so themselves. These professionals have the lives of our most precious loved ones in their hands. I ask the House: are those really the conditions we want them to be experiencing?

I have had messages from midwives all over the country. Last year, I received a letter from a former midwife saying that she was

“extremely concerned about the deepening crisis within maternity care.”

She handed in her notice. That is a loss of more than 10 years’ experience in clinical midwifery—experience that we cannot magic up overnight to replace her. She

felt that she could not always provide the good, kind midwifery care that she was trained to give. She cited increasing paperwork, long hours and the inability to work hours that fitted around her family as key concerns. She had begun dreading each shift. Being required to work faster and do more than was humanly possible meant fearing making a mistake that could lead to a tragic outcome.

Another midwife wrote a blog entitled, “How do we keep going when there is nothing left to give?” in which she talks about midwifery being a celebration of new life and how midwives get to share the joy of families starting out, but also how they are struggling in a system that does not allow them to do what they dreamed of, trained for and worked so hard for. With no staff available or even in the pipeline, the midwife describes having to close facilities, reduce antenatal education, and minimise post-natal visits. Another midwife talks about trusts having to introduce incentive payments, selling back annual leave and employing agency staff, but even then staff are declining the extra work because they are so cream-crackered and feel constantly stressed that the money just does not get them over the line.

Maternity staff are all incredibly caring human beings and they want to do a good job. They tell me they can recover from the physical strain of their job each day, but the mental anguish is weighing heavier and heavier. That mental strain is very real, as problems and errors in maternity services can have devastating consequences.

Although outcomes for mothers and babies have improved in so many areas in the last 10 years, any loss is too great. Understandably, the families affected cannot rest until they have knowledge of what happened and believe that it will not happen again. My heart breaks for them and, if I am honest, I will struggle to tell their stories without crying.

Birthrights is a UK charity that provides advice and information on legal rights, and trains doctors and midwives. The Ockenden review, which looked at maternity services, took serious evidence following the devastating loss at the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital, and I know that the Health and Social Care Committee has also investigated maternity. Approximately 59%—about £4.2 billion—of the value of new clinical negligence claims is attributable to poor maternity care. In 2021, maternal mortality rates were found to be more than four times higher for black women, two times higher for mixed-ethnicity women and almost twice as high for Asian women. There is clearly so much more that we need to learn and change.

I know that this issue is close to the hearts of many across this House. Between them, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the House boast a lot of experience of births, and the Minister is an excellent person to be responding given her own professional experience. The Government have made two important commitments: the first is to train 3,650 student midwives over four years, starting in 2019-20, and the second is to employ an additional 1,200 midwives. Obviously, that is hugely welcome, but given the seriousness of the situation and the fact that midwives are taking to the streets, I ask the Minister to update us on any progress and explain the recent decline in the number of midwives.

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend not only on her pregnancy, but on securing the debate. As the son of a community midwife, I know

how hard our midwives work. The issues that she is outlining are not just about recruitment, but about retention. Does she have any ideas on how we can tackle that retention issue, too?

Siobhan Baillie: It would be interesting to hear from the Minister on that. Midwives and some of the marchers have suggested talking about financial payments, but there also needs to be a culture shift. If we are asking midwives to do things that they desperately want to do, such as the continuity of care, but they do not have the staff teams to do them, they will feel as though they are failing. No money in the world will make that any better. Working together constantly and joined-up thinking are important to help that retention. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's mother.

I have some questions for the Minister. How many midwives are currently in training and recruitment? Why are babies not counted in the patient headcount to determine staff ratios? What measures, such as flexible working, are being considered to make the profession more attractive to those who have caring responsibilities or who are choosing a second career? Are we looking at salaries and financial support for students?

The issues that midwives face are incredibly complex, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) said, it is not just about staff. Midwives tell me that, without proper administrative support to reduce their huge non-clinical workload, they feel they are drowning in their jobs. The Association for Improvements in Maternity Services says that midwifery is a service that seems unable to support its own staff, including precious newly qualified members, with frequent reports of bullying. That is incredibly worrying. In England, that cultural problem was a key focus of the "Better Births" report in 2016, and it is an issue that the ongoing maternity transformation programme has been working to address.

The pandemic restrictions, which my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom) mentioned, caused huge problems for mothers and partners. Mothers are now so scared that the restrictions will come back.

Shaun Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Con): Further to the intervention from our right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom), I am sure my hon. Friend will be aware that, contrary to NHS guidance, my own NHS trust, Sandwell and West Birmingham, stopped allowing birthing partners to be with expectant mothers. We managed to get that decision overturned, but just to re-emphasise the point, does my hon. Friend agree that birthing partners form an important partnership with midwives in ensuring that the safety of expectant mothers is paramount in the delivery process? I am sure she will expand on that later in her speech.

Siobhan Baillie: I thank my hon. Friend for all the campaigning that he has done—as has my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns), who is not in the Chamber this evening—and he is absolutely right. Birthing partners not only provide that immediate bond and that precious time with the baby; they provide support for the mother and support for the team, and have the important ability to spot what is

going on. A mother who is taking quite a lot of gas and air might need someone else to have a couple of conversations when she cannot do so herself.

We are making changes in schools so that we do not see restrictions and closures again, and I think that if we are ever faced with the need to introduce further covid restrictions, we cannot do that in maternity services. The restrictions have had a knock-on impact on midwives as well: seven out of 10 RCM members have experienced abuse about visiting restrictions. That abuse may well have come from very worried and well-meaning people, but there is no doubt that it has contributed to their wish to leave their jobs.

The campaign group Pregnant Then Screwed did a great deal of work on this, and 98% of respondents to its survey said that the possibility of further covid restrictions on maternity services was causing them anxiety. There is enough for pregnant women to be worried about without their having to worry about that. Mothers reported rushing their hospital care during the pandemic, and seeking early discharge so that they could get home to be with their partners. As was mentioned earlier by my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey, women-centred care is the ethos of midwifery, and continuity of carer is the national recommendation. It is the right approach, but at no stage have the current staffing levels and the impact of covid been taken into account to assess the viability of a new system. The vaccine mandate continues to cause concern, and the potential loss of more staff is adding to the pressure-cooker effect.

We in Stroud are hugely proud of the facilities that we have. In the past, Stroud constituents have come together and fought to save the maternity unit, and that fight was so strong that I do not think anyone would dare to try to close it down again. We have also recently instigated an important campaign to deal with mental health and birth trauma. Between 25% and 40% of women view their experience of giving birth as traumatic—I am probably in there somewhere—and one in four have experienced sexual abuse. Such issues often have a huge impact on fears for pregnancies and future births. The campaign and the dedicated mental health team that Gloucestershire is setting up will change perceptions and conversations surrounding birth from the off. Our minor injuries unit across the road from the maternity unit has received a welcome £2 million for refurbishment purposes. I was at the hospital recently for my scan, and it is really buzzing. Although I have raised some serious matters, I do not want expectant mums to be worried about the care that they will receive at Stroud or anywhere else, as professional maternity teams will look after all of them.

One midwife told me that midwives do not speak out because they are always trying to put the women in their charge at ease, but unfortunately it has reached the point at which they feel that they must do so, which is why they have sent me here today. That said, although a Minister will respond tonight, the issues raised are clearly not just for the Government to address. NHS trusts, their human resources teams, managers, and all of us as patients in society need to think about how we behave, how we use the NHS, and how we can improve it. Making the NHS a political football, claiming that more and more money is the only way to fix issues, or putting the NHS on a pedestal so that there can be no

[*Siobhan Baillie*]

criticism or open scrutiny, will not help a single midwife in this great country. I believe that the men and women of our maternity services deserve better. They literally hold new life in their hands, along with all the hopes, dreams and responsibilities that come with that job.

I leave the final words to a midwife who told me:

"I love my job. I love supporting women and the team. But I too feel that maybe this is as far as I can go. I have never suffered with mental health concerns prior to this last year. Anxiety has crept into my normally happy life due to work issues."

I think that that is quite a stark way in which to end the debate, and I genuinely think that we can do better. I look forward to hearing from the Minister, who I know cares deeply about this issue, and I am grateful for the time that I have been allowed tonight.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): The hon. Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie) and the Minister have agreed that Taiwo Owatemi may make a short contribution. I ask her please to allow the Minister some time to sum up.

10.34 pm

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker; I will be very brief. I thank the hon. Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie) for securing this important debate and wish her well with her pregnancy.

We in Parliament have been talking about the issues that midwives face and their working conditions for quite a while now, and they were discussed just last year in a Health and Social Care Committee report on maternity health. As a member of that Committee, I have two simple points to make.

The first is about NHS staff shortages, which have affected many midwives in this country and which our Committee has been looking at for a while. Our report last year clearly shows the severe staff and resource shortages that have affected the NHS and midwives specifically. According to the Royal College of Midwives, just 4,773 midwives have joined the register since 2019. The number of midwives working for the NHS in England has actually reduced: the full-time equivalent numbers have gone down by 125. The demand for midwives has not decreased, and nor has the supply of registered midwives, but the number of midwives in the NHS has done so. As many hon. Members have said, it is important that the Government do more to ensure that fully certified midwives get the much-needed jobs and fill up the spaces in the NHS.

I will move on to my second point, because I am aware of time. As a result of the lack of resources and staff, midwives are suffering under terrible working conditions. Midwives across the country have stated that they are not getting too breaks, that they do not have time to eat lunch and that they are working on minimal sleep. That is really concerning, particularly because it can affect patient care. It is common sense that mothers and their babies in my constituency of Coventry North West will suffer if midwives are being overworked and under-resourced. It is vital that the Government do as much as possible to ensure that midwives are not placed in that situation or in impossible

working conditions. It is time that we fixed these burdensome circumstances and that the Government provided resources for midwives.

Finally, I thank all the wonderful, hard-working midwives at Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust for all the work that they do despite the current working conditions.

10.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie) for securing this debate and wish her well with her "vested interest" and her pregnancy. I am sure that her experience with her midwife, Jan Partridge, will be positive.

I want to thank all midwives and maternity teams up and down the country. For the past 18 months to two years, they have gone above and beyond their duty. I have visited maternity units, spoken to midwives and heard how difficult it has been, particularly with covid. Being on a maternity ward, particularly a labour ward, is a busy enough experience anyway, but if there are women there with covid, the added infection control measures bring extra pressures. With staff isolating and being off sick, it has been an incredibly busy time, and I have heard at first hand many of the experiences that my hon. Friend raises.

I say to midwives that I fully recognise the pressure that they are under. Sometimes there are not enough staff on the wards, and they are dealing with more complex cases. I hate to use the term "geriatric women", but we are seeing women becoming pregnant much later in life, with the risks and complications that that brings. We are also seeing babies being born much earlier. The expertise and skills that a midwife brings to those situations mean that we all see the incredible work that they do.

There are three areas that I think we need to address. The first is staff numbers, an issue that the hon. Members for York Central (Rachael Maskell) and for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud all raised. I reassure hon. Members that we are trying to get on top of staffing levels. Health Education England undertook a survey based on the Birthrate Plus midwifery workforce planning tool to assess the numbers of current midwives in post, current funded posts and recommended funded posts to try to bridge the gaps between the three. Following that, NHS England invested £95 million to support the recruitment of 1,200 more midwives and 100 more obstetricians and to support multidisciplinary teamwork. There is also £450,000 for a new workforce planning tool at a local level, so that maternity units can calculate their own staffing level requirements.

We are trying to increase the number of midwives in practice. Returners are being encouraged to join Health Education England's Return to Practice programme, where a payment of £5,000 is given to employers to support returners. Funding is given to the students to pay for their fees and their Nursing and Midwifery Council tests of competence, and they get a stipend while they are learning.

My hon. Friend is right about new students. We have increased student training places to 3,650. We are also recruiting from overseas. Early this year, we are advertising

and interviewing for between 300 and 500 overseas midwives to join the NHS in the next 12 months. We are also recruiting extra maternity support workers to support the work of midwives.

We are also trying to improve the environment and to bring in a positive working culture. Some £52 million has been brought in to accelerate the digital maternity programme, so that the burdensome paperwork and paper records that midwives are having to work with will hopefully come to an end. Improving that documentation will improve the outcomes for mums and babies, too.

There is so little time to express how much we are doing. We are trying to bring in a positive working culture; it is not right that midwives are having to go without toilet breaks or are unable to drink during shifts. That is completely unacceptable, and it creates a vicious circle: because working conditions are so tough

at the moment, we are losing experienced midwives, which makes trying to recruit and retain more staff even more difficult.

The debate we have had this evening is just the start, and I want to work with Members across the House to ensure that we support midwives as much as we can. We are serious about increasing staffing numbers and improving the working environment for midwives, because that is how we improve the safety of maternity care.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): The Speaker and his team send their congratulations to the hon. Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie).

Question put and agreed to.

10.42 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statement

Monday 17 January 2022

TRANSPORT

Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games: Transport Plan

The Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps): The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games will take place from 28 July to 8 August 2022 and will be the biggest sporting event ever held in the city featuring thousands of world-class athletes and over a million spectators. With an estimated global television audience of 1.5 billion people, the games will showcase Birmingham, the west midlands and the entire country as an amazing place to live, work, study, visit and do business.

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

On 23 October 2020, in line with section 25(1) of the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Act 2020, I directed the West Midlands Combined Authority to prepare a transport plan for the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

Today I am pleased to inform the House that the West Midlands Combined Authority board has approved the final Games Transport Plan.

The transport plan has been produced in close collaboration with Birmingham City Council and the Birmingham 2022 Organising Committee. It sets out a strategic approach to planning and co-ordination of transport to support the games; covering the transportation of spectators, athletes and the games family, while at the same time ensuring that any disruption to transport users and residents is kept to a minimum.

The transport plan is also the result of consultation with key stakeholders, including local authorities, police forces, transport operators, and the Department for Transport, as well as wider public engagement.

The transport plan presents five principles that have guided decision making throughout the stages of strategic planning, and which underpin the objectives for transport during the games. These principles are:

- Clean and green; a public transport games
- Safe, secure, reliable and efficient transport
- Minimising disruption
- Long-term benefits
- Access for all.

I am placing a copy of the Games Transport Plan in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS539]

Ministerial Correction

Monday 17 January 2022

TRANSPORT

Transport Connectivity: Merseyside

The following is an extract from the Westminster Hall debate on Transport Connectivity: Merseyside on 12 January 2022.

Andrew Stephenson: In the 26 seconds left, I will say that the national bus strategy, which is part of a £3 billion spend on buses over this Parliament, should address many of the issues about buses raised by hon. Members. Obviously, during the pandemic, we provided £1.5 billion in emergency funding to keep the buses in the region

going. We have **supplied the region with £710 million** in dedicated funding for active travel, and more has been announced by the Chancellor as part of a £2 billion package.

[Official Report, 12 January 2022, Vol. 706, c. 306WH.]

Letter of correction from the Minister of State, Department for Transport:

An error has been identified in my speech.

The correct information should have been:

Andrew Stephenson: In the 26 seconds left, I will say that the national bus strategy, which is part of a £3 billion spend on buses over this Parliament, should address many of the issues about buses raised by hon. Members. Obviously, during the pandemic, we provided £1.5 billion in emergency funding to keep the buses in the region going. We have **supplied £710 million** in dedicated funding for active travel, and more has been announced by the Chancellor as part of a £2 billion package.

ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 17 January 2022

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Monday 17 January 2022

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MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Monday 17 January 2022

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**not later than
Monday 24 January 2022**

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